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Poland

Death on the road to a workers' party

Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski

"The workers have lost their leader" wrote Magdalena Ostrowska in the daily "Trybuna" after the September 2005 death of Daniel Podrzycki, president of the free trade union "Sierpień 80" [1] and candidate for the presidency of the Republic under the banner of the Polish Party of Labour (PPP), set up by this union. It is no exaggeration. The workers' movement has lost a militant who would have been able to become the leader of the Polish working class. The mass media forgot about it almost immediately, although the reasons given for the accident which took place on September 24, 2005 on the road between Katowice and Dabrowa Gornicza raise a number of questions.

Marcin Adam, a militant of the Communist Party of Poland, who was a member of the PPP's electoral committee writes, "From the first this accident seemed bizarre. According to the official police communiqué, Daniel's car turned on to the other road crossing the separation barriers. It is not normal. The accident was not caused by collision with others. The road is straight at this point.

"Daniel was an experienced driver. His BMW, although old, was in good technical condition and regularly maintained. What is more shocking, and perhaps most important, is the event which took place a month earlier.

"The car lost a wheel. Happily that happened while climbing at a low speed (40 km/h) and there was no damage. It was then said that the wheels of Daniel's car had been unscrewed. This story was known from his collaborators, that's why we were keeping an eye on security questions. Overwork and a continual race against the clock were the daily lot of the PPP president in recent times, however, and that could mean that something was not noticed".

Boguslaw Zietek, the new president of Sierpień 80 and the PPP, does not believe the death of Podrzycki was an accident. "According to our information, it appears that Daniel was not able to cause the accident himself, the weather was fine that day and there were no problems on the road, his car was overhauled. Everything seems to indicate that someone cut across his path".

The newspaper Fakty i Mity said, "Will the police be capable of finding whoever was responsible for the accident? It would not be good to conclude that the accident was brought about by a dog which crossed the road...

"Those familiar with the site of the accident know that there could not have been a dog there. We are persuaded that someone has brought about the death of our comrade and independently of the bodies of investigation, we will attempt

ourselves to explain the background to the accident".

If a candidate who makes the front pages of the newspapers died in such circumstances, they would have been analyzed attentively. But as a worker and a socialist, Podrzycki was an intruder among the candidates for the highest office of state. Thus it was simply noted that the intruder was out of the game.

"The conditions of this tragedy have not been and doubtless never will be clarified," wrote Jan Czarski in the monthly Nowy Robotnik [2]. "For it is a man who was an irritant for the regime and the elites, an authentic worker leader, who has died".

Preserving trade union independence

It all began with the establishment of the state of emergency on December 13, 1981. Podrzycki, then a high school student, by instinct of solidarity with the workers organized in the trade union Solidarnosc had attempted - without success - to go to the Huta Katowice steelworks [3], occupied by workers and encircled by the army and police.

Czarski described his itinerary thus: "Because of his political activity he was expelled from school, for a long time he could find neither a school nor work. He did everything to survive - digging ditches, working as a builder's mate, and at the same time he was active in the underground. He was involved in the chaplaincy of the region's workers. At the end of the 1980s he made contact with Marian Jurczyk [4] and in his name he built the structures of Solidarnosc 80 in Upper Silesia, competing with Solidarnosc.

He was one of the rare militants in Solidarnosc who opposed Walesa's line then. The latter said then he wanted to rebuild the union, but a union which would not be strong, because a strong union would be an obstacle to reform.

To say in 1989 that Lech Walesa had betrayed the working class was



blasphemy. Daniel suffered attacks, including insinuations that he worked for the political police - recalls Boguslaw Zietek, Podrzycki's closest collaborator and friend.

The collaboration with Jurczyk lasted several years. During this period Solidarnosc 80 became one of the most active union forces in Upper Silesia. The union was the organizer of the first serious strikes in the mines, which were to be closed down according to the plans of the time.

"At a meeting of the national Commission of Solidarnosc 80, held in the 'Wujek' mine, we had decided to organize a national strike. Many people who did not belong to Solidarnosc 80 but wished also to protest against the policy of the government, among others the rail workers, joined the movement. But in Szczecin it did nothing [5].



Daniel Podrzycki

"This was a strike of Upper Silesia alone", says Zietek. It became clear that the roads of Jurczyk and Podrzycki were separating. "Two questions led to the separation. First Jurczyk was afraid of the Silesians and did everything to weaken the position of Daniel. Then we had a disagreement on the attitude to take towards the Olszewski government [6].

"This government fell in June 1992 after engaging in an anti-Communist campaign and attempting to take control of the process of privatization.]. We said that his government did nothing good because in particular it had supported the privatization of the FSM car factory [7]. On the contrary Jurczyk was disarmed before Olszewski".

Struggle against privatization

At the founding congress of the free union Sierpien 80, Gabriel Kraus presented events thus: "The determining influence on the union's activity was monopolized by pressure groups inside the National Commission and by the workplace commissions which, while criticizing totally the policies of the government and regularly calling for a general strike, at the end of the day accepted it, orienting towards the best "arrangements" to the detriment of others.

"In a worsening situation for the workers and certain branches and sectors of industry, they accepted collaboration with the political authorities and the management in the broad sense." Here is "a characteristic example of a workplace, which for Solidarnosc 80 had a symbolic character and whose trade union commission had been the cradle of many key leaders of the union with a big influence on the policy and morale of the national Commission. We are talking obviously of the naval shipyard at Szczecin". This naval shipyard was in a critical financial situation and was close to bankruptcy. In 1992 it entered into negotiation with the creditors.

"There was a desperate attempt by our regional organization commission [in Upper Silesia, ed.] with a view to starting, here in the department of Katowice, a national general strike in solidarity with the strike led by our workplace commission of the FSM at Tychy. It should be stressed that this strike would be the first significant strike co-organized with other unions, grouped in the inter-trade union national negotiating and strike committee.

"Our coal mines were to begin it, although they were then in a worse financial situation than the naval shipyard. And at the call of the national commission and the regional organization commission they began it. However the naval shipyard in Szczecin did not go on strike. And unhappily that wasn't because the strike "didn't catch on". It was because of the conscious, not to say cynical particularism and opportunism of militants of "Solidarnosc 80" at the shipyard." The day of the meeting of the creditors, the workplace commission of Solidarnosc 80 suspended the preparation of the strike.

Moreover, in a sign of support to the restructuring programme for the shipyard,

it assured for the second time to the directorate and the bank that it had abandoned its wage demands. "Such opportunism proved profitable for those of the employees who stayed in the enterprise after the draconian job cuts. A collaboration first with the Christian National Union [8], then the "presidential opening" on Lech Walesa [9], have borne fruit in the form of better wage conditions in the immediate and a tidy packet of shares.

"The rebellious workers of the FSM in Tychy have not won such conditions. One can even say that the price they have paid, as well as the miners who supported them through a national strike, has been consumed by the workers of the naval shipyard.

"For it is not certain that without this strike and without the preceding actions led by the regional organization commission in the department of Katowice, those in the naval shipyards would have been able to obtain what they have won. Such an attitude, adopted moreover not only by the workplace commission in the naval shipyards, had nothing in common with the idea contained in the name of the trade union. For it would be hard to see any solidarity there.

"But it is not a moral or material condemnation that is at stake here. What is at issue is a much more important question, that is of submission to the method, as old as the hills, employed by all dominant layers and bosses, expressed in the maxim "divide and rule", which leads to demoralization and finally paralysis".

It was thus, on a clear class basis, that Daniel Podrzycki and the radical activists of the regional organization commission and workplace commissions of the Silesia-Dabrowa region of Solidarnosc 80, split and founded the free trade union Sierpien 80. The new union rapidly received the support of the FIAT workers at Tychy [ex-FSM], the mines of Silesia, the Huta Katowice steelworks and became known for its determined and effective struggles.

Victorious steel strike

The strike in the steel works, whose CEO was then Emil Wasacz, ex-president of Solidarnosc in the company and former activist in the Catholic movement Oasis, was particularly remarkable. Because of the aggressive policy of wage reduction implemented by Wasacz since 1991, the steelworks had the lowest wages in its branch and an absurd pay scale which led to those who had the highest wages winning the biggest increases.

Sierpien 80 then launched a struggle for increases in wages which would be equal for all. And it succeeded. Everyone won an increase of 200 zlotys, from the director

to the sweeper. Janusz Kucharz, president of the workplace commission for Sierpien 80 recounted the struggle thus in the "Kurier Zwiaskowy" [10]: "Solidarnosc" totally ran the steelworks. As employer and as trade union, which claimed to have 5,500 members.

The wages policy implemented then in the steelworks - and which some years later was presented by Wasacz (in an interview in the daily "Zycie") as "necessary lowering of real wages", had led to the explosion of a dramatic strike. In particular a new wage agreement was demanded. The strike started on June 1, 1994.

The blast furnaces began, then, in the course of the four following days, the other departments joined them. On Monday June 6 there was the biggest meeting in the history of the steelworks (and perhaps even the biggest in the history of struggles in Poland), with 14,000 workers from a single enterprise participating. There was a strong tension between the strike committee (which involved 740 delegates from all sectors of the steelworks and whose presidium had 86 members) and the directorate on the site where negotiations should take place.

The directorate refused to negotiate for 14 days, not wishing to do so in the blast furnace department. On June 14 the delegation from the directorate came to the canteen of the blast furnace department. Inside there his highness CEO Emil. It was then that he said - as recorded on video - "It stinks here!" Thus after three years on the directorate, the Polish steel-maker had become foul-smelling for the former unionist. After numerous rounds of negotiation, on June 18 at 5h35 we signed an agreement putting an end to the longest and biggest steel strike.

The agreement completely destroyed the policies implemented until then by Emil, that is a policy of degradation of wages in the Huta Katowice steelworks. This was the beginning of the forward advance of workers' wages at the steelworks. Barely three months later, shamed and dragging his tail behind him, Emil Wasacz left the enterprise with his henchmen. The workers breathed again and their wages rose systematically every year to become the highest in the branch."

Zietek recalls in "Nowy Robotnik": "Since that time, Daniel established the position of "Sierpien 80" in the region and in the country, by realizing his vision of the union. He wanted a strong union, which would not be an intermediary between the workers and the employers; he did not want a union sitting astride of the barricades, but one that firmly represented the workers".

Unity in defence of the coal mines

In December 2002 Sierpien 80, in common with the other unions active in the mines, signed an agreement with the government. "This agreement was a point of inflexion in the recent history of the collieries. The government wanted to liquidate the mines one after the others. But we obtained the establishment of the Company of Collieries, the biggest producer of coal in Europe, which managed well on the market.

It is in some way to the credit of Daniel, who succeeded in winning to his project not only the other trades unionists, but also the municipalities and the scientists. The result was the letter from the scientists to the Prime Minister Miller [11] against the plans for closure of the mines", says Zietek in "Nowy Robotnik".

When the agreement was signed, Zietek explained in "Kurier Zwiazkowy": "No miner has lost work. In the Company the collective agreements signed in the mining companies will continue to be applied. The government has not succeeded in taking the miners' rights from them. Yet in mid December the minister of the economy of the time, Jacek Piechota, spoke loudly of the need to deprive the miners of "barbórka". [12] and the fourteenth month. We have been able to block this.

Inside the Company the miners are covered by the previous collective agreements, which would guarantee them the realization of all the benefits which figure there. The first effect of this has been the payment of the fourteenth month in all the mines. The creation of the Company of Collieries, composed of all the mines, representing all the employees and their collective agreements did not correspond to the aspirations of the Minister of the Economy, who did not wish to respect the previous agreements.

The government also envisaged that at the time of the foundation of the Company, some of the mines would not be involved and that they would be thus automatically condemned to closure. These governmental plans were blocked by the agreement signed on December 11 in which, under the pressure of the union, the government had to accept all these guarantees. Of course the struggle for the miners was not over. But its first round led to the defeat of those who wanted to liquidate the collieries and deprive the miners of their gains.

It is worth remarking, that Solidarnosc did not sign this agreement which guaranteed to the miners employment and the maintenance of their conquests. The same Solidarnosc was responsible for the programme of liquidation of collieries carried out by the AWS [13] in 1997-

2001. In the framework of this programme, 20 mines were closed and 100,000 jobs were axed, while miners' wages were frozen for four years. Until the end "Solidarnosc" wanted to pursue the programme of AWS, which embodied every evil for the industry and the miners."

After the death of Podrzycki, during the Fourth national Congress of the delegates of Sierpien 80, Boguslaw Zietek could state with pride: "Four years ago they wanted to carry through the plan of successive closure - between seven and twelve of them - of the mines, dismiss the miners and deprive them of their gains embodied in collective agreements. It is Sierpien 80 which took the head of the struggles against these aspirations.

"We organized the resistance of the unions; we convinced the municipal and scientific milieus to come to the defence of the collieries, side by side with us. Today the collieries have a future. Polish coal has a future. We have succeeded in defending the mines and the gains of the miners. Today, again workers are being taken on in the collieries. Mining schools have been opened - which was unthinkable not so long ago - which can train new managers for the branch; often these are the children of miners, but not always. The mines now have a future before them. That which for us was always obvious does not now provoke mocking smiles.

"I have no doubt that the turning point for the branch was the agreement signed with the government following a wave of struggles on December 11, 2002. It was a great success for the union, but also a personal success for Daniel, without which there would have been neither the governmental setbacks nor the agreement. Of course, the collieries still face new threats, above all now that the people who had already attempted to reform the branch in 1997-2001 with the known consequences, have come to power. We should oppose these threats.

"As much in the coal sector as in lignite, whose role is no less important, we should base ourselves on the principle that the potential of the extractive industry determines the energy independence of the country. The coal and lignite mines are a sector of strategic importance for the energy security of the country and as such should not be privatized in part or in any form. Their privatization would endanger the whole state economy. Privatization is also the biggest threat weighing on the workers of this sector. "Sierpien 80" categorically says NO to all attempts to privatize the collieries. Neither will we accept a limitation on the extractive potential of Polish mines.

"The national economy like the states of the EU has an incessantly growing

demand for energy, which opens good perspectives for Polish coal. The limitation of coal production capacities in Polish collieries would be an action detrimental to the interests of the Polish state and its economy. All attempts to make the miners pay the costs of restructuring of the branch are also unacceptable. We firmly oppose all attempts to limit miners' rights, embodied in collective agreements, and to all attempts to deprive miners of their pension rights".

A laboratory of class-consciousness

Militants in other unions call Sierpien 80 an "extremist union", because it firmly defends the rights, dignity and interests of workers, that is it adopts a class attitude. This organization emerges favorably on the basis of the deep impasse and grave crisis of the current Polish union movement. The latter is very divided and characterized by a weak rate of unionization of employees and seriously low social credibility; in the terms of the leaders of "Sierpien 80", it plays the role of intermediary between the workers and the employers and is sitting astride the barricades.

It bends under the weight of a passive and impotent bureaucracy, often corrupted by capitalist businesses, and submits to the aggressively anti-worker policies of successive governments which protect capitalist interests, supporting the political parties of right and left which represent these interests and consequently regularly losing the class battles without a fight.

The whole history of Sierpien 80 constitutes a very significant contribution to the study and reflection on the conditions of development and evolution of consciousness and of current working class politics in Poland. We live in a country where a government supposedly representative of the working class crushed a workers' revolution supposedly in defence of socialism, burying the chances of its renewal and allowing capitalist restorationist tendencies to grow inside it.

Worse, the leaders of the independent workers' movement betrayed this revolution and this movement, allied themselves with imperialism and, in alliance with the restorationist wing of the 'Communist' bureaucracy, restored capitalism. The consciousness of the workers who constituted the social base of Solidarnosc and trade union organizations which emerged from it was torn apart by the contradiction between the feeling of victory in 1989 and the feeling of defeat stemming from the restoration of capitalism, the loss of social gains dating from People's Poland and the brutal

restructuring, or rather de-structuring of the working class.

Hegemonic on the left, social democracy [14] became one of the spokespersons for the interests of capital, neoliberal globalization and Poland's participation in imperialist wars. During all this time no alternative political force was structured to the left of social democracy.

In the narrow milieus which identified with Marxism, identification with the interests of the working class did not go beyond expressions of faith. They led a chronic groupuscule life, remaining outside the real workers' movement and exerting no influence on it. The tendency to mask its own political impotence led to incredible extravagances like the accusation brought by one of these milieus against the leaders of "Sierpien 80" of having degenerated into a trade union bureaucracy.

"The secretary of the national Commission of the free trade union Sierpien 80, Boguslaw Zietek, took issue us in the columns of "Wiadomosci Kulturalne", for [our political group] "embodies in its programme the most radical workers' traditions, including support for the dictatorship of the proletariat"", said one of these micro-milieus in 1996.

"The absence of links of the representative of the trade union bureaucracy with workers' traditions and the dictatorship of the proletariat is not the fruit of chance. This is not then by chance that we have loosened our links with "Sierpien 80", when its dignitaries have moved into a luxurious office with big mirrors". This is an example of the total incomprehension both of how the consciousness of the workers' vanguard is formed and of what the trade union bureaucracy really is and how it develops.

Concerning these mirrors, they can be seen in the union office in Katowice [15] and to take this as proof of the claimed bureaucratization, some years after the birth of a combative organization and immediately after it led a big strike would be an event without precedent in the history of the workers' movement.

A great confusion in workers' consciousness was inevitable, making it difficult for them to identify their own interests, not only historic but even immediate. Under this or that aspect even a workers' organization inside of which working class consciousness is best expressed, cannot avoid this confusion.

This is particularly true in regions like Upper Silesia and in branches like the mines, where this consciousness is formed under the weight of structures and processes of reproduction of dependent capitalism which are establishing themselves in our country.

In the framework of the European and world capitalist system they reinsert Poland in its old position as a dependent country. But where "national exploitation completes and strengthens class exploitation" (Trotsky), the dependent development of capitalism profoundly deforms the conditions of the production of the national society and renders impossible to the proletariat any normalization of the strategic basis of the class struggle. Nationalism is here an inseparable component of class-consciousness.

The question is what is the class form of this nationalism, for it can also have its proletarian form, that is whether or not it obscures and deforms class-consciousness.

Some Marxists know that the great trade unionist, fighter for Irish independence, socialist and revolutionary, James Connolly, was right when, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, he argued against the mechanistic and economist currents then dominant within Marxism that among oppressed nations and in dependent countries the proletarian type of nationalism and international workers' socialism are not contradictory but complementary [16]. The elaboration of such a form of nationalism, in accord with the interests of the working class, is just as difficult for the workers' movement as arriving at political independence. So long as this is not realized, the "ready to wear" ideologies - petty bourgeois and reactionary bourgeois forms of nationalism -inevitably obscure class-consciousness.

Confusions, errors, misunderstandings

In January 2000 Sierpien 80 took part alongside "Samobrona" [17], the Front Polski [18] and general Tadeusz Wilecki [19] in the forum aimed at the creation of a national-popular Bloc for the elections.

This Bloc was ephemeral - the fruit of confusion if only from the fact that Wilecki had been a declared partisan of general Pinochet whereas the leaders of Sierpien 80 had no doubt that, as Podrzycki wrote, Pinochet was "a brown general, acting in the interest of foreign capital, at the initiative of the right, whereas "president Salvador Allende was overthrown by the military junta of Augusto Pinochet because he had opposed the "interests of the free market" of the US copper mega-holding, ITT".

In 2001, Sierpien 80 entered an electoral coalition of "political, social, economic and professional organizations representing national and pro-independence milieus" under the name of the Social Alternative-Movement, formed by KPN-Ojczyzna [20] and a group of

activists originating from the Christian National Union. Inside this coalition were diverse organizations of the radical right and nationalist far right, including the National Renaissance of Poland/Alliance of New Forces [21], and the secretary of Le Pen's Front National, Bruno Gollnisch, was invited to Poland by the Alternative's parliamentary group.

At the end of the 1990s numerous anti-neoliberal economic analyses appeared in Kurier Zwiaskowy, along with proposals of economic alternatives and other materials issued by the Schiller Institute. This Institute belongs to the political current led by Lyndon LaRouche. In 1973 LaRouche transformed his US organization from a left grouping to a far right organization which practiced physical terror against Communists and Trotskyists and their assemblies, meetings and bookshops.



Lyndon LaRouche

Later LaRouche launched the idea of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), or "star wars", thus politically arming the "Reagan revolution", and mobilized support for it in Europe and Japan. René Monzat, a French analyst of LaRouche's organization, writes that it "has then served with success as an international lobby for the most gigantic project of the US military-industrial complex."

The links with this complex and with the representatives of its interests - "the conservative and traditionalist elements of the army and the military training apparatus" (the quotation comes from the LaRouche press) - explain why LaRouche's supporters identify with the interests of industrial capital while violently criticizing finance capital in apparently radical critiques of neoliberal globalization.

It is clear that the leaders of Sierpien 80 did not know who lay behind this Schiller Institute. In any case, LaRouche's material has definitively disappeared from the columns of "Kurier Zwiaskowy" since spring 2001.

"In the light of these facts can the passage of the Polish Party of Labour to left positions be considered credible?" This question was posed to me recently by activists in an association.

Yes, it is credible, for this episode constituted an anomaly in the history of Sierpien 80. "Any suggestion that Daniel was on the right is an absolute misunderstanding. Daniel was an ardent patriot, considering it necessary to devote all his strength to Poland, but that had nothing in common with the right. He always realized social goals, of the left. All his union activity witnesses to it. From the beginning he considered that the union cannot hold rightwing positions, for it would be a form of negation of his own ideas" says Zietek in "Nowy Robotnik".

To the extent that its activity in defence of the workers' interests Sierpien 80 brought together political experiences, reactionary ideological incursions and political connections were repelled.

They were repelled by the level of class-consciousness that this organization embodied. It is not by chance that this went hand in hand with the creation of the Polish Party of Labour, based on Sierpien 80. The basis on which Podrzycki, Zietek and the other militants of Sierpien 80 took the decision to build the party was the consciousness of the antagonistic contradiction between labour and capital.

Podrzycki put it thus in "Trybuna": "It might appear to you very Marxist, but it is about class struggle. The employers and employees are in two opposed, irreconcilable positions. On the one hand there are the interests of workers, including the right to decent pay for conscientious and honest work. On the other side - the interests of the boss whose goal is to maximize profit".

The Polish Party of Labour states clearly that it is founded on the principle of the unity of the interests of the working class and the workers' movement on the international scale.

In the "Letter to Friends in Europe", adopted at the congress in late October 2005, it states: "We know in Poland that capitalism is exploitation, the crushing of the rights of workers, unemployment, poverty and exclusion. The demands of workers in Poland and Western Europe are the same. It is your struggle and it's ours. We reject all attempts to oppose workers to each other in Europe. We know that we can only succeed if we are united.

"We believe profoundly that a common front of the European left can effectively oppose the aggression of big capital and new forms of exploitation. The organized attack against the social gains and legal protection of labour constitute in reality an attack against democracy. The Polish Party of Labour, conscious of the gravity of the situation, declares itself ready to cooperate with all authentic forces of the left in Europe which are ready to defend the exploited and the excluded".

A trade union party

The creation of a party founded on the unions is one of the classic ways of building a workers' party known in the history of the international workers' movement. Recall here the attitude of Trotsky during discussions with US comrades in 1938, when there were initiatives inside the US union movement favouring the creation of a party of labour based on the unions.

Trotsky said the revolutionary left should support such initiatives and that "Any revolutionary organization occupying a negative or neutrally expectant position in relation to this progressive movement will doom itself to isolation and sectarian degeneration". If possible, it should take part in the creation and construction of a party founded on the unions, while proposing to it a precise programme.

Trotsky says "(we must work...) not to engage in abstract formulas but to develop a concrete program of action and demands in the sense that the transitional program issues from the conditions of capitalist society today, but immediately leads over the limits of capitalism."

He said on this subject: "Are we in favor of the creation of a reformist labor party? No. Are we in favor of a policy which can give to the trade unions the possibility to put its weight upon the balance of the forces? Yes. It can become a reformist party - it depends upon the development. Here comes in the question of program. I mentioned yesterday and I will underline it today - we must have a program of transitional demands, the most complete of them is a workers' and farmers' government.

"We are for a party, for an independent party of the toiling masses who will take power in the state. We must concretize it - we are for the creation of factory committees, for workers' control of industry through the factory committees". [22] Remember that in Poland such committees were called workplace councils just after the war, workers' councils in 1956 and councils of workers in 1981.

Since 1992 I have said - in the columns of the socialist newspaper "Dalej!" [23] which I then wrote for - that the construction of an independent party of workers and toilers, based on the unions, would be useful and necessary in Poland.

In spring 1999, during the political restructuring of the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD - transformed into a party), limited but significant forces inside the trade union federation OPZZ argued in the "Nowy Tygodnik Popularny". [24] that the political representation of the unions grouped inside this federation should not be confided to the SLD; it was necessary to found a trade union party.

In relation to this discussion I wrote then: "Firstly, we are in favour of the total independence of the unions from all parties - which does not rule out individual membership for trade unionist of various parties or the conclusion of collective alliances by the unions with the parties, or the formation by the unions of a party which belongs to them.

"Secondly, we consider that the possession by the unions of their own party - that is a party which constitutes the political tool of trade union action - constitutes a significant factor in the preservation of the independence of the trade union movement and that only the existence of such a party can resolve the question of the political representation of the trade union movement. Thirdly, in the interests not only of this movement, but those of the whole of the labouring class and the entire workers' movement, we are in favour of the construction of such a party."

I also indicated that the trade union party "should not be oriented only - nor even essentially - towards participation in elections and parliamentary activity, but should develop everyday political activity everywhere where those whose interests it represents work, live and struggle" and that if this was possible, "within such a party our own party - which we try to build on the basis of the programme of the Fourth International - would act as one of its currents".

The Polish working class urgently needs to rebuild the political forms of the workers' movement. On the basis of the balance sheet of setbacks of 20 years of my own attempts - and those of others - seeking to build a revolutionary party in Poland, I wrote in summer 2002 on the website Czerwony Salon (Red Salon), that today the greatest tragedy of this class is the absence of a workers' party. Without such a party the country cannot have its own political representation and the workers' movement does not have the possibility of guaranteeing its own independence.

It must be remedied quickly, for the class struggle will not wait, and the more it develops and the more this tragic absence persists, "the more this struggle, left to its own spontaneity, will disperse or be consumed in a sterile fashion or again will be led into an impasse by political forces which are hostile from the class point of view". I wrote also that the workers' party should be open to all those who "aspire to the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of socialism without taking account what they think of whether this is done by the road of revolution or that of reform", in other words, that it should not immediately be "strategically defined".

In the class struggle, which should not be confused with literary proclamations, the

separation between the revolutionary and reformist currents crystallizes in the course of struggle, on the basis of experiences accumulated by the workers' party, differentiations and debates between tendencies appearing inside it.

Those who make strategic definition the condition of the construction of a workers' party, proclaiming in an ultimatum manner that its founding act should be marked by its demarcation from the reformists, that it must be a declared revolutionary party marching towards the dictatorship of the proletariat and so on, adopt a purely ideological approach. That only allows parties to be built on paper.

After nearly a quarter of a century of such attempts which have yielded nothing, it is time to reflect and to place the horse before the cart, which the militants of "Sierpien 80" have precisely done, instead of placing the cart before the horse, which has been done up until now.

In recent years the Polish working class has lost nearly all its social gains. It urgently needs means of political struggle in defence of all that which still remains and to recover what has been lost. Without doubt more than for all the other reasons, it is as founder of the first workers' party that Daniel Podrzycki will enter the history of the Polish workers' movement.

This party is still at an embryonic stage. Its only base is a minority trade union confederation. Its foundation is only a first step - but nobody has been capable of taking such a step until now. Independently of the future fate of this party, the die has been cast. If it survives the death of Daniel Podrzycki and develops - and it has a chance of so doing - it will naturally become the main factor of recomposition and development of the forces of the anti-capitalist left on a workers' basis, that is on the sole terrain where that is possible, inside the workers' movement. Daniel Podrzycki is no more. The struggle continues.

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► Zbigniew Kowalewski was in 1980-81 a member of the regional leadership of *Solidarność* in Lodz. As a delegate to the First Congress of *Solidarność*, he took part in the elaboration of the programme that was adopted. He was in Paris at the invitation of French trade unionists when the state of siege was declared in December 1981. He helped to edit Polish-language *Inprekor*, a journal of the Fourth International circulated clandestinely in Poland from 1981 to 1990, and published "Rendez-nous nos usines!" ("Give us Back our Factories!") (*La Brèche*, Paris 1985). He is at present editor of the trade union weekly *Nowy Tygodnik Popularny* and of the theoretical journal *Rewolucja*.

NOTES

[1] "Sierpien 80" ("August 80") is a trade union confederation founded in 1992 by the regional commission of Upper Silesia (Region of Katowice) of the trade union "Solidarność 80" ("Solidarity 80"). "Solidarność 80" was in turn created in 1989 by militants originally in "Solidarność" who opposed the round table agreement between the clandestine leadership of this union and the state bureaucracy, which led to the acceptance of neoliberal policies and capitalist restoration by the opposition.

[2] *Nowy Robotnik* ("New Worker") is a radical, pluralist left monthly which has been published for the past six years.

[3] Huta Katowice, the second biggest Polish steel complex, was built starting from 1973. It was privatized in October 2003 to the benefit of the Indo-British holding LNM, (it has since become Mittal Steel), which acquired it for a hundredth of its value, according to Daniel Podrzycki (see "Prywatyzacji nie" ("No to privatization!"), "Kurier Związkowy" number 216, March 9, 2005).

[4] Marian Jurczyk, a "Solidarność" leader from the Szczecin naval shipyard and a member of the national leadership in 1980-1981, opposed the round table negotiations in 1989 and was the main leader of the "Solidarność 80" trade union. In 1997 he was elected senator, in 1998 mayor of the city of Szczecin.

[5] The town and region of Szczecin was the other point of strong implantation for *Solidarność 80*.

[6] Jan Olszewski, lawyer, active in the Polish opposition since 1956, formed a right wing government in December 1991.

[7] FSM produced small popular cars under license from FIAT. In May 1992 the company was taken over by FIAT in the framework of a joint venture and divided into three companies: FIAT AUTO POLAND, MAGNETI MARELLI POLAND and TEKSID POLAND.

[8] The Christian National Union (ZChN) was a clerical and reactionary party, founded in 1989. A good part of its members have joined the current governmental party Law and Justice, PiS.

[9] President of the Republic from 1990 to 1995, Lech Walesa, historic leader of *Solidarność*, tried and partially succeeded in transforming the unions into clientele for his political projects. As a candidate to the presidency in 2000, he won only 1.01% of votes cast.

[10] "Kurier Związkowy" ("Trade Union Mail") is the organ of "Sierpien 80". In principle weekly (with periods of irregularity), it is distributed free by the union structures and available on the web: www.wzz.org.p

[11] Leszek Miller, secretary of the Central Committee of PZPR in 1988 and member of its Political Bureau in 1989, was one of the founders of the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SDRP), which took the place of the PZPR in 1990 and a minister in 1993-1997. He was president of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD, new name taken by the SDRP which had previously constituted an electoral alliance

with other political and trade union organizations) in 1999-2004, and Prime Minister from October 2001 to May 2004.

He pursued a neoliberal policy, developed privatization (in particular steel), negotiated Poland's entry into the EU and its involvement in the US war in Iraq. He was dismissed by his own party in 2004 when his popularity in the polls had sunk to 5% (in 2001 the SLD won 41% of votes cast, in 2005 finally 11.31% of votes cast while 60% of those registered abstained).

[12] *Barbórka* is the name of a traditional miners feast, marked by a day off and a bonus payment.

[13] "Solidarność Electoral Action" (AWS), a front of right wing parties set up in 1996 around the "Solidarność" union, under the leadership of Marian Krzaklewski. In government from 1997 to 2001. Did not elect any deputies in 2001. The majority of its politicians are now in the current governmental party, PiS.

[14] First SDRP then SLD (see note 12)

[15] A big apartment on the third level of an old building at the centre of Katowice, the office of the national leadership of WZZ "Sierpien 80" opens on a hall one side of which is lined with cupboards equipped with mirrored doors. The newly installed trades unionist did not judge it prudent to invest in new doors.

[16] For a more theoretical approach to this question see Z. Kowalewski, "Le trotskisme et le nationalisme révolutionnaire: introduction au cas cubain", "Cahiers Léon Trotsky" number 77, 2002, pp. 10-17.

[17] *Samoobrona* (Self-Defence) was originally (1991) a trade union and a peasant party set up by middle peasants who had become over indebted because of the monetarization of the economy. In 1993 this party (a trade union cannot contest elections) stood at the elections, winning only 2.78% of votes cast. It won parliamentary representation for the first time in 2001, winning 10.2% of the vote and becoming the third parliamentary party, with a populist programme. In September 2005 *Samoobrona* repeated its electoral success with 11.41%. Its founder and leader, Andrzej Lepper, has just announced his support for neoliberalism and his deputies have supported the government, which it aspires to join before the end of the current legislature.

[18] *Front Polski* ("Polish Front") was a small, ephemeral nationalist organization.

[19] General Tadeusz Wilecki, chief of staff of the Polish Army from 1992 to 1997, was in 2000 candidate for the presidency of the National Party (SN), winning 0.16% of votes cast. He identifies with the very reactionary nationalist party of R. Dmowski. In 1999 he said: "General Augusto Pinochet has taken the examination and has succeeded. The state is a supreme value and one cannot do everything with white gloves."

[20] The KPN-Ojczyzna (KPN-Homeland) is a split from the Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN), a nationalist opposition party founded in 1979, whose leaders were harshly repressed. In 1997 on

the lists of the AWS, KPN-Ojczyzna elected 8 deputies and a senator.

In 2000 this party split up, its most right wing (and best known) leaders setting up the KPN-Oboz Patriotyczny (KPN-Patriotic Camp), with a minority pursuing activity under the old name for a time.

[21] National Renaissance of Poland/Alliance of New Forces is a far right nationalist organization founded in October 1981.

[22] L. Trotsky, "The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution", Pathfinder Press, New York 1977, pp. 107, 83, 82-83.

[23] "Dalej!" ("Further!") was an irregular publication of the radical left.

[24] Nowy Tygodnik Popularny ("New Popular Weekly") is a trade union publication linked to the OPZZ union federation.

Poland

Where Does the Left Come From?

Magdalena Ostrowska

Magdalena Ostrowska interviews Boguslaw Zietek president of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions "Sierpien 80" and the Polish Party of Labour.

MO: *Although Sierpien 80 ("August 80") is not the biggest trade union federation in Poland, since its foundation it has become famous as an organizer of serious strikes and workers' protests. Some characterise it as an extremist union, seeking confrontation. Where does this radicalism come from?*

BZ: It's not only radicalism, it's also honesty and consistency. Sierpien 80 was founded by people who had experience of the 1980s. We remember that in August 1980 on the Baltic coast the striking workers raised the slogan: "Socialism - yes, deviations - no!". We have not replaced this slogan by that of "Capitalism - yes, deviations - no!" as the Solidarnosc union has.

We have not forgotten why the striking workers struggled in 1980 and those who joined the first Solidarnosc union, which then had ten million members. Our critical attitude towards the new Solidarnosc led us at the time to participate in the foundation of Solidarnosc 80, which in 1992 organized the first serious strikes in Poland.

These strikes, co-organized with the OPZZ (the official trade union under the old regime - ed.), were aimed at the so-called reforms of the first "Balcerowicz plan" (an IMF-dictated programme of capitalist restoration - ed.). The attitude adopted then by the union leader, Marian Jurczyk, his support for the government of Jan Olszewski - responsible, among other things, for the botched privatisation of the FSM car factory - and the compromises made by Solidarnosc 80 with the employers, led to a split and the birth of Sierpien 80.

Daniel Podrzycki (see article in this issue) was the founder and president of Sierpien 80. After his tragic death in the course of the presidential campaign, the union congress conferred the leadership on me. Sierpien 80 can boast notably of having organized the biggest and longest victorious strike in the Huta Katowice steel plant.

It is on this basis that the union experienced a dynamic development. Sierpien 80 is currently the third biggest trade union federation in Silesia, the region where our confederation was born. Our most recent success has been an effective struggle in defence of Polish coalmines and miners' pensions.

Is this orientation the fruit of your experiences?

From the beginning our goal was a firm, effective and consistent defence of workers' interests. We don't wish, like some unions, to be sitting astride the barricades and doing deals with the employers. And we have succeeded. We don't want to be a "transmission belt" between the employer and the employee. The role of a union is to defend the fundamental workers' interests and not to legitimate neoliberal reforms.

As trades unionists we are "at the service" of the representation and the defence of workers' interests. It is them we must serve, not their opposites. Such an attitude does not arouse sympathy from the employers, or those unions who, often at the price of the abandonment of the interests of the workers, seek an agreement at any price with the employer. That underpins our disappointment first with Solidarnosc, then Solidarnosc 80.

Such an attitude must not have been enough, since you took the decision to set up your own political party.

As Sierpien 80 we believe that the realisation of the workers' interests cannot be founded on the trade union struggle alone, but that we should develop a political tool. The union experience convinced us that an effective struggle is not limited to protests against bad decisions and bad laws.

To represent the workers effectively, trades unionists must have an influence on the creation of the law, so that it is in agreement with the interests of workers. Other trades unionists, although they have had such a possibility, have not wished to



defend the interests of the workers in parliament.

The Constitution does not envisage the possibility of unions presenting their own lists in parliamentary elections. So instead of relying on other parties, Sierpien 80 has created its own political representation for workers. Capitalism is exploitation, the crushing of workers' rights, unemployment, poverty and exclusion. Our trade union experiences authorise us to make such a judgement. The attitude and effect of the activity of Sierpien 80 give a picture of what the party created by us will be like.

The Polish Party of Labour (PPP) will defend the rights of workers and their interests. We have heard such affirmations several times from various groups, but when it comes to the crunch, they disappear among other questions.

The PPP was created by authentic workers' representatives and not by frauds that have little in common with this social group and use it for short-term gains. There are no corrupt and ephemeral bureaucrats among us. It is perhaps for that reason that we are attacked as a union. For some years in Poland we have had violations of the Labour Code and laws, which concern the workers. Exploitation doesn't just take place in the supermarkets [1]!

The non-respect of trade union rights is general. For some years we observe a fall in the rate of unionisation, which has a number of sources, but the same effect the lack of effective defenders of workers' interests. That is already beginning to rebound against employers who apply the "divide and rule" principle, buy off the trades unionists and scare the workers.

Such a policy leads to desperate workers beginning to defend themselves and to take their revenge for the indignities they suffer, for example by physically attacking the managers who oppress them at work. That is what happened recently at Indesic in Lodz [2]. Workers are deprived of the

instruments of peaceful and civilised defence, so they resort to more radical and desperate measures, because their backs are against the wall. It would be wrong to believe that the workers will indefinitely shut up and suffer all these humiliations. Revolt is certain.

The PPP emerged from the struggle for the workers' interests, has a class social base and is strongly linked to the working class for example through Sierpien 80. Is this why the party has a left orientation?

All trade union activity is of the left, because it involves struggling for the interests of the workers. That is what decides the attitude and the programme of the PPP, which has its social base in the labour movement and takes account of it. For this reason alone the PPP is indispensable, as a left that has no truck with the neoliberals.

A true left, which does not calculate like a banker, but fights like a worker. The workers and the unemployed were not at all represented in the parliamentary arrangements until then, or if they were represented, it was done badly. Trades unionists have entered parliament on various lists, but rapidly the interests of the workers were subjected to those of the party.

Many examples witness to this. In 1997 a group of trades unionists entered parliament on the lists of Solidarnosc Electoral Action (a front of right wing parties set up in 1996 under the leadership of Marian Krzaklewsk -ed.), which formed a coalition government with the Union of Liberty (the dominant neoliberal party from 1989 to 1991 -ed.). Their first act was to turn their backs on the interests of the workers.

The period 1997-2001 saw the worst solutions from the point of view of society, among others the four reforms of the government of Jerzy Buzek [3] and the reform of the coalmines, which led to a total collapse in Silesia and the liquidation of 100,000 jobs in this branch alone. One cannot forget that it was the government supported by Solidarnosc that deprived 1.8 million people of the right to an early pension.

During the subsequent legislature, when the SLD came to power, we had a repeat performance. The trades unionists who were on its lists and the government of Leszek Miller enacted a far-reaching liberalisation of the Labour Code, among other things. Will the PPP's strong links with a trade union protect this party from alienation from the milieus it should represent?

This link constitutes the guarantee that the PPP will not alienate itself. The SLD came to power with social slogans, of struggle for the rights of the poorest, a halt to privatisation and so on, but in practice it



"Socialism without deformations" - Solidarnosc in its early days

did the contrary - it enacted the neoliberal programme. For example its first decision in Silesia was the privatisation of the Huta Katowice steel plant, pioneered by the minister Andrzej Szarawarski.

The people no longer want these political representatives who assure them during the electoral campaigns that they will carry out a left programme and once in power continue the neoliberal reforms. Now once more we are witnesses to such a situation. It is enough to compare what Andrzej Lepper and Samoobrona Samoobrona (Self-Defence) said in their electoral campaign and what they say now. Samoobrona Samoobrona (Self-Defence) was originally a peasant union.

In 2005 it won 11.41% of the vote and its leader, Andrzej Lepper, has announced his support for neoliberalism and the hope that his deputies will enter the right wing government before the end of the legislature. After the elections, even Balcerowicz ceased to worry Lepper.

One cannot treat people like this and abuse their confidence in the name of personal games. In the case of the PPP such a danger does not exist, because the dependency is in the opposite direction. Inside the PPP it isn't the trades unionists who are at the service of the party, it is the party which is the tool of the workers. It is the best protection against the distancing of the party from its social base and a guarantee that the left programme will be enacted in a consistent manner.

The PPP emerged from Sierpien 80. Does it limit its programme to the militants of this union?

The PPP has presented a programme that any trades unionists could sign up to. We demand an increase in the minimum wage to the level of 68% of the average wage. We want a 35-hour working week while preserving the current level of wages and increasing it systematically in the future.

We are for the maintenance of progressive income taxation and in favour of the introduction of a rate of 50% for the wealthiest and 10% for the poor.

We are also opposed to taxing the social groups on the borders of poverty as well as the retired and those living on pensions. We have drawn up a draft "Law on the status of the unemployed", guaranteeing benefits to all those who do not find work.

We favour the maintenance of free education and health services, and oppose the privatisation of public services and the strategic branches of the economy. That's what we want to achieve through political means. I cannot imagine a trade union which would not agree with these goals. Sadly practice shows that there are unions who not only do not support the left but also support the programme of the right wing and neoliberal parties. It's a confusion! But the level of consciousness is growing and such unions are losing their *raison d'être*, because people don't want games, they want work and bread.

Yet everything indicates that soon we will only have games.

There is no doubt on what the right wing government will be like in Poland. You can already clearly see it in the crushing of workers' and trade union rights in the KWK Budryk coal mine and in the limitation of the right to demonstrate in the streets of Poznan and other towns in Poland. And that will not be limited to blind political revenge, purges and limitations of democracy.

In 1997-2001 it was virtually the same leadership as those who have just formed a government who exerted power, only under another label. That speaks for itself. The level of unemployment will not fall, there will be no social minimum or unemployment benefits, no serious social problems will be resolved.

For Poland, this will be a bad government. But it can constitute a chance for the left, if the latter can unite to present a credible programmatic alternative. We must show that it is possible to implement an economic programme that serves the workers and not the capitalists. Sadly, the past experiences with the SLD and SdPI show that if these parties put forward a left programme, their leaders have implemented a generally neoliberal programme after the elections. That's what we've seen up until now.

Can it change? We will see. The errors that the right will make in government will be a chance for the rebirth of a credible left. In the same way a reflection on the errors made by the left groupings constitutes such a chance. But when I read that the SLD and SdPI envisage fusing with the former Union of Liberty, now called the Democrat Party, then I have the greatest doubts that it is a suitable partner for the left. Such conceptions clearly place these parties on the neoliberal side.

Does the PPP's electoral score indicate that a clearly left programme does not convince a lot of people?

The success of the PPP which has just been set up was to succeed in getting on the list in all the electoral constituencies. In the parliamentary elections we won 0.77% of votes across the country. There is no reason to rejoice, but we didn't expect anything else. The elections were decided before anyone voted - by the media and the pre-election polls. But the PPP has all the same succeeded in reaching the voters. If we relate our expenditure for the campaign and the number of votes we obtained, it emerges that our party spent the least to reach the voters. It isn't enough. The airtime in the context of the electoral campaign is not enough for a party that is "outside the loop" and for the voters to become aware of our programme and convinced of it. The PPP hopes to participate in the next local elections and I believe our results will be better.

Who will the PPP collaborate with if it is not to be limited to the activists of Sierpien 80?

The electoral committee of the PPP has invited onto its lists other organisations of the extra-parliamentary left, including the Communist Party of Poland (KPP), the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the Anticlerical Party of Progress, "Reason". We want to collaborate with these groupings as partners and create with them a credible left, integrating these milieus around a common programme.

We reject the artificial historic divisions, founded on what people did before 1989. If someone wants to do some good for Poland today, it isn't important that they belonged in the past to the governing party or the opposition.

Until 1989 I was in the opposition, but I understand perfectly those who say that in the time of People's Poland the country developed, people had work, there was no unemployment and poverty was not on a scale comparable with today and that after 1989 we saw the selling off of all that had been built by generations of Poles.

I understand the bitterness and disenchantment of those who equate the 16 years of reforms with the liquidation of the social gains of labour and I understand, because I see how many enterprises have been liquidated in Silesia and that in this department alone there are 400,000 unemployed. And the situation is worse in the rest of the country.

We have three million unemployed and only 10% of them have the right to benefits, the others are left to themselves. 40% of the unemployed are under 25. They have never had access to employment. It is this which underlies the real criteria of division and not the historic divergences over who was right in 1956 or 1989. One cannot accept the disdain for the achievements of preceding generations, nor reject them solely because they lived and worked in People's Poland.

In the programme of the PPP, beyond the social questions, there are also fairly unilateral ideological choices. In our reality they even sound very radical.

The PPP was founded on the basis of a trade union, but we do not limit our demands to the social sphere alone. Nobody reasonable can have any doubt that we need a secular state, neutral from the ideological viewpoint, and the separation of religion from questions of state and politics.

It is important that in Poland civilised standards concerning women's rights are applied and that the state actively fights against manifestations of discrimination and tries to equalise women's rights in the various areas of life, in particular on the labour market.

There are numerous groups who are discriminated against and excluded. We want to defend their rights as a political party. Since the beginning we were clearly against Poland's participation in the Iraq war and against the occupation of this country, demanding the immediate

withdrawal of Polish troops. Unlike many parties who use the left's colours, we have not hesitated to present a clear viewpoint on this subject and we have taken part in anti-war demonstrations.

Does the PPP identify with the left groupings who participate in the global justice movement and reject the conception of the "third way" formulated in 1999 by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder and by social democracy?

We are also critical of the phenomenon of the left's retreat before the interests of big capital, which should be clearly seen as betraying the interests of the labour movement. That is why we look with interest on the processes underway on the western European political scene, where the consistent left is gaining in popularity. In Poland we can see the beginning of similar transformations.

In our country also the movement for global justice has emerged and argues that "another world is possible" We oppose the negative effects of neoliberal globalisation, which we also suffer in Poland. We take part in various initiatives of the Polish global justice movement and we collaborate with these milieus. In particular we want to take part in the international social forums, as a trade union and as a party. In these Forums there are various social and political currents. What unites us are the demands for social justice, a real democracy and the primacy of labour over capital.

► *Magdalena Ostrowska is a journalist and editor of the review "Rewolucja" ("Revolution") and the daily "Trybuna". This interview first appeared in the "Impuls" supplement to the daily "Trybuna" on December 1, 2005.*

NOTES

[1] Since 1989 Western supermarket chains have enjoyed unlimited rights to establish themselves in Poland, pushing small traders into bankruptcy.

[2] At the Indesit refrigerator factory in Lodz, the directors abolished safety systems on the presses, leading to the death of a young worker and a subsequent assault on one of the directors. There are no unions at Indesit and those who have tried to set them up have been sacked.

[3] The government of Jerzy Buzek (1997-2001) carried out four main counter-reforms: education, administration, health and pensions.

Bolivia

Unity and Perspectives of Bolivian Left

Remberto Arias

In this article, written before the electoral victory of Evo Morales and the MAS, Remberto Arias (a militant of the POR-Combate (Revolutionary Workers' Party - Combat, Bolivian section of the Fourth International) deals with the question of the unity of the Bolivian Left. He recalls the sort-lived Unity Pact of March 2005, which involved the whole Left, including the MAS, and outlines the National Workers' and People's Summit, due to be held in January 2006, involving forces that are critical of the MAS.

The Pact of Unity of the Left, signed on March 9th, 2005 at the headquarters of the COB, didn't last long. But this unity can be renewed at any time, through a new pact. Nevertheless, it should in the future adopt a serious perspective, which would enable it to become a real lasting alternative, as the next National Workers and People's Summit could become for the social movements who will be involved in it.

Panorama of the recent political situation

The executive power put an end to the "war of parliamentary seats" by promulgating a decree to enable general and prefectural elections to take place on December 18th, 2005.

This conflict over seats provoked a series of protests which were to say the least peculiar, in the departmental capitals of La Paz, Oruro and Potosi; no massive mobilization of the population, but hard-line reactions from political elites who were ready to do everything to defend additional sources of revenue.

So these parliamentarians engaged more vigorously in the struggle for seats than they had done in the struggle for hydrocarbons some months earlier. Cochabamba turned against the departments of the West, all this in a climate of potential separatism.

Because the objective that was sought after was to launch an attack against the centralism of the state, on the basis of regional interests, of the interests of the oligarchies, and if possible to prevent Evo Morales, the leader of the MAS, from becoming head of state.

The MAS today, in spite of its name, does not claim to defend socialism and presents itself rather as a nationalist party. Evo describes the nationalism of his party as "new nationalism", very different from that of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR), and intends to promote forms of participation very different from those of the indigenous peoples.

This tendency to combine several ideologies within the MAS has increased with the arrival of Alvaro Garcia Linera as

candidate for the vice-presidency. While proclaiming himself "Gramscian", Garcia Linera is in reality taking a position in favour of an "Andean capitalism".

However, that has not prevented the MAS from attracting the support of some left parties such as the pro-Chinese Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Bolivia (PCMLB), the Democratic Socialist Party of Rene Morales, Guevarist groups... These parties, while signing agreements formalising their support for Evo, maintain a critical attitude and do not hesitate to formulate their reservations.

The Pact of Revolutionary Unity

The participation of the COB in the unity, in the consolidation of a popular and social movement against the oligarchy, was concretised through the document of the Pact for the Dignity and the Sovereignty of the Bolivian People, signed on March 9th, 2005.

This agreement was broken, mainly because of the insults and personal attacks that were launched against each other by two of the greatest leaders of the Bolivian popular movement: Jaime Solares and Evo Morales. The disagreements over nationalisation and over the role of soldiers in a revolutionary process represented fundamental principles, in relation to the strategy of taking power, that justified the dissensions between them.

Today, it seems unquestionable that the majority of votes in the country will be in favour of the MAS, unless there is electoral fraud on the part of the Right, in order to avoid it losing control of the hydrocarbons. If a "political instrument" of the COB had stood, no doubt the vote in favour of the MAS would have been affected as a result, inasmuch as the party of Evo Morales seems capable of attracting all the left votes.

The transnationals, the traditional neo-liberal parties such as the MNR, the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left), ADN (Nationalist Democratic Action), the UCS (Civic Solidarity Union) and the NFR (New Republican Force), the oligarchies, in particular of Santa Cruz,



did not succeed in sabotaging the elections by the "war of parliamentary seats".

The Right will not be able to oppose the new social force that is emerging, and behind it, the Bolivian social movements, unless they try to impose a military coup d'etat as some people are already predicting, with the aim of re-establishing neo-liberal economic policies, subjected to the interests of capitalism and imperialism.

Some members of parliament wanted to avoid the holding of elections, the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, the prosecution of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada and his ministers for the events of October 2003, [1] in order to stay in power and thus continue to plunder the country's wealth, in order to pursue the "Gonist" [2] experience. These are the reasons that drove some people to take advantage of this "war of parliamentary seats" to destabilise and divide the country.

The programme of the Pact

The first point of the Pact for Dignity stipulates that it is a politico-social agreement which goes beyond political divisions and ideological dogmatism. The organisations taking part in it will be the opponents of the bourgeoisie and its lackeys. The Pact also stipulates that El Alto and Chapare are the headquarters of the movement of the country's poor and excluded. This point thus recognises the role played by the city of El Alto during the recent social crises that the country has experienced.

The second point declares a permanent struggle against the interference of imperialism and of its neo-liberal economic model which, through privatisation, "capitalisation", the "transnationalisation" of the Bolivian economy and the imposition of the Treaty of Free Trade and the Zone of Free Trade of the Americas (ALCA), leaves the majority of Bolivians to suffer from grinding poverty, hunger, social exclusion and unemployment. Despite the present divisions in the popular movement, we are continuing to struggle in this direction.

The third point makes the taking of power a strategic objective to be accomplished starting from the Constituent, and thanks to the consolidation of the leadership established by the pact, which acts against the government, against the financial, mining, banking, agricultural, etc., oligarchy.

This point gave rise to an intense debate over the nature of the Constituent Assembly, certain radical currents arguing for a Popular Workers' Assembly, fighting for social liberation, inasmuch as the Constituent Assembly can appear as simply a means for the capitalist state to reorganise itself.

The fourth point establishes unity to attain the recovery of the country's national resources and all the hydrocarbons, towards the national liberation of the Bolivian state and the respect for its sovereignty, in particular by rejecting the immunity that North American soldiers enjoy.

The fifth point is an analysis of the conjuncture, standing up against the humiliating conditions that the racist government in the pay of foreigners imposes, facilitating by its action the fraudulent operations of the transnationals and the plunder of our natural wealth.

Finally, the seventh point deals with the prosecution of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, his ministers, the police and the Army, all of whom refuse, one after the other, to take responsibility for the dead of October 2003. This point commits the signatories to fight for the trial to take place as soon as possible. The COB, as the central entity of the workers and of the defence of the exploited people, is strongly engaged in this task.

The MAS and the COB, but also the other political and social organisations, [3] signed and sealed this pact, with the aim of accomplishing the historic tasks outlined above, by means of a leadership called "Peoples' Revolutionary Political Command". Unfortunately it didn't last. It is necessary for the reformists and the revolutionaries, the nationalists and the socialists to analyse and discuss together, first of all about the role that the proletariat must play and what alliances it can establish, then about the strategy for the taking of power and the building of socialism. All the rest is just errors and irrelevancies. Today, the forces of the MAS and of the COB are unfortunately very far from the objectives laid out by this document and this tactic.

On the coming Summit

The first National Workers' and Peoples' Summit, from which the MAS is today standing aside, includes the social sectors who took part in the heroic struggles in defence of hydrocarbons against Goni and Mesa, who prevented the coming to power

of Hormando Vaca Diez, president of the Senate, and of Mario Cossio, president of the Assembly, during the crisis of May-June 2003.

The objective of this Summit is to build a "revolutionary political instrument", against hunger, unemployment and poverty and for the defence of hydrocarbons and natural resources. To create this instrument, the COB, the Trade Union Federation of Miners of Bolivia (FSTMB) and the Regional Workers' Confederation (COR) of El Alto, [4] have come to a common agreement, thus filling the vacuum left by the absence of a political and social leadership for these sectors. The principal demands of the unitary platform are the following:

- 1) Struggle for the nationalisation of hydrocarbons and of the country's natural resources.
- 2) Analysis of the general and prefectoral elections, and evaluation of the challenges that face the social movements after the elections.
- 3) Articulation and consolidation of the Indigenous Popular Assembly [5] as an instrument of power.
- 4) Evaluation of the accomplishments, of the nature and of the perspectives of the Constituent Assembly.
- 5) Evaluation of the challenges concerning the strengthening of the COB and of the trade union and people's organisations of Bolivia.
- 6) Conclusions and declaration of the National Workers' and People's Summit.

This Summit will begin with a big demonstration regrouping the organisations and social sectors, the "living forces", the parties of the Left, etc., on January 8th, 2006 which will go from the Ceja in the city of El Alto to the Public Autonomous University of El Alto (UPEA) where the plenary sessions will take place.

From the signature of the Pact for Dignity and the Sovereignty of the Bolivian People to the Summit planned for El Alto, a process is underway of the recomposition of the forces of the Left with the aim of giving the social movements and the exploited workers a revolutionary leadership capable of integrating all of these movements into a project of social transformation, in order to fight effectively against capital and the multinational companies who are exploiting the people and plundering the wealth of the country, with the help of the corrupt state bureaucracy...

In the immediate future, the popular political forces which are participating in the elections must unite to drive the enemy from power once and for all and, by what would unquestionably be a popular victory, take forward the perspective of

the exercise of political power by the workers, the building of socialism, a society without exploited or exploiters. [6]

► *Remberto Arias is a militant of the POR-Combate (Revolutionary Workers' Party - Combat).*

NOTES

[1] It has been established that Sanchez de Lozada gave the order to open fire on the people, leading to the death of more than 60 people. Now a refugee in the United States, he cannot be tried as long as he does not return to Bolivia.

[2] From Sanchez de Lozada's nickname, "Goni".

[3] The main organisations who were signatories, apart from the MAS and the COB, are the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP) of Felipe Quispe, the United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB) led by the MAS senator, Roman Loayza, the coordination in Defence of Water and Gas of Oscar Olivera, the Regional Workers' Confederation (COR) and the Federation of Neighbourhood Committees (FEJUVE) of El Alto.

[4] The nomination by the government of Eduardo Rodriguez Veltze of the executive secretary of the COR of El Alto, Edgar Patana, to the organising committee for the Constituent Assembly, along with other Bolivian citizens, at once affects the organisation of the Summit, insofar as all the sectors who will take part will have to commit themselves to the autonomous elaboration of a programme of revolutionary struggle. That means that comrade Patana will have to refuse this appointment.

[5] The Indigenous Popular Assembly was set up in El Alto and Cochabamba during the crisis of May-June 2005.

[6] *Editors note: The POR-Combate (Revolutionary Workers' Party - Combat) of which the author is a member is the historic section of the Fourth International. It played an important role during the 1952 Revolution and afterwards went through the numerous splits of the international Trotskyist movement. Under the leadership of Hugo Gonzalez Moscoso, the POR-Combate remained the Bolivian section of the Fourth International. During the 1980s, while underground, it took part in a recomposition of the Bolivian revolutionary Left, which gave birth to the POR-United, Bolivian section of the Fourth International. The recomposed organisation did not manage to survive and the 12th World Congress of the Fourth International in 1995 could only take note of the disappearance of the section. The present POR-Combate was re-established by a group of militants loyal to the Fourth International when the POR-U collapsed. Its militants are mainly active in the COB and are in favour of the unity of the Left.*

Bolivia

"The nationalisation of hydrocarbons will be our first task"

IV interview with Evo Morales

Herve do Alto

After his unchallengeable victory in the presidential election of 18th December, the leader of the Bolivian peasants and indigenous people, president of the Movement towards socialism (MAS), Evo Morales, was interviewed in his campaign headquarter in La Paz by our correspondent in Bolivia, Herve Do Alto. The President-elect spoke of the challenges facing the future MAS government, and in so doing came back to the issues that have been at the centre of the social struggles of recent years, issues like the nationalization of hydrocarbons and the defence of the cultivation of the coca leaf.



Q. After the results of the vote on Sunday evening, there is no longer any doubt that you will be elected president of the Republic of Bolivia. How do you feel personally about what has happened to you since Sunday?

A. I am very happy, because of the confidence that the Bolivian people have shown in me. I never thought I would be where I am now. To win with more 50% of the vote is something historic. We have broken a record in the entire history of Bolivian democracy. Furthermore, to represent the indigenous people, not only of Bolivia, but of the whole of Latin America is a source of great pride for me, as I hope it is for all those peoples.

I want to prove myself worthy of my brothers. I also feel proud of all those from the middle classes, all the intellectuals and even employers who have joined us. I want them to feel proud of the indigenous people and of Evo Morales, and I hope that together we will be able to change our Bolivia, thinking of unity and of the poor and of those who are excluded in this country.

What in your opinion is responsible for this unprecedented success in the history of Bolivian democracy?

It is the result of a lot of hard work. At 5 o'clock in the morning we met to start work, for the campaign or to prepare the future government. We worked in coordination with the social movements and we will continue to do that tomorrow (Wednesday) through a big general assembly in Cochabamba. There will always be differences within these movements, but dialogue must prevail.

The role of the social movements will not be to give us orders, we will have to build this power together through debate. We feel ready to change the country, to change our Bolivia, so as to have an influence on our history, as did Tupac Katari, Tupac Amaru, and all those indigenous leaders who fought for the Tawantinsuyo [the pre-Colombian Inca Republic], as did Simon Bolivar who fought for the great Latin American fatherland. So we are going to continue our struggle in government, with

the support of the social movements, with which we can affirm that we are the big majority, since we won the election with more than 50% votes.

You are often associated with Latin American political personalities such as Fidel Castro or Hugo Chavez. Can we then say that you are a socialist?

Obviously. Socialism involves a personal change. I have always said that it was necessary for us to change ourselves in order to change Bolivia.

As far as I'm concerned, that means not being egoist, not being individualist, not thinking about what is in it for me, not being a manipulator, and always thinking of the interest of the big majority of Bolivians. It is through my experience of union struggles that I learned all that. That's why we also have the will to change the MAS.

We are staking our future on communitarian socialism, organised around the activity of peasant communities. Where does communism come from? Well, from communities!

Where I lived there was no private property, it was an agricultural zone which belonged to the whole of the community. So we have to take over and strengthen these forms of organization, which are collective and based on solidarity, so as to better share out our riches, our wealth, in the whole of Bolivia.

What will be the first measure of your government concerning the cultivation of the coca leaf?

There will not be total eradication of coca. On the other hand, we want a rationalization of production that is destined for legal consumption. We must put a stop to cocaine, to the drug trade. That's why I invite the North American government in particular to sign an effective pact to struggle against the drug trade, which would imply shared responsibility, so as to be able to control the banking sector and the market. We don't just need a law 1008 [the law that is the legislative framework concerning coca in Bolivia] which would be concerned

with treating "supply", we also need a law 1008 to deal with "demand".

We will only be able to end the drug trade when there is zero market, zero demand, and zero cocaine addicts. If there is an illegal market in coca leaves, the legal market will continue to be affected by it. That's why one of the keys to the struggle against the drug trade will also be the strengthening of the legal market.

Does that mean that the surface cultivated is going to decrease?

Our experience in Chapare [the coca producing region near Cochabamba] is of delimitation of cultivated surfaces by what we call the catu, 40 meters by 40 meters. This is undoubtedly the most important contribution of the movement of the peasant producers of the coca leaf to the struggle against the drug trade.

Will the nationalization of hydrocarbons be the first measure of your government?

Yes, as far as the economic domain is concerned. In the political domain, the priority will be the establishment of a Constituent Assembly, to put an end to the colonial state which has governed the Bolivian nation up until now.

The oil companies seem to fear that radical measures will be taken towards them, in the framework of this nationalization. Should they expect to see drastic changes in the conditions in which they exploit these resources?

For us it is not a question of confiscating or expropriating the property of the oil companies. However, they must not be able to have property right to the hydrocarbons, which really belong to us. From now on, it is our government which will exercise this right. We are going to nationalise the hydrocarbons, but not the property of the oil companies.

How are you going to go about recovering the property rights for the Bolivian state?

Simply by relying on the political Constitution of the state, which has up to now been trampled underfoot. From now on, whatever the oil company that wants to invest in the country, it will have to be

subordinate to the Constitution. Many lawyers affirm that the contracts which at present govern the links between these enterprises and the Bolivian state are null and void in law, because they have not been ratified by the Congress.

Any contract has to be ratified by the Congress to be able to be implemented. That means that these contracts are anti-constitutional and have therefore been implemented illegally. From now on, it is the state that will be the owner of the hydrocarbons, on the surface as well as under the ground. In every case, with companies which demonstrate a responsible attitude, we will guarantee them a return on their investments, because any enterprise that invests is logically seeking to make profits. But these profits must be earned in a fair and transparent fashion, and the first beneficiary must remain the state.

We cannot continue with the kind of sharing where the state only earned 18 per cent of royalties and the companies 82 per cent.

That must change. If the people have voted for nationalisation, for me, the voice of the people is the voice of God, and so we have to respect it.

Since the gas is governed by a fixed price, Bolivia sometimes sells it at a price inferior to the market price. Does that mean that your government will fix a minimum price for gas?

There must first of all be a price for the domestic market. That must be one of our priorities. We have to put an end to this situation where, under the ground, we have all this wealth at our disposal, while in the daily life of the people, the majority continue to use wood for heating. That is why we need a special price for the domestic market, a price that is not subject to the demands of the international market. Secondly, the contracts that have governed the conditions of sale up to now, these same contracts which are marked as unconstitutional, are precisely the ones that force us to sell our barrels of oil at 16 or 17 dollars, whereas in fact the price is of the order of 60 dollar. So it really is the case that we have to put an end to these contracts and impose a revision of them.

Argentina is at present paying a price that is much lower than that, as are a certain

number of other neighbouring countries. What will be the consequences of such a policy for these countries?

First of all we will have to solve our problems of domestic supply. Once that is done our priority objective will be to increase our exports to the countries of the region. I cannot say as of now what prices we will establish, but in any case, when I say that our exports must be guided by the principle of equilibrium, I mean that we now have to move towards inter-state relations. It must no longer be Repsol Argentina that buys gas from Repsol Bolivia. It must be the Bolivian state, acting in a sovereign way, that sells its gas to the Argentinean state. That is the only viable way of making sure that the resources generated by the gas are beneficial to the big majority of people, rather than to the oil companies who are only a minority.

The day after you were elected, the United States sent you a rather chilly message of congratulations. How do you see relations between Bolivia and the United States evolving from now on?

We are ready to dialogue with all governments, including with the United States. If the North American government adopts a democratic attitude towards us and respects the choice of the Bolivian people, we will have relations with them, but relations that exclude any relationship of submission or subordination.

They will be relations whose aim is to resolve the problems of the people. If the Bush government respects and defends human rights, and also the struggle against poverty, it will be welcome. But we will not accept blackmail or any sort of horse-trading.

However, we are not alone. We are going to begin a foreign trip in January, a trip that will start with a visit to Nelson Mandela in South Africa, then one to Lula in Brazil. On top of that I have a meeting that has several times been postponed, with the Chinese government.

Two political personalities seem at present to polarise the political scene in Latin America, Nestor Kirchner and Vicente Fox. What are your relations with them?

Kirchner called me to congratulate me, but Fox didn't, nor for that matter the North American Embassy. But I'm not

complaining. They have the right to call me or not call me, but in any case, we respect all governments and their policies and we are not going to interfere in debates about domestic policies.

We have allies in the social movements of the whole world, including those in the United States. We will continue as always to look for allies who are capable of advising us and guiding us in our struggle. I still have a lot to learn, from the Bolivian people as from the people of Latin America.

Jorge Quiroga [candidate of the right-wing alliance PODEMOS (Democratic and Social Power), who came second with 28 per cent of the vote] committed himself to signing the Free Trade Agreement (TLC) with the United States. The MAS seems on the other hand to have adopted a more ambiguous attitude concerning free-trade agreements and to be in favour of projects of regional integration. What is going to happen with the TLC and with Mercosur, where Bolivia at present has the status of an associate state?

Whatever commercial treaty we are talking about, the TLC, ALCA (the Free Trade Area of the Americas) or whatever, all must be directed towards a just and equitable vision of trade, a vision where the micro and small businesses, the small producers and even the Bolivian agro-alimentary industry, are the ones who resolve their own problems, in order to avoid the states that subsidise their agriculture flooding countries like ours with their exports. I believe that this is a central theme. That is why we must revise these treaties to enable these small structures to have guaranteed markets. Perhaps we will also be able to enter the North American market, who knows, maybe with coca! (laughs). If we find a market for quinoa or for lama meat, we will sign, but we will not get involved in that kind of thing if it is a question of agreements whose consequence could be to eliminate the small producers.

Interviewed on Tuesday December 20th, 2005.

► Herve Do Alto is the correspondent in Bolivia of Rouge, weekly paper of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International.)

Bolivia

Will Evo Morales Change Bolivia?

Jeffery R Webber

The results of the December 18 elections in Bolivia were surprising to everyone, including to Evo Morales himself, the leader of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party. Morales won 54% of the vote, almost double the 29% for the nearest contender, right-wing Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga. A record 85% of eligible voters cast ballots, despite reports of widespread disqualification of mostly indigenous peasant supporters of Morales for technicalities. Since the return of

electoral democracy to Bolivia in 1982, no presidential candidate has come close to achieving an absolute majority (over 50%). This makes Morales' victory all the more remarkable.

It is also notable that Morales is the first indigenous president in South American history. MAS won a majority in the lower house, a near majority in the Senate, and three of nine governorships. There are, therefore, no institutional obstacles to blame if MAS fails to carry through the hopes of the exploited and oppressed popular classes and indigenous nations who voted it into office.

The electoral results in Bolivia were greeted with widespread euphoria across both the NGO (non-governmental organization) Left and large sections of the radical Left internationally. Important socialist intellectuals in other parts of Latin America, such as Atilio Borón in Argentina and Heinz Dieterich in Mexico, see anti-capitalist, revolutionary potential in Morales's victory.

People with a more sceptical view of the new Bolivian government, such as the long-time socialist researcher on Latin America James Petras or journalists Luís A. Gómez and Jean Friedsky of Narconews, are frequently dismissed as ultra-leftists, sectarians, dogmatists, etc.

Although it is too early to pronounce confidently on the character of the new Bolivian government, the recent history of the MAS and its relationship to the wave of popular insurrection that began in 2000 and peaked in October 2003 and May-June 2005 supports the view of the sceptics. The optimistic view is based on a superficial understanding of the Bolivian situation.

The MAS and Popular-Indigenous Struggle

Bolivia entered a revolutionary cycle of near-constant popular insurrection in 2000, starting with the "Water War" of 2000 in the city of Cochabamba and its surrounding countryside. That popular revolt against the privatization of water also signified popular condemnation of the entire period of neoliberalism (1985-2000), with its rampant privatization, growing inequity, and ongoing poverty.

The Water War was followed by three weeks of mobilization and road blockades by the Aymara peasantry in the altiplano (high plateau region) in September-October 2000. The heights of the revolutionary cycle, however, came during the October 2003 Gas War that forced neoliberal president Gonzalo (Goni) Sánchez de Lozada to flee the country, and in May-June 2005 when Goni's successor Carlos Mesa was forced to resign due to his refusal to break with the neoliberal economic model.

What do we know of the MAS during this period? The MAS grew out of the coca-

growing, indigenous peasant resistance in the Chapare region of the country. During the late 1980s and 1990s the coccaleros (coca growers) were the most important force on the indigenous-Left.

They combined the revolutionary Marxist traditions of ex-miners forced to move to the Chapare region due to the privatization of the tin mines with traditions of indigenous peasant resistance. Facing brutal repression under the US-led "War on Drugs," the coccaleros developed an anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal ideology directed primarily against the US.

For the first few years of its life, in the late 1990s, the MAS maintained organic ties with the coccaleros' peasant unions. Evo Morales, of mixed Aymara-Quechua descent, was among the most important union leaders and would emerge as the front man of the MAS.

The MAS initially focused on extra-parliamentary activism and base-level democracy, but especially since the 2002 elections has moved away from mass struggle and towards electoral politics.

In the 2002 elections, Evo Morales came second to Sánchez de Lozada in the presidential race by less than 2%. This unexpectedly good result, following on the heels of inflammatory pre-election threats against Bolivians by the US ambassador, gave the party a sense that they could win electorally. The MAS began to shift away from street mobilizations and towards courting the "middle class."

The leading sectors of the popular-indigenous mobilizations of September-October 2003 radicalized and brought into the streets hundreds of thousands of people despite MAS attempts to contain and soften their demands. The party's vision was to win the scheduled 2007 elections and they would not let a revolution get in their way! Evo Morales supported the constitutional exit from the crisis in 2003, allowing Goni's vice-president Carlos Mesa to come to power. Morales and the MAS were instrumental in supporting Mesa's neoliberal government well into 2005.

During May-June 2005 the MAS did participate in a way they hadn't in October 2003, leading a march from Caracollo to La Paz to demand a Constituent Assembly. Nonetheless, the party emphasized the need for a constitutional



Evo Morales leads march demanding gas nationalisation, 2003

exit to the revolutionary situation and the supremacy of electoral politics.

At a massive rally in the central plaza of La Paz during the height of the May-June insurrection, I listened to a whole series of leaders of popular organizations calling for the nationalization of natural gas. Meanwhile, huge sections of the crowd chanted "Nationalization! Nationalization!" Morales was the only speaker to call instead for 50% taxes for transnational gas corporations exploiting natural gas resources in Bolivia.

In the early stages of the electoral campaign, before Álvaro García Linera became the party's vice-presidential candidate, the MAS attempted to form a broad alliance with the Movement without Fear municipal party, led by neoliberal La Paz mayor Juan del Granado.

James Petras is absolutely correct when he writes of October and May-June: "Morales succeeded in taking the peoples' struggle out of the street and dismantling the nascent popular councils and channelling them into established bourgeois institutions. In both crises, Evo favored a neo-liberal replacement in opposition to the peoples' demands for a new popularly controlled national assembly."

The First Indigenous President

Much has been made of the fact that Evo Morales is the first indigenous president in South American history. To understand the significance of this, let's look at the very different but nonetheless instructive national liberation struggles of southern Africa.

In his book *The Next Liberation Struggle* (2005), John Saul points out that the first series of national liberation struggles in southern Africa, from 1960 to 1990, were fought against European colonial occupation and white minority rule, and for Black majority rule. Winning Black majority rule is to be celebrated, but Saul's book correctly calls for a new struggle in southern Africa, or "the next liberation struggle": a revolutionary transition to socialism, because Black

majority rule has not meant an end to capitalist exploitation in southern Africa.

Similarly, in Bolivia gains by indigenous peoples in Congress in 2002 and Morales' victory in December 2005 are important steps towards bringing an end to white-mestizo (mixed race) minority control of the state in a country where the majority of the population is indigenous people. This is a democratic gain.

At the same time, however, the MAS has taken steps against the "next liberation struggle" for socialist transformation, just as the African National Congress did in South Africa after the defeat of apartheid.

Across Latin America, one of the central paradoxes of the 1990s has been the emergence of neoliberal multiculturalism. In reaction to massive indigenous mobilizations, states began to react to contain the radical potential of these movements through official "recognition" of cultural diversity, indigenous languages, and so on. At the same time, while the cultures of indigenous peoples are being "recognized" by neoliberal states, the living conditions of indigenous peoples are deteriorating!

In a recent interview with an Uruguayan radio station Petras pointed out that for a president to say "I'm indigenous, or I come from humble origins" does not guarantee anything. We need only look at the deplorable examples of Víctor Hugo Cárdenas who served as Bolivia's vice-president from 1993-1997, President Toledo in Peru (who claims indigenous descent and wore a poncho in his first presidential electoral race) or Gutiérrez in Ecuador. All three were indigenous - or indigenous-backed - leaders who did not break with neoliberalism and did not forge the path toward the next liberation struggle.

The New Administration and Social Movements

Since their victory, the MAS leadership has been playing to their different bases of support. Morales quickly made visits to Cuba and Venezuela, suggesting a united fight against "neoliberalism and imperialism." At the same time, however, Morales and García Linera were quick to visit the most reactionary sections of the Bolivian capitalist class in Santa Cruz, in particular the far right Civic Committee of Santa Cruz. This meeting was to reassure these capitalists that their interests would be protected under the new administration.

Early visits were also made to Brazil and Spain. Not coincidentally, the Brazilian state-owned multinational Petrobras and the Spanish oil and gas giant Repsol are the biggest investors in Bolivia's natural gas industry. As the Spanish newspaper El

País reported recently, "Bolivian President-elect Evo Morales softened his tone... over plans to nationalize his country's gas industry as he met with Spanish officials and business leaders in Madrid."

The newspaper reports that according to Spanish Industry Minister José Montilla, Morales has adopted a "prudent" line with regard to the nationalization of natural gas resources. The minister stated bluntly: "There will be certain changes to the rules of the game... but I told him that companies need a stable and trustworthy environment in which to invest and I think he is conscious of that."

This corresponds with the fact that while occasionally using the word "nationalization," the MAS leadership has been nothing but ambiguous as to what they mean by nationalization.

Vice-president García Linera has famously denounced a transition to socialism in Bolivia as impossible for at least 50 to 100 years. Instead, he argues for "Andean-Amazonian capitalism," which through greater state intervention will supposedly be supportive of indigenous peoples. We should remember that the ANC's Black capitalism has been anything but good for South Africa's Black working class.

If the MAS radicalizes during its first months in office, it will not be a consequence of the benevolent leadership of Morales or García Linera. If radicalization transpires, which is certainly not impossible, it will come from pressure from below, from the same sort of mass self-organization that we witnessed in Cochabamba in 2000, and throughout the country in October 2003 and May-June 2005.

The chances of success for mass struggle will probably be better in the first year of the MAS administration, before the Right has time to regroup and rebuild counterrevolutionary forces.

There are some signs of optimism in the social movements. Two popular meetings were held in El Alto in early December, just before the elections. The first was the Congress of the National Front for the Defence of Water and Basic Services and Life.

Neighbourhood councils from Oruro and Santa Cruz, FEJUVE-El Alto, and the La Coordinadora (the principal social movement organization in the Cochabamba Water War of 2000) held a rather successful meeting calling for a social-political front outside of the MAS to foster the self-organization of the masses on the Cochabamba model regardless of what party is in government. This movement may prove to have some capacity to mobilize against the MAS

government if it does not meet popular expectations.

Oscar Olivera of La Coordinadora recently told Green Left Weekly, "we are also conscious of the fact that it does not depend on the capacity of manoeuvring, nor does it depend on the political capacity of the government, whoever it might be, to take us to our objective.

It depends fundamentally on continuing to develop and better the capacity of unity, of organisation, of proposals and of mobilisations of the social movements in front of the next government. I believe that is fundamental, and I reiterate that the elections are simply a space for the accumulation of forces."

The second meeting was organized by the Bolivian Workers Central (COB), the Regional Workers Central of El Alto (COR-El Alto), and the central miners' union (FSTMB). While this meeting produced much fiery rhetoric, attendance was low.

The organizations that took part in these meetings seem to be remaining independent from the MAS government. Most recently, Olivera was apparently offered a place in government by García Linera. He has shown no interest. It is also unlikely that the mostly Aymara peasantry of the altiplano - a key force in October 2003 and May-June 2005 - will succumb to cooptation through petty handouts from the MAS. They are likely to play a key role in mobilizations that take on the MAS if the party does not fulfill basic expectations.

At the same time, the warnings of Luís Gómez and Jean Friedsky, writing just prior to the elections, need to be taken seriously: "The possibility of an Evo presidency makes many nervous, including us. Our fear is not that Evo's broad bases will revolt should he not satisfy expectations, but that they won't.

In recent years, Evo's primary constituency (the cocaleros) and the more radical sectors (the Aymara of El Alto and the surrounding highland provinces) have risen up simultaneously when their interests overlap. But what happens if one group's allegiance to an elected official overrides their desire to protest?"

We can only hope that mobilization from below continues, beginning the next liberation struggle.

► *Jeffery R. Webber is an editor of New Socialist and a PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Toronto. He was in Bolivia most recently from January-September, 2005.*

Iraq

The Case for Immediate Withdrawal

Gilbert Achcar

Gilbert Achcar spoke in New York City on November 3 at an event organized by the Campaign for Peace and Democracy entitled "The Case For Immediate Withdrawal: Wrestling with the Hard Questions". This interview was done the following day by Bill Weinberg of WW4 Report.

BW: In your comments last night, you started out by noting the irony that many critics of the war had anticipated precisely what is happening now, which is chaos and danger of civil war. And yet, the White House is using precisely this as a rationale for remaining in Iraq.

GA: Yes, this is really an irony of the history of this war. We - I mean, the opponents of the war-had warned that the invasion would produce a very dangerous situation in Iraq, a chaotic situation, and we kept stressing that, and we were faced by the supporters of the war explaining that it will be a cakewalk and that U.S. troops would be welcomed there with flowers and sweets.

And what happened on the ground was very sadly what we predicted-I mean very sadly for the Iraqi people, because it's absolutely tragic what the Iraqi people are suffering right now. And now that we ask for this occupation to stop, and to stop immediately, in light of the disaster has brought to that country, we are faced by the same people who were supporting the war, saying no, the troops must stay because otherwise, there will be chaos.

I don't think we should counter such an argument with a complete reversal of positions, saying exactly what those supporters of the war used to say. We can not now for instance, explain that if the occupation ends, Iraq will suddenly turn into a kind of paradise.

I think no one is in a position to make any prediction as to what might happen after the withdrawal of occupation troops from Iraq. But there is one fact which is absolutely certain, in my view indisputable: the situation has only been deteriorating in a very, very dangerous and tragic manner, ever since the occupation began.

In light of this fact, logic compels us to call for immediate withdrawal of occupation troops from Iraq-with the hope, in any case, that if the Iraqis are faced with this prospect, they might find in that a powerful incentive to come to terms, to agree on some means of renewed co-existence, and for the reconstruction of their state. And there are grounds to believe that this is one of the possibilities.

If we consider the fact that the main constituency for what is called the insurgency in Iraq is the Arab Sunni areas of the country, and since we know quite well that Arab Sunnis in Iraq are a



minority of the population and the Arab Shi'ites are three times their number, and the Kurds are more or less equivalent to the Arab Sunnis in number, but much more powerful in organized military force, I think that, except for a tiny minority of lunatics, the wide majority of the Arab Sunnis will understand that it will be in their interest to negotiate and reach a deal on some compromise.

Otherwise, the option of civil war would be disastrous for the Arab Sunnis because they would be caught between the might and military force of the Kurds on the one hand and the overwhelming majority of Shi'ites on the other side, and that would be a very, very precarious and dangerous situation.

BW: And yet that does not seem to be having a restraining effect on them now.

GA: Precisely. It has no restraining effect on them now. The very presence of the occupation troops prevents this-any direct clash between the three major components of the Iraqi population. And on the other hand, the very presence of the occupation troops gives a real legitimacy to at least the anti-occupation actions waged by the various armed groups in Iraq. And of course the Arab Sunni population considers that this armed struggle is legitimate-though there is a distinction to be made here between actions against occupation troops and actions of a sectarian character.

The mass killings of Shi'ites, the murder of civilians, are not at all welcomed even

by the Arab Sunni population in its large majority. I mean, most people consider that to be criminal acts and even the Association of Muslim Scholars always draws a distinction between what they call "honorable resistance," which is just striking at occupation troops, and what they themselves call "terrorism," which is all these actions aimed at civilians or fellow Iraqis...

BW: The Association of Muslim Scholars-this is an Iraqi body?

GA: The Association of Muslim Scholars is the most influential group among the Arab Sunnis in Iraq. The fact that you didn't have a powerful organized opposition to Saddam rooted among Arab Sunnis resulted in the fact that there is no major leadership for the Sunnis as you have for the Shi'ites and the Kurds. But nevertheless, you have a certain number of groups, and it is generally considered that the Association of Muslim Scholars is the most influential among these groups.

And even the Association of Muslim Scholars says that once a withdrawal deadline is fixed, all armed activities should stop. So, there is real grounds to believe that if occupation forces leave Iraq, the incentive for some formula of coexistence between the various components for the population of Iraq will be quite strong.

BW: And yet it seems that it's largely the same groups which are carrying out the resistance activities against the U.S. troops and the attacks on civilians...

GA: Well, no, not all of them. No. The groups waging armed operations in Iraq are many and diverse. At the beginning of the occupation, it was estimated that a high proportion of the attacks on occupation troops were done by local groups of people. You know, Iraq is a country where the population is generally armed, you have tribal traditions and all that...

BW: And that was permitted under Saddam?

GA: Even under Saddam, yes. I mean, no one would dare use their weapon against the regime, because the regime was so brutal and such a superior organized force, that would have been suicide. But the regime didn't try to disarm the populace of those light, personal weapons that people have had traditionally in this part of the world.

BW: Are we talking about hunting rifles here or machine guns?

GA: Even machine guns. You know, in the Middle East, it's not uncommon to find Kalashnikovs in peoples' homes. It's linked to an ancestral tradition of bearing arms and it's difficult for any government to try to suppress that completely. And with the disintegration of the regime when the invasion started, people got hold of all kinds of weapons. So that's why it's estimated that at the beginning, a lot of the actions are done by local people, even individuals sometimes, or small cell-groups of people revolted because of their direct experience of the occupation.

On the other hand, you already one organized network active, which was left by the previous regime. We know that this time Saddam Hussein's regime, in light of their experience in '91, understood that they wouldn't be able to resist the military power of the United States, and therefore they prepared a network to carry on actions against the occupation troops after the invasion.

They put aside a lot of weapons, explosives, money. So you had a combination of actions coming from an organized network, and local groups or more or less spontaneous actions. And, with time, you had the formation of several organized networks.

So now there are a certain number of groups which are considered to be the major organized networks of the armed struggle in Iraq. You still have the Ba'athists-but the Ba'athists never sign their armed actions under their label, so you never hear of a communique from the Ba'athists saying "our people did this, or attacked this." There are no military communiqués, just political communiqués from the Ba'athists-and it's believed they act behind facades, with Islamic names....

BW: Why? I've always suspected that the role of the Ba'athists is somewhat overestimated in the resistance.

GA: Why would they do so? Because they know that it wouldn't be very popular to use their own identity as a label for armed actions against the occupation. That's a general guess why they would do so. [Chuckles]

BW: Yet you're convinced there is a large Ba'athist element to the resistance.

GA: I think this is indisputable. Absolutely indisputable. What is unclear is what percentage of that is people who are loyal to Saddam Hussein, and what proportion is made of more or less break-away factions, as is sometimes maintained... But the Ba'ath's organized network is definitely playing an important role. And then you have also the al-Qaeda, or the Zarqawi group, which has been dubbed "al-Qaeda in Iraq" by bin Laden...

BW: They seem to have embraced the name themselves...

GA: Yes, but I don't see why it would be astonishing that al-Qaeda recognizes Zarqawi as one of their own. After all, they share the same ideology, obviously. Even though Zarqawi is even more fanatical, if one could be, than even bin Laden, than classical Bin Ladenists are.

And then you have four or five other major groups, with Islamic names...

BW: What are those groups, and what information do we have about them?

GA: Well, in general, you have either three political components of the armed groups. You have Islamic fundamentalists, ranging from the extreme, like Zarqawi, to the relatively more moderate. You have the nationalist but non-Ba'athist element, with no allegiance to the Ba'ath party as such, and its ideology and leadership; and you have the Ba'athist.

And that's basically what you've got. Unfortunately, you have no progressive force whatsoever among those groups, and that's a result of the historical defeat of all progressive and left-wing currents in the Middle East, which has led to a vacuum filled by the fundamentalist forces. And that's part of the tragedy of that part of the world.

Now, to get back to your starting point. Yes, it's difficult to make a distinction between groups waging only anti-occupation actions and groups which waging only anti-Shiite actions.

The same groups who are attacking Shiites would also, to claim some legitimacy, at least proclaim some actions against the occupation. You have a combination of two different kind of wars: one which we might call a liberation war against the occupier, and another which is a civil war-actually, a low-intensity civil war, but nevertheless, a civil war.

One can consider that the actions against an occupation are legitimate actions, a part of the right of every people to resist occupation and to fight for liberation. But of course, actions against another component of the same population are criminal actions.

But some of the groups waging the armed struggle have a discourse which equates the U.S. occupation and what they call "Iranian occupation," and they look at the Shi'ites as agents of Iran, and they see themselves as continuing the war waged by Saddam Hussein against Iran. But this war is completely reactionary. I mean, it has absolutely no liberation dimension to it, contrary to what one might say about the other kind of war against the occupation...

There's no important group as such which could be described non-Islamic, non-fundamentalist, non-Ba'athist, nationalist. What I would call the nationalist component of the resistance to the occupation, would be these local, spontaneous actions by people completely fed up with the occupation and the way the U.S. troops behave with the people, and the way they search houses and all that. So this leads to people taking arms and attacking U.S. troops without adhering to any ideology like Islamic fundamentalism or Ba'athism. So these would be, you know, nationalist patriots or whatever the label you want to use...

BW: But without any real organizational capacity...

GA: There's no major network representing that element-unfortunately, I would say, because that would be something better than the two other components: Ba'athists on the one hand, the Islamic fundamentalists on the other. The tragedy is that the organized networks, with the real means, are of the two other kinds.

BW: The major grouping that you hear about is always the so-called "al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia." But what about the other groupings. They all have names like the Army of Mohammed and so on... Do we know anything about them, apart from their names?

GA: It's difficult. But you can find, for instance, Shi'ite allegations that this or that organization is actually Ba'athist. But on important indication was the constitutional referendum of October 15. There was a major shift in the attitude of the Arab Sunnis in the referendum, compared with the January '05 election, which was almost totally boycotted by the Arab Sunnis. This time, you had a real significant participation of Arab Sunni areas-I mean, of course, with a no vote, but it was still participation in the electoral process. And on the day of the

referendum, there were very few violent actions.

The Iraqi government and Washington claimed that it was because of their successful measures, but this is bullshit, the reality is that some of the main armed networks proclaimed a cease-fire for that day because they called for participation in the election. That was something new. If you take the labels most used, four out of the five major groupings called for participation with no vote in the referendum.

And I think this led all other groups-including Zarqawi, who is vehemently opposed to any participation in any kind of election, whether under occupation or not, as a more general position against the very principle of such elections, out of some very fanatical kind of you know-even this group did not act during that day, for fear of clashing with the other groups. Even the Ba'athists and Zarqawi, who called for a boycott of the elections, did not act that day...

BW: The Ba'ath party - publicly, as identified as such - called for a boycott in some kind of political communique?

GA: Sure, sure. They have their statements on their website...

BW: And do they still claim loyalty to Saddam?

GA: Oh sure. When you go to their website, Saddam Hussein is there... [chuckling]

BW: And their website is maintained from where?

GA: I cannot tell you. But there's more than one website linked to the Ba'athists. You even have an official website of the Ba'ath party where you find all their communiqués. And yes, you have a communique several weeks before the referendum very vigorously condemning that and condemning any participation.

And they publish communiqués attacking other Arab Sunni groups who are getting into the political process which they denounce as traitors. Because for the Ba'athists, the very idea of these elections is something going against their own ambition of recovering power. Although I think it's a very wild dream, actually.

BW: Restoration of Saddam?

GA: Well restoration of Saddam if he's still alive, or restoration of Ba'ath power. But I say, it's a wild dream, because the force has been basically broken. They have the power of an underground network, but if they had to have an open confrontation in some kind of full-fledged civil war, they would be no match in terms of numbers or military capabilities compared with the Kurds and the Shi'ites, who would be of course backed by Iran.

And then you have a fifth group which took no position, which is called Ansar Sunna-the Partisans of the Sunni. This group has claimed several anti-Shi'ite operations. So this is a kind of hardline, fundamentalist type of group-or perhaps some kind of a facade of Ba'athis, it's difficult to tell... But you see there are differences among the armed groups, and that's why I say if the occupation ends in Iraq, one can very reasonably hope for the situation to...

BW: ...stabilize somewhat.

GA: Well, stabilize would be quite optimistic. But at least move toward a political solution, and a gradual isolation of those elements who would like to continue fighting the Shi'ites.

THE CIVIL WAR SCENARIO

BW: But I think a lot of people fear precisely the opposite. That a U.S. withdrawal would only precipitate a full-fledged civil war, and that the country would basically be divided into three statelets: some sort of Shi'ite Iranian protectorate in the South, and the Kurdish state in the north, and a Sunni Taliban-type regime in the center which would be extremely oppressive. And this would also likely spark foreign intervention-Turkey would intervene if the Kurds get an effective independent state...

GA: Well, as I just said, I think that the very presence of the occupation fuels that kind of scenario, and not the reverse. If the presence of the occupation prevents full-fledged civil war, it facilitates the action of armed groups among the Arab Sunnis because they can fight the occupation, and they can strike at the Shi'ites without facing the Shi'ites directly.

They are just, you know stealthy attacks-suicide bombers and things like that. But the story would be completely different if you didn't have occupation troops. Then also the risk of a massive retaliation by the Shia would be great. And if the situation were to move toward the civil war-the Arab Sunnis would be completely crazy to believe they would be able to be victorious in a confrontation with the Shi'ites and the Kurds.

So when we speak of the break-up of the country-well, the presence of the occupation is not preventing that at all. On the contrary, actually. It is the divide-and-rule policies applied by Washington's representatives in Iraq, since the very start of the occupation, which have fostered to a great extent the tensions among the various components of the Iraqi population. And all the efforts by Khalilzad, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, could not convince the Shi'ites to withdraw their demand for inclusion in the draft constitution of a provision allowing for any provinces of Iraq wishing to do so

by majority vote to unite as an autonomous region...

BW: The U.S. was opposed to this measure?

GA: Well, the U.S. could not come openly against that. But it's clear from all the attempts by Khalilzad to negotiate a compromise between Arab Sunnis and Shias and Kurds that Washington was not very happy about this prospect. And why so? Because for Washington, any kind of autonomous Shi'ite region in the South, where you have especially most of the resources of Iraq, could only be a platform for Iranian influence. And that would be considered as a threat to U.S. interests in the whole area. That's why I don't think that Washington is happy with this specific clause. But Washington is not in a position to prevent the Shi'ites from moving forward in that direction, and now you have that in the constitution.

And suppose the Shi'ites decide to apply this aspect of the constitution which now has been adopted, and proclaim an autonomous region. Do you think that Washington troops will prevent them from doing that? That's quite impossible. And therefore, to say that U.S. troops are preventing the break-up of the country, is not convincing. What is preventing the break-up of the country is the fact that they realize it would be very costly for everybody. That it wouldn't be in their interest, the common interest of the Iraqi people.

The Kurdish people are very much entitled to an independent state if they wished so. Because they are a different nation, they should have, as any nation, the right to self-determination-and not only in the Iraqi part of Kurdistan, but also in the Turkish part of Kurdistan the Iranian part, the Syrian part. And the Kurds had a referendum in Kurdistan, with almost a unanimous vote in favor of independence, and the Kurdish leaderships know that their constituency wants independence very badly, and are not happy at all that the constitution did not provide for the right of the Kurds to self-determination, including forming a separate state, if they wished so.

Despite all that, they keep telling the constituency-you have to be patient, the day will come when Kurdistan will become independent, officially independent (because, factually speaking, Kurdistan has been functioning as a more or less independent state since 1991). They keep saying, you have to be patient because now the conditions are not right for any proclamation of independence, if we did so, we would face terribly difficult conditions, we have the Turkish threat. Turkey has repeatedly, as you just said, threatened to intervene if that would happen. They would have more to lose

from proclaiming the independence right now than whatever they could win. So that's what prevents the Kurds from breaking away officially as a state.

And as for the Shia and the Sunnis-the picture that the people can get sometimes from the media is distorted. I mean, you don't have a country where you have purely Shi'ite areas. The Kurds are a different situation-you have three provinces which are Kurdistan-geographically, culturally. But you don't have a Shi'ite country and a Sunni country.

You have provinces with a Sunni majority, provinces with Shi'ite majority, even sometime large majorities-but you have also some mixed provinces, you even have tribes that are mixed religiously; you have a lot of intermingling between communities.... And Baghdad is a city where you have all of them represented. And the Shi'ites know that if they were to secede in some formal manner, that would not only mean a costly civil war-bloody for everybody, including them-but they would be faced with hostility from the Arab environment.

The Shi'ite leadership, in my view, are completely aware that it is not all in their interest to split up the country and then face this prospect of ethnic cleansing, to use the term used since Bosnia, a very costly civil war, and then facing a hostile Arab environment, and being dependent on Iranian friendship. The Arab Shi'ites have their own pride and consider, they don't like to be dependent on Iran, contrary to what is pretended by some people.

BW: There is at least one faction of the Shi'ites which is very pro-Iran, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution...

GA: Well, the Supreme Council has been linked closely to Iran, but they are not-you know, between quotation marks-"agents" of Iran. They don't have the type of relation you used to have between Communist parties and the Soviet Union. That's not how they look at Iran-not at all. As I said, they have their pride. I mean, Arab Shiites take pride in belonging to the nation that produced the prophet of Islam and produced Ali, the main reference of the Shi'ites.

I don't claim to be an oracle, and anyone claiming to know what will happen, is just, you know, a worthless pretension. But on the basis of a rational evaluation of what exists, one might reasonably think that the incentive for a renewed formula for building a common state would be very strong.

But as I said, one thing is clear: it's not the presence of U.S. troops which is preventing the deterioration of the situation. General Casey, he himself said the presence of the occupation fuels the

insurgency, that was in hearings with the Senate.

THE NEO-CON AGENDA

BW: And then there's also the sort of conspiracy theory that there's this maximalist neo-con agenda to intentionally divide Iraq...

GA: Well, that was Plan B for the neo-cons. Plan B for the neo-cons, and also for the friends of Sharon's government in Israel, who wouldn't be sad to see a break-up of Iraq and even a civil war, among the various Iraqi factions, in the same way that Washington was quite happy to see Iran and Iraq fighting each other for eight years.

We know what role Washington played in the Iran-Iraq war: every time you had one side weaker, Washington would give some kind of support to this weaker side, so that it would sustain the war. And Kissinger at that time wrote a frank article saying that our interest is that they destroy each other, for as long as possible. So the same kind of logic is applied to Iraq by the Sharon government and its U.S. friends among the neo-cons.

And the neo-cons have been influential in shaping the invasion and the post-invasion aftermath of the invasion-but just for the first seven months. After which it proved such a disaster, and all the blueprints that they had prepared proved so far from the reality on the ground, that the Bush administration had to change course in Iraq. You have had disputes on the scenario between the State Department and the CIA on the one hand and the Pentagon on the other hand...

BW: With the Pentagon taking more of an ambitious neo-con position?

GA: Sure. The removal of Paul Wolfowitz is an indication of a change...

BW: So you do think there's been a retreat within the Pentagon, from this kind of position?

GA: Oh, I think the signs for that are quite many. And on the ground, that was represented by the clash between Bremer and Chalabi, who used to be Washington's Iraqi stooge when the neo cons were influencing most directly the policy for Iraq. Another sign is the replacement of Chalabi with Allawi; Allawi was a CIA buddy and represented the other scenario-which the state department and CIA before the invasion were supporting and which was discarded.

And then when the neo-con scenario proved a failure, they went back to the Allawi scenario-although it was in a sense too late, because this scenario demanded the collaboration of a substantial fraction of the Ba'athist apparatus, whereas the blueprint of the neo-cons and Chalabi was for total dismantlement of the old state apparatus, and building from scratch a

new state apparatus-a small army, neutral state, some kind of Arab Switzerland, friendly to Israel. And this was completely wild...

BW: That was the neo-cons' Plan A, and then their Plan B was actually to divide Iraq...?

GA: Yeah, Plan B would be the splitting of Iraq. But this Plan B does not conform to the fundamental interests of U.S. imperial hegemony. It would be absolutely risky, even disastrous for U.S. interests in the area. Why so? Because on the one hand, the Shia, as an independent entity, would much more likely be allied to Iran than to Washington; and secondly, that would destabilize the whole area, and be an incentive for the secession of the Shia province in Saudi Arabia (or the Saudi kingdom-I don't like to say "Saudi Arabia"; the kingdom is Saudi, it is the name of a dynasty, not a country). And it so happens that they are also the areas of the Saudi kingdom where the oil reserves are concentrated. So, this is a nightmarish scenario for, for Washington.

BW: There's also the question of Turkish intervention.

GA: Of course. And all that would also lead to terrible consequences in the level of the oil market. So although the neo-cons might consider that partition of Iraq is a good thing, the fundamental interests of Washington, on which you have a bipartisan consensus in the U.S. ruling class, would definitely consider that to be a disaster.

THE QUESTION OF SOLIDARITY

BW: A real important question for me is who are the forces in Iraq that we can loan some solidarity to? Do you see any forces on the horizon which really present a progressive, secular alternative?

GA: What is tragic in the whole area actually, left wing, progressive, emancipatory forces are quite marginal, and as a product of historical defeat-or even bankruptcy because of very wrong policies in some cases-the overwhelming forces in the mass movement have been of a very different nature, mainly Islamic fundamentalist forces.

Iraq is a country where you have had historically a very powerful communist party with a tradition of building workers' movements and all that, and one would have hoped that this would at least lead to an survival of a progressive current-but the problem is that the communist party joined the governing council set up by Bremer and ruined its credibility as an anti-imperialist force by doing so. Although they had opposed the war officially before it took place. And as a consequence that they had a very poor result in the elections in January. They

waged a dynamic electoral campaign, but they got ridiculous results, less than 1% of the vote. And this is a party that at one point in the late '50s could mobilize 1 million people in the streets. I mean, this was a total disaster.

BW: And you attribute this to what, this decline?

GA: I attribute it to the sheer opportunism of the leadership of this party. And this same opportunism has now led them to join Allawi's slate; now they're part of the slate of Washington's stooge-man in the coming elections in December.

BW: And what had been their posture towards Saddam when he was in power?

GA: Well, they, at the beginning, when the Ba'athist coup d'état occurred in '68, they tried to collaborate with the Ba'athists-although the Ba'athists were repressing very violently a splinter group from the Communist Party, which was actually one of the reasons why this coup was organized: to liquidate this Guevarist guerilla struggle in southern Iraq, which was started by a guerilla-ist Iraqi who came back from Britain and went to start some kind of foco war...

BW: Indeed? Against who, exactly?

GA: Well, against the Iraqi bourgeois state.

BW: But there had been some sort of left-nationalist regime in power before the Ba'athist coup, no?

GA: Yes, but we were at times of radicalization in the Arab world, and even Nasserism was considered as being bourgeois. I mean, Nasser was the man who led Egypt between '54 and his death in 1970, who was a champion of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism-and even that was considered at this time of the radicalization as being bourgeois and had to be overthrown. So these were different times.

BW: Who was the leader of this Guevarist faction?

GA: Khaled Ahmed Zaki. A well-known figure, but he was killed even before the Ba'athists took over. He made the same calculation that Guevara made in Bolivia in '67. He thought that he could draw a segment of the Communist Party, knowing that it had a real network and apparatus in the country, to radicalize and support his armed struggle, and that would join with the Kurdish liberation struggle, and this combination could lead to a revolutionary seizure of power in Baghdad.

That's the calculation he was making at the time. And you had a split in the Communist Party; you had a left-wing faction which hooked up with the guerilla. But the Ba'athist coup d'état crushed this wing of the Communist Party, and so the other wing, the majority wing of the Communist Party-the pro-Moscow wing-

tried to collaborate with the Ba'athists, and even entered their government for a while in the early '70's. This was not only opportunist but, I would say, criminal-how can you join with such a criminal, repressive government, if you claim to be the representative of the working class? But it was even stupid, very short-sighted-because anyone would know that at some point the Ba'athists would get rid of them. Especially when Saddam Hussein concentrated power into his hands.

BW: So what did happen to the Communist Party when Saddam concentrated power?

GA: They were crushed severely, in their turn.

BW: That would have been in the 80's?

GA: The late 70's. Along with any kind of political entity independent from the Ba'athists. Saddam Hussein's brand of Ba'athism was quite totalitarian in the full sense of this term...

BW: And yet, the Communist Party survived as a party.

GA: Well, it survived as a party in exile. Don't forget that you had four million Iraqis in exile under Saddam Hussein. That's a huge number. Remember, we're not dealing with a population of 200 million, like in the U.S. ... So, it's a huge proportion of the population who were forced into exile by this absolutely ruthless, bloody, totalitarian dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.

Not to mention the crazy wars he waged later on, against Iran. So the Communist Party survived with a very weakened underground network in the country. But mainly the network was kept alive in exile, and they went back after the fall of Saddam Hussein. And their attitude since then has ruined completely their credentials as a progressive force.

You have another left-wing organization, which is called the Worker Communist Party of Iraq, which originates in a Kurdish group, the Komale, which was present in both the Iranian and Iraqi parts of Kurdistan. They were mainly based in Kurdistan under the dictatorship, and after '91 when Kurdistan became an autonomous area, their main constituency was there.

They had some frictions and clashes with the mainstream Kurdish leaderships. And after the fall of Saddam Hussein, they moved to establish offices and activities in other parts of Iraq, mainly Baghdad, but their basic constituency is Kurdish. And they have a discourse which is very violently opposed to all Islam-not only Islamic fundamentalism. They have formulas that would be provocative for ordinary Muslim believer, I would say.

BW: Such as what?

GA: They denounce Islamic fundamentalist forces, but they don't take the necessary precaution of clearly making a distinction between these currents and the religion of Islam. And therefore they might appear as an anti-religious group. And they also reject nationalism-and this is not only a Kurdish rejection of Arab nationalism; actually they mean all nationalism, including Kurdish nationalism...

BW: They actually seem to draw leadership from an Iranian thinker, Hekmat Mansoor...

GA: Yeah, as I said, the group was originally in both parts of Kurdistan, and then when they created two communist parties, they decided that they were no longer Kurdish groups, but an Iranian and an Iraqi group, addressing the whole population of Iran and the whole population of Iraq.

This group, in my view, doesn't have much prospect of growth because of what I would consider to be a rather sectarian way of dealing with things. But they organized activities on the women issue, and a trade union movement. I mean, when you look at the landscape in Iraq, they are much more progressive than most of what you've got.

What I think would be worth support in Iraq is the Oil & Gas Workers Union, in Basra, in southern Iraq. Why so? First of all, it's much easier to organize support for a union than a very radical kind of group. And this is a genuine union, a genuinely autonomous union, not the offshoot of any party. And among them, you have all kinds of ideologically-minded people; some might be a supporter of the Shi'ite parties, some might be coming from a communist tradition or whatever.

And they are in a very sensitive position because the oil industry is the main resource of Iraq, and that's the main target of the occupation, of course. Therefore I think they deserve strong support in their fight, which is presently concentrated on the issue of privatization, opposing the privatization plans or designs concerning the oil industry...

BW: What are the roots of this union? Did it exist under Saddam? Or has it come into existence since the fall of Saddam?

GA: No, it came into existence after... Whatever you had in Iraq as an autonomous workers' movement had been crushed in the most bloody way by the Ba'ath... I mean, even before Saddam took over completely as the leader. Any time you had an attempt at a strike or anything like that-you would have Ba'athist thugs coming on with machine guns and mowing down the workers...

BW: As I understand it, there are three trade union movements in Iraq now: There's the oil workers in Basra, and

there's the entity which seems to be linked to the Worker Communist Party, which is the Federation of Worker Councils and Trade Unions. And then there's a third, the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions, which is-at least according to the Worker Communist Party-collaborationist, and dealing with the regime.

GA: This third one is led by the Iraqi Communist Party, and you even have some people from Allawi's group in its leadership, although the real organizers are communist. Well, I think this is a real union. It doesn't have to be judged on the political positions of the party leading it. It has to be judged on what it does for the workers' cause. I would say that one should support all struggles wherever they occur, and whoever leads them, if they are just struggles... One hopes, at least, that this country will reach a situation where you can have real social struggles instead of the kind of civil war that looms on the horizon.

THE IMPERATIVE FOR MOVEMENT-BUILDING

BW: Any closing words? Particularly in terms of the way forward for anti-war forces in the United States?

GA: One should be aware of the very crucial importance of building a strong anti-war movement within the United States. The United States government is going to be faced with an increasingly difficult situation in Iraq. My prognosis for next year is that it will be very tough for Washington. The Shi'ite alliance is renewing its demand of a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops—a central demand which was put aside after they had to cut a deal with the Kurdish alliance in order to form a government.

And that compromise was opposed vehemently by the partisans of al-Sadr, who are now part of the alliance, and even in the government. They petitioned in the national assembly, and collected a very significant number of signatures of MP's—over 120—demanding the government place a timetable for the withdrawal of occupation troops... And I think the Sadrist can be expected to be still more active than what they have been until now, on this issue... You remember on April 9 of this year, there was a huge demonstration in Baghdad against the occupation, where they burned puppets representing George Bush, Tony Blair...and Saddam Hussein.

BW: This was the al-Sadr people?

GA: Yes.

BW: But they also have representatives in the Parliament?

GA: In the Parliament and even in the government. Yes, sure. And they will push

strongly for a withdrawal within in the Shi'ite alliance.

BW: And is the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution also in this alliance?

GA: The Supreme Council is the major force in the alliance. The alliance is basically the Supreme Council, the Sadrist, and other groups like the Dawa Party. But the two major forces are the Supreme Council...

BW: And Sadr.

GA: And Sadr. And they both have their own militias.

BW: They were opposed. They made some kind of reconciliation?

GA: I mean, they are rivals. But at the same time, they can consider that it's in their interest not to split their constituency and try to find some kind of agreement. Because actually they have more in common than what separates them. Both are Islamic fundamentalist, both are Shi'ite organizations.

One is more radical than the other in its attitude toward the occupation, but the Supreme Council views the U.S. presence in a tactical way, believing, as Iran does also, that they are making use of the U.S.—they made use of the U.S., to topple Saddam Hussein, their arch-enemy, and they are now taking advantage of the presence of U.S. troops to build up their forces, to build an Iraqi state under their control, until they reach time when they will ask the occupation to leave the country...

Washington will be very strongly backing Allawi; the Kurds don't need backing in the election because their constituency will vote for them anyhow. But Washington wishes that Allawi this time—contrary to his defeat in January, when he only had 14% of the vote—will be able to lead a more significant faction in the Parliament, powerful enough to be able to exert some kind of veto power, with the Kurds. So we'll see what the December election brings—one never knows in Iraq. But it's very likely that we are heading towards even tougher times for Washington in Iraq than what we've seen until now. And with the kind of administration we've got in Washington, the worst is possible; facing adversity, they might react in a very violent, vicious manner...

BW: You mean the White House?

GA: Yeah, absolutely. We see how they have increased regional tension, they have built up the threats against Iran, against the Hezbollah in Lebanon, against the Syrian regime. And they know perfectly that the Shi'ite alliance in Iraq is led by forces who have in common with Iran not only Shi'ism, but also, in the final

analysis, hostility toward a continued U.S. presence in Iraq.

Washington went into this war at a huge cost for the United States—whether in human lives or economically, the cost has been huge, absolutely huge. To withdraw from Iraq and lose everything would be a terrible defeat of strategic proportions, for the United States. So, this administration could very well be tempted, faced with adversity, to react very wildly...

BW: Meaning what?

GA: I mean, everything is possible. Military action against Iran. Turning their weapons also against the Shi'ites, if the Shi'ites radicalize against the occupation. And therefore you could have a much greater bloodbath in Iraq than what we have seen until now, which is already something.

And this is where the U.S. anti-war movement comes into the picture. I can refer you to the example of Vietnam. When Washington was faced with great difficulty in coping with Vietnamese resistance to the occupation, there was a temptation at some point to use nuclear arms. And a study was commissioned from the CIA about what it would entail. And the main argument that was published recently in the archives, was that the use of nuclear arms would not be accepted by the U.S. population.

So the anti-war movement in the United States, the anti-war feeling that was building up at that time, were instrumental in preventing the worst in Vietnam—the use of nuclear arms, or those threats by Nixon to inundate North Vietnam at one point.

BW: Inundate?

GA: Yeah, by destroying dams. So, if we want to avoid seeing this administration trying to remain in control of Iraq by resorting to disastrous type of measures, it is definitely crucial that there is a strong, powerful anti-war movement in this country. And already it is very much encouraging to see the level of the polls, the radical shift in public opinion in the United States, but the shift in the polls is not enough. You need to translate that into a powerful, grassroots, autonomous movement, and maintain the pressure very strongly.

Transcription by Melissa Jameson

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India

Slum dwellers organise against demolitions

Maya Valecha

The recent spate of demolitions has brought slum dwellers together and an umbrella organization “Jan Aandolan” (People’s Movement) has been formed. In its first state wide protest program, rallies and demonstrations were held on 21st December demanding Housing as the Fundamental Right, implementation of the government’s own policy and an immediate stop to demolitions.

India, with its 7% GDP growth rate last year and a target of 8% for this year, occupied the top position in a global survey of business confidence by Grant Thornton International, pushing behind it not only the G8 giants but also its nearest rival China. In order to sustain this position, providing infrastructure to local and foreign investors is at the top of the Indian Government’s priority list. Land acquisition on a large scale by the government in both rural and urban areas and then passing it on to industrial house builders at a nominal price is at its historical peak.

The space is being cleared for building roads, flyovers, multiplexes, skyscrapers to house offices of IT and financial businesses, multinational corporation-owned shopping malls and housing colonies for these few neo-rich. The construction industry is growing at a rate of 5% and is at 12th position in the world. On the other hand, with a high level of automation in new investments and the upgrading of previous industries, large scale closure of small scale industries and cities becoming the hubs of IT and finance sectors, the requirement for manual, skilled and semi-skilled labourers is at its minimum in the cities. So the local governments in all the major and minor cities and even towns are on a slum demolition spree.

Four hundred thousand slum dwellers were rendered homeless within a period of two months just before heavy rainy season of this year in the city of Bombay alone. The exact figure for other cities is not available but demolition of slums is almost a routine affair in all the cities and towns - without giving any alternative accommodation, with 7 days notice and with extreme brutality during these operations.

Ahmedabad in Gujarat has had four or five slum demolitions a week during last one and a half months with each slum having from 100 to 700 dwellings. A temporary brake has been applied in Baroda because of the organized protests as will be described later. West Bengal where Stalinist parties have ruled for last 25 years is no exception, the only difference being the demolitions there are the fastest, using the most brutal force, giving no time to slum dwellers to organise any help.

India is signatory to the declarations by UN conference on ‘Human Shelter’ 1996, which only reconfirmed the previous commitments of 1976 conference. In this declaration it is said that enough shelter with all basic amenities is recognised as a human right and it will be the government’s responsibility to see that all the people get it. In the last 10 years, umpteen number of times promises have been made by state and central governments to build houses for the slum dwellers. Gujarat state government’s policy on paper is to provide houses to every slum dweller wherever they are located at present. But exactly contrary to all these on paper promises a large scale slum demolitions are undertaken daily to ‘beautify’ the cities.

The only problem with this whole dream of Indian ruling class to create ‘beautiful’ cities for themselves is that the people who are being uprooted do not want to take it all lying low. After all they had erected these dwellings by saving pennies from their meagre earnings. Most of them have lived there for last 25 to 30 years or even 50 to 60 years. To get their votes in elections they were given water connections metered electric connections and charged taxes and now bulldozers are coming and destroying everything pushing them back by 25-30 years!

The resistance to slum demolition has always existed on the part of different groups working independently, the authorities giving practically no response as the resistances remained low key because of slum dwellers’ difficulties in waging a continuous fight as most of them are daily wage earners, the inability of the organizations working with them to realize the need for unity or the hold of one or the other bourgeoisie political parties in slums fooling them giving false promises and so on.

The recent spate of demolitions has brought some of the organizations and slum dwellers together and an umbrella organization “Jan Aandolan” (People’s Movement) has been formed. It has started organizing slum people, forming committees for putting up a long term fight. Taking legal help of activist lawyers who are among the founder members of “Jan Aandolan”, quite a few court orders staying demolitions have been won at the same time. In its first state wide protest



program, rallies and demonstrations were held in two cities Ahmedabad, Baroda and four towns Vyara, Kalol, Himatnagar, Modasa of Gujarat State on 21st December demanding Housing as the Fundamental Right, implementation of the government’s own policy and an immediate stop to demolitions.

Rallies were held on the 8th day of local civic election results in Baroda and though no mention of slum dwellers’ wellbeing was present in the pre-election manifesto and in fact notices were being served for demolitions from the day one of the election results, by the 5th day of the rally the elected mayor started talking of settling them in situ! Municipal offices have started responding the demands for basic amenities in slums very quickly. In fact the Baroda Municipal commissioner promised to provide light and water wherever it is absent right at the time of receiving memorandum. The promises can be just to calm down the tempo of the movement and actual work is not done at that speed.

The picture is not as rosy at other places in Gujarat and demolitions continue. In Mumbai the schemes are being prepared by the government under the pressure of the agitations there. But it is very difficult to sustain these movements during time taken to prepare and implement the schemes. Some of the slums are saved intact with quick legal actions using lame laws of Indian constitution but where bulldozer has already destroyed it all, how long can they stay in the half or fully broken houses or tents to occupy the same place facing the extremes of weather vagaries that India has.

“Jan Aandolan” has been formed with a long term perspective of taking up all the other issues like unemployment, education, health, etc, of poor people and not demolition alone. Much more is required to be done and this is just a beginning.

► Maya Valecha is a member of Inquillabi Communist Sangathan, Indian Section of Fourth International.

Brazil

A bad internationalism - and unenlightened ideas about the Brazilian PT

Joaquim Soriano

The October issue of IV carries another contribution by Francois Sabado, analysing and seeking to give guidance to the Brazilian left. In his text, Sabado ignores basic principles of revolutionary internationalism - the relationship based on solidarity amongst revolutionaries of different nations and respect for the national party building processes in each country - and acts in a factional manner.

As a leader of the LCR (Revolutionary Communist League) in France and of the IV International, Sabado's stance breaks with precisely the fruitful relationship we have had between the LCR (representing the IV International) and DS, especially in the 1980s, when it was a relationship of mutual respect, based on the exchange of experiences and the attempt to build a pluralist internationalism. That was an attempt to correct the enormous mistakes made by the IV International at other times and in other parts of our region.

Although this is not the place to go into it at length, we should remember that a balance sheet of the IV International in Latin America is needed. A brief glance at the continent shows us a depressing picture. Almost all the political organisations that were members or sympathisers two decades ago have disappeared, have split and/or are badly weakened. And they have not been replaced with a new generation, even though we are in a much more favourable regional situation than in the 1990s. (The development of DS has been an exception.)

Sabado returns to the old vices of, on the pretext of internationalism, carrying out a factional struggle in another country (supporting a minority group that has broken with DS). In Brazil, his analysis and his proposals are far apart from the real social and political movement that is struggling to overcome neo-liberalism. While claiming to criticise the limits and contradictions of this movement, he breaks with it, and in its place he puts the typical schemas of the sects.

Socialist Democracy will continue on the path democratically decided by its members at its National Conferences and in its general activity. We accept and promote innumerable internationalist debates, so long as they are conducted in the framework of an internationalism without any guiding party (or section) and without factionalism.

...and its unenlightened ideas...

Readers who want to know the opinion of Socialist Democracy on the political situations of the last three years can go

directly to the texts we have published on our site www.democraciasocialista.org.br.

Here in this article we aim only to clarify a few of our points of view for Inprecor readers who have read the article in question and to correct some point of information, because much of what is in the Sabado text is incomplete or pure fiction.

1) Sabado adopts the position that the Lula government is the neo-liberal continuation of the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC). This position was debated and defeated in two consecutive conferences of Socialist Democracy, in November 2003 (VII Conference) and in April 2005 (Extraordinary Conference). The resolutions are on the site mentioned above.

Sabado knows this, but he takes no account of it for one simple reason: the aim of his intervention in the "debate" is not to collaborate with the positions developed by DS. His intervention is the continuation, by other means, of factional activities against our current.

2) Sabado refers to DS as the "governmental left" that is fighting for an "illusory re-orientation" of the PT. Here too he adopts the positions of a small circle of ex-members of DS, who took part in the Extraordinary Conference, whose positions were democratically defeated and who did not accept the resolutions approved by a large majority.

Indeed they did not take part in Raul Pont's campaign for national president of the PT. They supported the campaign of Plinio Arruda Sampaio. The members of this group are not "the left wing of DS". They left DS, in between the first and second rounds of the internal elections for PT president and joined the PSOL. As is well known - but it is worth repeating because it was also spelt out by our most recent conference - Socialist Democracy is an internal tendency of the Workers Party. And only its members, and its democratic structures, have the right to decide who is a member of DS.

3) Sabado's balance sheet of the PT's internal election (the PED, or Process of Direct Elections) is completely confused



Brazilian president Lula speaks at a conference on global poverty

and leaves out important information in an attempt to bolster the argument that the dispute within the PT is an illusion. He says that the majority sector retains 60% of the National Leadership. How so!? He doesn't know the PT and doesn't realise that the crisis in the PT has permitted an important internal reorganization. The old "majority camp" has 42% on this body and is deeply divided and less able to unite than in the recent past. Raul won 48% of the votes in the 2nd round.

Sabado gives no importance to the 315 thousand voters in the first round of the PT internal elections. Dear readers, do you know of any similar experience in any other part of the world? In the middle of its biggest crisis, without the financial resources to conduct a campaign in the internal elections as it did in 2001, faced with a tremendous campaign to demoralise the party from the right-wing press, 315 thousand people turned out to vote and gave a clear message that they want the PT to change direction.

And the second round of the internal election was an extraordinary phenomenon. Raul confirmed his leadership role in the PT and for broad social layers and the critical intelligentsia, with positions clearly in favour of changing the course of the PT and the government. It was a very intense public campaign. You can read the manifesto of intellectuals in support of Raul - a broad spread of allies on the left. You can read the support of Leonardo Boff, Marilena Chaui, Luis Fernando Verissimo, Paul Singer, Emir Sader, among many others. You can read the expressions of support from the MPs and senators of the party. Raul's candidacy united forces within the PT and in democratic sections of society, with a real chance of winning. We lost by very little!

And the little we did lack was to be found in the ranks of those who supported the candidacy of Plinio for president and who announced their departure from the PT on the eve of the second round, amongst them Plinio himself, the comrades of APS (Popular and Socialist Action), the MPs Orlando Fantazzini and João Alfredo (the

latter had also supported Raul in the first round). They left before the fight was over, to the benefit of the other candidate.

Sabado does not mention this fact. Why? Because in order to assert that the fight for the PT is illusory he cannot admit that Raul could have now been the National President of the PT. It should also be pointed out that there were some who left the PT and from the outside openly campaigned against a vote for Raul. They said it was the worst thing that could happen. A left president of the PT? How awful! One more pearl of sectarian lunacy!

3) Let us get some things straight. Sabado says that Joao Alfredo left DS with 2/3 of the members of the current in the state of Ceara. Where did he conjure up this information from? It is true that many people from the youth wing there left. But it should be said that all the trade union sector and all those with leadership positions in the Fortaleza municipality stayed in DS. To back up this (erroneous) information, he says that Ceará was the region with the second largest number of DS members. Again, where did he get this from? In any case, it is not part of the DS tradition to create a “competition” or “rankings” amongst our regions. Our concern now is to support the sector in Ceará that remains in DS, help it organise to face the challenges we have in the Fortaleza Mayor’s Office and in the political disputes in the state. That is the important thing.

Sabado states that the APS left the PT and joined the PSOL. It is true that the leadership of that current made a complete turn towards the PSOL. But many valuable militants of that current stayed in the PT, some have already joined DS and we are talking to many others to see if the same can happen in the near future.

Sabado says that the PSOL has two Senators. The information is out of date. The senator for Acre, Geraldo Mesquita, left the PSOL because of accusations about giving jobs to relatives (nepotism is a cancer in Brazilian politics) and the receipt of inappropriate financial benefits. When he mentions the creation of the PSOL he forgets the third founding deputy of this party: João Fontes, a conservative politician from Sergipe who was elected for the PT. With no public explanation, one fine day he left the PSOL and reappeared as a member of the PDT.

Sabado says that the federal deputy Orlando Fantazzini, ex-member of DS, went into the PSOL with “several hundred militants”. He failed to say that if such a contingent existed, they were not members of DS. The only DS members who left with him were those employed in his office and ten or so others!

Sabado tells us that Jorginho, a national leader of the CUT, went over to the PSOL. But he doesn’t tell us that among the leadership of his own union, the Shoe Workers Union in Franca (São Paulo), out of 30 members only two followed his lead, and that only nine members of the PT in that city left.

4) Sabado insists on his now aging thesis, that there should exist a convergence between militants of the PT left and those of the PSOL. This thesis only exists on the other side of the Atlantic. Over here, below the Equator, there is only sin. The main aim of the PSOL is the destruction of the PT and especially of the PT left. No collaboration is possible and it is not true that the PSOL has taken initiatives towards unity.

5) And, once again, the elections of 2006. For Sabado the dispute in 2006 will be between Lula and Heloisa Helena! With one magic wave, the author causes the entire Brazilian right to disappear! As a new specialist in Brazil, Sabado should read the country’s newspapers and magazines. He would have seen that there is a real right-wing campaign underway, led by the PSDB and the PFL and supported by the mass media, not only to defeat the Lula government, but also to wreck the PT as a legal party.

Although Sabado insists that the Lula government is neo-liberal, that it represents the interests of finance capital, etc, etc, the bankers and big businessmen, along with their political parties and their media, do not think the same. They are fighting for the return of the PSDB and the PFL to government. As the banker and president of the PFL, Jorge Bornhausen, put it, they (the right) are taking advantage of this crisis (of the PT), “to be rid of these scum for the next 30 years”. And by “these scum” he means not only the PT but also, as a target of the right, the MST and later other social movements too.

Only sectarianism and schematism prevent some groups from seeing that the central question of Brazilian politics today is a fight between left and right. This short-sightedness leads them to prioritise, from a mad leftist point of view, the attack on the PT and, above all, on the left of the PT. In the history of the workers and socialist movements there have been other moments in which irresponsible leftism have aided the strategy of the right. We in DS are working with determination to avoid the tragedies of the past repeating themselves in the present as farce.

An internationalism of the XXI Century

Lastly, we wish to take the opportunity of these brief remarks on a case of “bad internationalism”, plagued with the vices of the XX century, to recall what we really

need: a debate on an “internationalism for the XXI century”, which recovers the values and legacy of the four internationals, but which also makes a balance sheet of the mistakes. Which identifies the new political actors that exist today, as well as those that remain (after the general crisis of the left at the beginning of the last decade), but which above all is capable of promoting an open and plural internationalism, closely linked to the political struggles underway. Something which in our region is emerging as an ever sharper struggle between a pole of resistance to US imperialism (headed by the Venezuelan revolutionary process and in which the PT is a strategic ally), and the initiatives of the Bush administration for the region.

At the level of “global civil society”, DS members in the social movements have played a prominent part in building international spaces and links like the World Social Forum, the Assembly of Social Movements, the Continental Campaign against the FTAA, the Continental Social Alliance, the World Women’s March, the Southern Cone Co-ordination of Trade Union Confederations, the forums of workers in the social economy, among other initiatives that have been important advances in the struggle against neo-liberal globalisation, imperialism, war and capitalist patriarchy in our continent. The big impact of the recent actions at the People’s Summit (called by the Continental Social Alliance) in Mar del Plata, against Bush and the FTAA, was living proof that this strategic orientation is the right one. There is now an intense mobilisation across the continent for the January 2006 World Social Forum in Caracas, which should be a watershed for this process.

Nonetheless, at the level of political parties there are today no articulations that can be considered the “counterpart” to this process of civil society. We face the challenge of building international and regional spaces of the political and party left (or of reformulating existing ones like the São Paulo Forum) so that they can interact with those processes of global civil society. The revolutionary left, including the IVth International, must respond to this challenge. This is the task to which the members of DS are devoting themselves. (But beware! Repeating a worn-out and “bad internationalism” will separate irretrievably from this path all those who insist on the errors of the past.)

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Far Left

Defending the SSP model - a reply to the SWP

Alan Thornett

The new edition of the International Socialist Tendency's Discussion Bulletin (Bulletin No7 January 2006) carries the SWP Central Committee text on International Perspectives written for the SWP conference which was held on January 6-8. The short section of the text entitled "radical left" - which addresses the issue of building broad parties in Britain and across Europe - provides further insight into the way the SWP sees Respect and into the roots of some of the problems Respect is facing. It also contains an attack on the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) which cannot go unanswered.

In arguing that such parties must be built as loose coalitions rather than political parties the document argues it is "essential that the new parties are sufficiently open politically and organisationally to be habitable for refugees from social democracy?".

It is "a mistake to argue, as some of the revolutionary left do, that these formations should convert themselves into 'parties' based on the traditional model of far left organisation - with their own papers, unitary membership rather than the quasi-federal structure adopted by Respect etc".

Underlying this "is the idea that what the new parties are about is regrouping the existing far left rather than acting as a focus of a much larger political realignment that draws in new forces. This may help to explain why the main organisation to have adopted the far left model - the SSP - has undergone a deep crisis over the past year".

It is indeed essential that these new parties are sufficiently open politically and organisationally to be habitable for refugees from social democracy. It is crucial. But this is not resolved by insisting that such 'parties' should be built only as loose coalitions. Respect does not meet this criteria, yet it exists as a loose coalition. Respect is marked by precisely its failure to recruit such refugees in significant numbers.

In fact it is the 'party' form, which the SWP text rejects, rather than the loose coalition form of organisation which is best placed to provide the democratic space for such 'refugees' to feel comfortable. It is the party form which gives individuals a role to play in such an organisation and a chance of contributing to its political development. It is the "quasi-federal structure adopted by Respect" which makes them feel that they have very little influence once the organised groupings, particularly the SWP, decide to move.

In Respect he rights, procedures, reports, information, collectivity and

accountability which is provided by the party structure is not there in order that people can be pedantic, it is there to empower the individual member and make the organisation effective. In fact refugees from social democracy probably need such a structure more than most and would least appreciate the structureless of a loose coalition and its consequences.

This structurelessness was clearly one of the factors behind George Galloway's disastrous individual decision to go on the reality TV show Big Brother. (At Respect's recent conference he argued that we could reach more young people through programmes like BB than through party newspapers).

On regrouping the existing left. No one in Respect, as far as I am aware, holds the view that these new parties should be about regrouping the existing far left rather than acting as a focus for a much larger political realignment. On the contrary, the very point of these new parties is to attract forces beyond the ranks of the existing left.

It is very difficult, however, to act as a focus for new forces without regrouping a substantial proportion of the existing left - both the far-left and the left social democratic left - in the process.

The SWP text falsely counterposes these two key factors and devalues the need to regroup as much of the existing left as possible in the process of wider regroupment.

The text attacks the SSP for adopting what it calls the 'far left model'. That is "regrouping the existing far left rather than acting as a focus of a much larger political realignment that draws in new forces". But this is not the SSP model!

True the SSP has been able to embrace the bulk of the existing left in Scotland, that is one of its greatest achievements.

It was on the basis of that achievement, however, that it has been able to go one



Supporters of the SSP march at G8 summit

and recruit a membership well beyond the ranks of the existing Scottish left. This is reflected in the fact that it has three thousand members. To match that in England Respect would need to have five or six thousand members in London alone. And the SSP has more branches in Scotland than Respect has in England - showing that it is a more comprehensive national organisation.

The SSP may be experiencing problems, certainly they did not do well in the general election last year. But such parties will not simply go from victory to victory, there will be setbacks in the process and problems to be resolved. Respect will not be immune from such things either. But the SSP remains a serious force in Scotland - both in Parliament and outside it.

Finally the text claims that the SSP is the main organisation in Europe to adopt this false model: i.e. building itself as a party. Again nothing could be further from the truth. In fact for such organisations organising themselves as parties is normal. The Red Green Alliance in Denmark is organised as a party with all the normal trappings of a party - despite its name. The same goes for Left Bloc in Portugal. Rifondazione Comunista in Italy is a highly organised party with a daily paper.

The Left Party in Germany is new and not yet fully formed - but its planned development point towards a party structure. In fact the former PDS, its biggest component, is very much a party, and its other component the WASG, is moving in that direction.

▶ *Alan Thornett is a leading member of the ISG, British Section of the Fourth International, and sits on the Executive Committee of Respect.*

Sri Lanka

The tsunami - one year after

Niel Wijethilake

On December 26 2005, Sri Lankans commemorated the first anniversary of the disastrous Tsunami that brought fear and devastation that will remain and haunt their minds for many years to come.

Official reports said that that close on 60,000 human lives were lost and the damage caused to houses and property was immense. The whole of Sri Lanka without any distinction of class, creed or colour wept for many months after this catastrophe.

And it needs to be explained that the Tsunami not only washed away human lives and homes but also represented a thundering blow to the economy that may take several decades to rebuild.

The situation at present

Families who live in those ruined areas are facing a more deplorable situation today than the damage caused by Tsunami tidal waves. Many thousands have lost their beloved ones, relatives, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and children etc. Thousands and thousands of children have become orphans.

The virulent seawater that flooded many parts of the island created more widows and widowers amidst destitution. The displaced people's destiny has become desperate.

A few days after this catastrophe a few NGO's and various people came forward and helped them to fulfil their primary needs. Those organizations and people made thousands of temporary houses for the displaced persons.

But even though one year has passed, many displaced people are still living in those temporary dwellings. They were eagerly looking to see some kind of light far away in the horizon that could illumine their gloomy lives. The main problem is Sri Lankan government did not build even a single new house for those who were affected by the Tsunami.

Even though some kind of reconstruction work has been started along the sea belt of the southern province, it is regrettable to state that along the sea belts of the northern and eastern provinces people are overlooked and totally neglected.

This is despite the fact that the previous government of Mrs Kumaranathunga passed a resolution with blessing of all political parties except the Sinhala-chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) in the Parliament that established a post Tsunami operational management structure (PTOMS).

This was extinguished because of short-sighted communal segments who campaigned against PTOM and sought



legal remedies to make PTOMS null and void.

The reconstruction and rebuilding programmes and work of the government and some NGOs proceeding in a lethargic manner. The work is lagging. There is no proper and well-planned mechanism to accelerate and intensify the work.

Proper management of funds received from donors is essentially needed. These are the vital issues that we face today. It would not be difficult to eradicate weaknesses and overcome problems provided the mechanism is invigorated.

The role played by the NSSP

The NSSP, the Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International, faced the biggest dilemma in 2005 because of the events of December 26. Many party members sympathizers and trade union members were affected by tsunami. Usually the party celebrates its anniversary on December 30 every year. The Boxing Day disaster made this very difficult.

Nevertheless, the party front liners assembled immediately after this episode and took some important decisions; how as a proletarian party we could come to the assistance of distressed people in those areas most affected.

We studied the whole situation within a few hours and took steps to mobilize the entire membership to go house to house and person to person to collect the items that were most needed such as clothes, infant milk food, tinned food and other dry rations for those who were destitute.

We specifically decided that all collections would be distributed among the displaced people in Northern and Eastern provinces.

This appeal met with a resounding response and large collection followed. NSSP PB member Com N. Janagan very clearly announced to the donors that all collections would be distributed among Tamils in the Eastern province and said "I am very happy that members could collect a lot of essential items and on January 2nd, 3rd and 4th 2005 the NSSP delivered their contributions to Batticaloa and Kalkudda."

At the crucial hour of desperation and destitution prevailed in the country when the unmerciful and ruthless tsunami sea waves that invaded lands of Sri Lanka, the NSSP made an appeal to the Fourth International to help and extend monetary assistance. There was a prompt response by the activists of the International.

The NSSP and the New Left Front (NLF) wish to thank with gratitude the initiative taken by the International to launch campaigns in various sections in various European countries and USA, and Japan. As a result of those vigorous campaigns the comrades of those countries have made monetary contributions and other donations. We in return toured those ruined areas and helped people who were really living in misery.

There were a large number of families whose houses were wrecked completely by the tidal waves and some of them were given temporary dwelling such as tents and huts. Others were accommodated in refugee camps.

The government imposed a rule that homes could not be rebuilt within 100 metres of the sea. This made the situation more difficult because it was impossible to acquire land further inland. This caused an undue delay in rebuilding and restructuring the areas hit by the tidal waves.

The party considered the difficult situation seriously and made a decision to reconstruct partly-damaged houses to provide dwellings for people to restart their normal life again. Under this new program we could supply building materials for in areas such Ratmalana, Moraruwa, Panadura, Ambalangoda, Hikkaduwa, Galle, Hamnbanthota, Batticaloa and some places in Trincommalee.

We also gave them financial assistance to meet expenses. Comrade M.R (Bata shoe worker) in Panadura whose house was wrecked and ruined by the Tsunami tidal waves, made an appeal to the Fund for assistance and after thorough study of this case the NSSP Tsunami Fund took a decision to make a donation of Rs.200000 which was promptly done. Health worker Com. Jayasinghe was given USD 1000 (Rs.100000) for rebuilding her house.

Aftermath

While the NSSP TRF was involved in helping and assisting distressed people through various avenues, the comrades

took a strenuous attitude towards the negligence and shortcoming due to utter carelessness and inefficiency in handling relief work, rebuilding and reconstruction work.

We took the initiative with a parallel program against malpractices in the field of relief work by making a huge cry throughout the country through agitations, campaigns and organized public meetings that won resounding applause from all corners of the country. We managed to hold 15 meetings of this type that ended in success.

We also carried a campaign against the expulsion of fisher folk and downtrodden people who lived in lands close to the beach. The government was and is still trying to implement this program under the guise of 100-metre rule with a view to handing over those areas that are vacated to local and foreign hoteliers and tour agents to build tourist resorts for the rich.

Gratitude and thanks

While praising the prompt action of the International to our request, we thank all comrades and all sections of the international and sympathizing organizations and comrades throughout the world for their kind and generous contributions. Without that which we received, the NSSP could not have helped the distressed people on such a large scale. This is a tremendous achievement.

Our fight against irregularities is not over yet. We assure you that we will combat malpractices, misappropriation of funds in general and uproot social disorder in rehabilitation work until a new social outlook is established on the ruins of the Tsunami.

The Tsunami came vigorously and with terror it took away thousands of lives and millions worth of movable and immovable wealth and property. But it taught every one of us a lesson, which is to be united. It left many nostalgic memories behind us.

The global capitalists have not hesitated to take selfish advantage of this natural disaster to achieve their ends. The capitalist class in Sri Lanka has failed to serve the Tsunami victims alike without racist discrimination. The Sri Lankan government either failed to do relief work for the people living along sea belt of Northern and Eastern province - areas are predominantly occupied by Tamils and Muslims - or deliberately left them to their fate. Due to this miserable failure Tamils have no other option than strengthen their liberation struggle.

► *Niel Wijethilake is a leading member of the NSSP, Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International*

Palestine

First Reflections On The Electoral Victory Of Hamas

Gilbert Achcar

The sweeping electoral victory of Hamas is but one of the products of the intensive use made by the United States in the Muslim world, since the 1950's, of Islamic fundamentalism as an ideological weapon against both progressive nationalism and communism.

This was done in close collaboration with the Saudi kingdom — a de facto U.S. protectorate almost from its foundation in 1932. The promotion of the most reactionary interpretation of the Islamic religion, exploiting deeply-rooted popular religious beliefs, led to this ideology filling the vacuum left by the exhaustion by the 1970's of the two ideological currents it served to fight.

The road was thus paved in the entire Muslim world for the transformation of Islamic fundamentalism into the dominant expression of mass national and social resentment, to the great dismay of the U.S. and its Saudi protectorate. The story of Washington's relation with Islamic fundamentalism is the most striking modern illustration of the sorcerer's apprenticeship. (I have described this at length in my Clash of Barbarisms.)

The Palestinian scene was no exception to this general regional pattern, albeit it followed suit with a time warp. Although the Palestinian guerilla movement came to the fore initially as a result of the exhaustion of more traditional Arab nationalism and as an expression of radicalization, the movement underwent a very rapid bureaucratization, fostered by an impressive influx of petrodollars and reaching levels of corruption that have no equivalent in the history of national liberation movements.

Still, as long as it remained — in the guise of the PLO — what could be described as a "stateless state apparatus seeking a territory" (see my Eastern Cauldron), the Palestinian national movement could still embody the aspirations of the vast majority of the Palestinian masses, despite the numerous twists, turns, and betrayals

of commitments with which its history is littered.

However, when a new generation of Palestinians took up the struggle in the late 1980's, with the Intifada that started in December 1987, their radicalization began in turn to take increasingly the path of Islamic fundamentalism.

This was facilitated by the fact that the Palestinian left, the leading force within the Intifada in the first months, squandered this last historic opportunity by eventually aligning itself one more time behind the PLO leadership, thus completing its own bankruptcy. On a smaller scale, Israel had played its own version of the sorcerer's apprentice by favoring the Islamic fundamentalist movement as a rival to the PLO prior to the Intifada.

The 1993 Oslo agreement inaugurated the final phase of the PLO's degeneration, as its leadership — or rather the leading

nucleus of this leadership, bypassing the official leading bodies — was granted guardianship over the Palestinian population of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

This came in exchange for what amounted to a capitulation: the PLO leadership abandoned the minimal conditions that were demanded by the Palestinian negotiators from the 1967 occupied territories, above all an Israeli pledge to freeze and reverse the construction of settlements which were colonizing their land. The very conditions of this capitulation — which doomed the Oslo agreements to tragic failure as critics very rightly predicted from the start — made certain that the shift in the popular political mood would speed up.

The Zionist state took advantage of the lull brought to the 1967 territories by the Palestinian Authority's fulfillment of the role of police force by proxy ascribed to it, by drastically intensifying the colonization and building an infrastructure designed to facilitate its military control over these territories.

Accordingly, the discredit of the PA increased inexorably. This loss in public support hampered more and more its ability to crack down on the Palestinian Islamic fundamentalist movement — as was required from it and as it began attempting as early as 1994 — let alone its ability to marginalize the Islamic movement politically and ideologically. Moreover, the transfer of the PLO bureaucracy from exile into the 1967 territories, as a ruling apparatus entrusted with the task of surveillance over the population that waged the Intifada, quickly led to its corruption reaching abysmal levels — something that the population of the territories hadn't seen first-hand before.

At the same time, Hamas, like most sections of the Islamic fundamentalist mass movement — in contrast with "substitutionist" strictly terrorist organizations of which al-Qaeda has become the most spectacular example — was keen on paying attention to popular basic needs, organizing social services, and cultivating a reputation of austerity and incorruptibility.

The irresistible rise of Ariel Sharon to the helm of the Israeli state resulted from his September 2000 provocation that ignited the "Second Intifada" — an uprising that because of its militarization lacked the most positive features of the popular dynamics of the first Intifada.

A PA that, by its very nature, could definitely not rely on mass self-organization and chose the only way of struggle it was familiar with, fostered this militarization. Sharon's rise was also a product of the dead-end reached by the

Oslo process: the clash between the Zionist interpretation of the Oslo frame — an updated version of the 1967 "Alon Plan" by which Israel would relinquish the populated areas of the 1967 occupied territories to an Arab administration, while keeping colonized and militarized strategic chunks — and the PA's minimal requirements of recovering all, or nearly all the territories occupied in 1967, without which it knew it would lose its remaining clout with the Palestinian population.

The electoral victory of war criminal Ariel Sharon in February 2001 — an event as much "shocking" as the electoral victory of Hamas, at the very least — inevitably reinforced the Islamic fundamentalist movement, his counterpart in terms of radicalization of stance against the backdrop of a still-born historic compromise. All of this was greatly propelled, of course, by the (very resistible, but unresisted) accession to power of George W. Bush, and the unleashing of his wildest imperial ambitions thanks to the attacks on September 11, 2001.

Ariel Sharon played skillfully on the dialectics between himself and his Palestinian true opposite number, Hamas. His calculation was simple: in order to be able to carry through unilaterally his own hard-line version of the Zionist interpretation of a "settlement" with the Palestinians, he needed two conditions: a) to minimize international pressure upon him — or rather U.S. pressure, the only one that really matters to Israel; and b) to demonstrate that there is no Palestinian leadership with which Israel could "do business." For this, he needed to emphasize the weakness and unreliability of the PA by fanning the expansion of the Islamic fundamentalist movement, knowing that the latter was anathema to the Western states.

Thus every time there was some kind of truce, negotiated by the PA with the Islamic organizations, Sharon's government would resort to an "extrajudicial execution" — in plain language, an assassination — in order to provoke these organizations into retaliation by the means they specialized in: suicide attacks, their "F-16s" as they say.

This had the double advantage of stressing the PA inability to control the Palestinian population, and enhancing Sharon's own popularity in Israel. The truth of the matter is that the electoral victory of Hamas is the outcome that Sharon's strategy was very obviously seeking, as many astute observers did not fail to point out.

As long as Yasir Arafat was alive, he could still use the remnant of his own historical prestige. Contrary to what many

commentators have said, the seclusion of Arafat in his last months by Sharon did not "discredit" the Palestinian leader: as a matter of fact, Arafat's popularity was at an all-time low before his seclusion, and regained in strength after it started.

Actually, Arafat's leadership has always been directly nurtured by his demonization by Israel and his popularity rose again when he became Sharon's prisoner. This is why the U.S. and Israel's nominee for Palestinian leadership, Mahmud Abbas, was not able to really take over as long as Arafat was alive.



This is also why both the Bush administration and Sharon would not let the Palestinians organize the new elections that Arafat kept demanding as his representativeness was challenged very hypocritically in the name of "democratic reform."

The very nature of the "democrats" supported by Washington and Israel under this heading is best epitomized by Muhammad Dahlan, the most corrupt chief of one of the rival repressive "security" apparatuses that Arafat kept under his control on a pattern familiar to autocratic Arab regimes.

The electoral victory of Hamas is a resounding slap in the face of the Bush administration. As the latest illustration of the sorcerer's apprenticeship that U.S. policy in the Middle East has so spectacularly displayed, it is the final nail in the coffin of its neocon-inspired, demagogic and deceitful rhetoric about bringing "democracy" to the "Greater Middle East." It is, of course, too early to make any safe prediction at this point regarding what will happen on the ground. It is possible, however, to make a few observations and prognoses:

Hamas does not have a social incentive for collaboration with the Israeli occupation, at least not in any way resembling that of the PLO-originated PA apparatuses: it has actually been thrown into disarray by its own victory, as it would certainly have preferred the much more comfortable posture of being a major parliamentary opposition force to the PA.

Therefore, it takes a lot of self-deception and wishful thinking to believe that Hamas will adapt to the conditions laid out by the U.S. and Israel. Collaboration is all

the less likely given that the Israeli government, under the leadership of the new Kadima party founded by Sharon, will continue his policy, taking full advantage of the election result that suits its plans so well, and making impossible any accommodation with Hamas. Moreover, Hamas faces an outbidding rival represented by "Islamic Jihad," which boycotted the election.

In order to try to rescue the very sensitive Palestinian component of overall U.S. Middle East policy that it managed to steer into dire straits, the Bush administration will very likely consider three possibilities. One would be a major shift in the policies of Hamas, bought by and mediated by the Saudis; this is, however, unlikely for the reason stated above and would be long and uncertain.

Another would be fomenting tension and political opposition to Hamas in order to provoke new elections in the near future,

taking advantage of the vast presidential powers that Arafat had granted himself and that Mahmud Abbas inherited, or just by having the latter resign, thus forcing a presidential election.

For such a move to be successful, or meaningful at all, there is a need for a credible figure that could regain a majority for the traditional Palestinian leadership; but the only figure having the minimum of prestige required for this role is presently Marwan Barghouti, who — from his Israeli jail cell — made an alliance with Dahlan prior to the election. It is therefore likely that Washington will exert pressure on Israel for his release.

A third possibility would be the "Algerian scenario" — referring to the interruption of the electoral process in Algeria by a military junta in January 1992 — which is already envisaged, according to reports in the Arab press: the repressive apparatuses of the PA would crack down on Hamas,

impose a state of siege and establish a military-police dictatorship.

Of course, a combination of the last two scenarios is also possible, postponing the crackdown until political conditions are created, that are more suitable for it.

Any attempt by the U.S. and the European Union to starve the Palestinians into submission by interrupting the economic aid that they grant them would be disastrous for both humanitarian and political reasons and should be opposed most vigorously.

The catastrophic management of U.S. policy in the Middle East by the Bush administration, on top of decades of clumsy and shortsighted U.S. imperial policies in this part of the world, has not yet born all its bitter fruit.

The author thanks Steve Shalom for his editing and very useful suggestions.

European Union

Defeat the Bolkestein directive!

Leonce Aguirre

Three weeks before the opening of the debate in the European Parliament, the mobilisation against the Bolkestein circular is becoming stronger. Preparations are under way for the demonstration that will take place in Strasbourg on February 11th, three days before the debate in the European Parliament opens. The following article, published in Rouge, weekly paper of the LCR, deals with the content of the directive and the mobilisation against it.

Three weeks before the opening of the debate in the European Parliament, the mobilisation against the Bolkestein circular is becoming stronger. Preparations are under way for the demonstration that will take place in Strasbourg on February 11th, three days before the debate in the European Parliament opens. The following article, published in Rouge, weekly paper of the LCR, deals with the content of the directive and the mobilisation against it.

On February 14th, the European Parliament is due to vote on the first reading of the directive on "services in the internal market", which is nothing but a rehash of the essential features of the so-called "Bolkestein" directive. This document provoked widespread opposition in the member countries of the European Union (EU) and 100,000 people took part in a demonstration in Brussels on March 19th, 2005, called by the European TUC (ETUC) and by several components of the global justice movement.

The rejection of this directive played an important role in the campaign for a "No" to the Constitutional Treaty, because it symbolised and concentrated everything that was wrong with the liberal policies that are conducted by the EU. At the time, Chirac violently criticised the directive and he even announced that it was definitively dead and buried. For him it



Brussels anti-Bolkestein demo

was a question, at that point in time, of saving the Constitutional Treaty and preventing the irresistible rise of the "No" from the left.

Far from being dead and buried, the Bolkestein directive was never abandoned and it duly made its way around the circuit of European institutions. It was thus amended by the commission on the

internal market and the protection of consumers.

The principle of the country of origin was baptised "clause of the internal market", without that changing anything about the fact that an enterprise which exercises an activity in a country of the Union will automatically have its right to exercise it in all the others recognised, its activity

being subject to the regulations of its country of origin.

That obviously represents an incitement to delocalise towards countries where the social and fiscal regulations and those concerning the protection of the environment and of consumers are the weakest, with in addition a levelling down of workers' rights.

Nor does it change the fact that the directive provides for a liberalisation of all services except those that are free, the only more open element being the possibility of derogations. But even if these derogations are introduced in sensitive areas such as health, the history of European construction shows that these derogations are put into question in a short space of time. So it really is all public services that are being targeted.

Lastly, Horst Schmitthenner, leader of the German IG-Metall union, illustrates an aspect of the directive that is too often underestimated: "The adoption of the Bolkestein directive would not only lead to increased social dumping, it would also profoundly affect the relations between capital and labour, by influencing the relationship of forces.

For example, what would become of the right to strike? The directive would enable capital to avoid a confrontation by referring to European law to look for another enterprise to provide the service in question. So, even formally written into the European texts, the right to strike would be reduced to a "wasp without a sting", incapable of flying".

For a pure and simple withdrawal

What is at stake is to impose the pure and simple withdrawal of this directive. As Marco Bersani, leader of ATTAC-Italy, puts it: "All the strategies aimed at amending it are doomed to failure because, even though the initial field of application of the directive was limited, the principle of the country of origin (PCO) could subsequently be progressively widened: there is no such thing as a "light" Bolkestein".

The dockers, by organising a European strike that blocked several ports of the EU and by demonstrating massively in Strasbourg, showed that it was possible to make the European Parliament give way. They obtained the withdrawal of the port directive which allowed ship-owners to use, in certain cases, their own personnel to load and unload ships, thus putting into question social legislation in a sector



where the workers are highly organised. The dockers have shown the way. It is by doing the same thing that it will be possible to defeat the Bolkestein directive.

The demonstration on 11th February in Strasbourg is an essential part of building up a relationship of forces and we have to do everything to ensure its success (see the united front appeal below). The same day, numerous initiatives are being organised in dozens of cities in Europe. On February 14th, the day of the debate in the European Parliament, the ETUC will follow on by also organising a European demonstration.

And if the Parliament does not reject this directive, we will then have to widen the mobilisation and increase the pressure by organising a strike and a demonstration on a European scale, on the occasion of the meeting of the heads of government, when they will be called upon to take a position on this heinous directive.

Appendix

Extracts from the united front appeal

Against the projected Bolkestein directive, for a united front mobilisation!

The projected "directive on services in the internal market" is due to have its first reading in the European Parliament on February 14th in Strasbourg. Based on the principle of the country of origin (...) this document is an incitement to competition between states and peoples. It organises social dumping, less protection for consumers, a threat to culture, a lowering of norms concerning the environment and public health. In fact, this document makes impossible public control over enterprises in the service sector.

Public services are still considered as commodities. The projected directive wants to liberalise all services, without taking into account their diversity. (...) The document still contains a long list of

measures that are judged to be incompatible with the freedom of entrepreneurs, measures which are however the basis for public policies.

This project was met by unanimous disapproval by public opinion. (...) A convergence is necessary between social movements, associations, trade union organisations and political parties to defeat this project, on both a national and European level. (...)

The President of the French Republic, who had, however, announced that this project was dead and buried, is today placed before his responsibilities. He must respect his undertakings and act so that this directive does not see the light of day. We appeal to citizens to call the French government to account so that this promise is kept.

The mobilisation of the peoples of Europe is today indispensable. We are calling for the building of a European day of mobilisation on Saturday February 11th, which will be expressed in particular by a demonstration in Strasbourg. We will be present at the demonstration called for February 14th by the ETUC, on the occasion of the debate in the European Parliament.

This appeal has so far been signed by more than 25 organisations in France, including, the Communist Party, the LCR, the Socialist Party's youth organisation, ATTAC, the Peasant Confederation, feminist groups and several trade unions.

► Leonce Aguirre is a member of the political bureau of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (French section of the Fourth International).

News from around the world

EACL plans May Paris forum

Declaration of European Anti-Capitalist Left meeting

European Anti-Capitalist Left

The European Anti-Capitalist Left conference met in London on the 26th and 27th November 2005. The conference took stock of the situation in Europe created by the No votes in the European referendums in France and the Netherlands and reiterated the need for an active radical alternative left to emerge on a European level. It therefore decided to step up its own activity and visibility, most notably by proposing to host a broad seminar in Paris in May 2006 as a forum for discussion for the European radical left.



European Anticapitalist Left Declaration

1) The results of the French and Dutch referendums on the European Constitution struck a major blow against the neo-liberal project of the European Union. The Draft EU constitution is dead and the EU itself is now in a crisis of legitimacy. The constitutional treaty was the summary of the neo-liberal agenda championed by European governments of both the centre right and centre left.

It flows from the undemocratic way in which the EU has been built since the 1950s for the benefit of the corporations and their shareholders. Consequently the popular rejection of the treaty also means the popular rejection of the neo-liberal agenda both at a national and a European level. But we also recognise that the drive to implement free market policies will be sharpened as a result of the competition between European, US and Chinese capital.

So we see further privatisation measures, attacks on pensions with the German, British and other governments proposing increasing the retirement age to 67 and more attacks on welfare, health and education. Yet this is also sparking resistance as demonstrated by recent strikes in Belgium, France and Italy plus the student protests and occupations also in Italy.

2) The radical left has continued to enjoy electoral success most recently in Denmark and England but above all with the success of the Left Party in the German federal elections. The success was the result of a united campaign of the German left. For the first time since World War 2 a broad alliance of nearly the complete left supported the new left party. There started a dialogue between the Left Party and the social movements to coordinate the parliamentary and non-

parliamentarian fight against neo-liberal policies.

This is urgent because the new government has already announced new severe and painful cuts in the social system. The left forces in Germany are preparing a campaign against the policies and threats of the new neo-liberal government starting with a common day of action in March. They are preparing a broad alliance for actions of protest against the G8 in 2007 in Germany and are calling for a European mobilisation.

The European Anti-Capitalist Left notes that a break in the most powerful and important European social democratic party is of major significance and marks a further development of the crisis of social democracy and a further advance in the construction of a left alternative.

3) The EU centres of power are determined to push ahead of their neo-liberal policies and the destruction of the social gains won by previous generations of working people. One of the attacks we face is on pensions and the attempt to increase the retirement age. Of fundamental importance to this clash between the popular classes and big business is the Services Directive (also known as the Bolkestein Directive) whose main purpose is to lower wages and to decrease rights at work across EU states.

We reject a policy of divide and rule which seeks to pit workers from Eastern Europe against those of Western Europe. We reject the “race to the bottom” where we are asked to accept the worst conditions in Europe. We note that this Directive flows from the WTO/GATS agreement and from the Lisbon strategy for a neo-liberal Europe agreed by the EU Council in 2000 and revised in 2005. Workers in any country are entitled to the same rights and wages as citizens of that state no matter where they originate.

We will argue for the worker’s movement across Europe to co-ordinate policies and action to secure work for all on living wages throughout the continent. United we can win gains for all, divided we all compete in the “race to the bottom”. Organisations, parties and movements involved in this EACL conference will actively participate in and promote the actions planned for the start of 2006 against the Services Directive/Bolkestein Directive when the European parliament meets to discuss this measure.

4) The results of the neo-liberal policies and attacks against social rights are increased unemployment and poverty as well as the increase in precariousness and poverty pay, particularly among young and women workers. Along with racial discrimination and the provocative behaviour of police against young people, this situation of poverty and the lack of hope is the background to the riots that exploded in the French suburbs this month.

The only answer of the French government and the political establishment has been more repression including the institution of a state of emergency on the basis of a law passed in 1955 during the colonial war against Algerian people. This law allows the suspensions of civil liberties, the right for police and prefects to ban demonstrations and meetings to impose curfews.

5) War against the poor and immigrants cannot be the answer to social questions. In recent months we have seen the further militarisation of Europe’s Mediterranean frontier with the clashes at Ceuta and Melilla and the detention of refugees in Lampedusa, Sicily and Malta. We reject a policy of deporting refugees to detention centres in Libya. In most EU countries new measures against civil liberties have been passed since 11 September 2001 using the “war on terrorism” as a pretext.

In recent months we have seen a rash of laws passed in European states limiting our rights, the approval of torture by the CIA and the creation of illegal detention centres in Eastern Europe with US flights using airports in the EU to deliver hostages to these centres and to those in Bagram and Guantanamo.

We reject the so-called “war of civilisations” and the Islamophobia underlying this policy. We renew our opposition to war and racism, our commitment to defending human rights and our rejection of “Fortress Europe”.

6) The European Anti-Capitalist Left is an integral part of the movement against the war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Once again we renew our commitment to ending these occupations and resisting imperialism. Above all we oppose the growing role of European states in the occupation of Afghanistan under the umbrella of NATO. Once again we reaffirm our determination to scrap NATO and any similar military alliances.

7) The global justice movement is the driving force of the new global resistance.

That is why we as participants in EACL will be present at the forthcoming World Social Forums in Mali and Venezuela. We will both to develop our links with the movements and the new left in both Africa and Latin America.

In particular we salute the success of the people of Bolivia in resisting privatisation and the pillage of their natural resources demanding their nationalisation in the interest of the people, the developing revolution in Venezuela and the rise of a new left in Brazil. We will be present too at the forthcoming European Social Forum in Athens and will co-ordinate our actions there.

We are committed not just to resisting attacks on our rights, our conditions and our future but to aiding the development of an alternative society based on peace not war, solidarity instead of competition, equality not repression and justice not exploitation. That is why we propose on the first anniversary of the French referendum vote to gather in Paris next year to discuss the creation of a Europe of social justice. This will be a seminar designed to encourage the maximum

participation and involvement of all those who are exploited and oppressed.

London, the 28th of November 2005

- Bloco de Esquerda (Portugal),
- Deutsche Kommunistische Partei (Germany)
- Espacio Alternativo (Spain)
- Esquerra Unida i Alternativa, (Catalunya)
- Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (France),
- Red/Green Alliance (Denmark),
- Respect (England and Wales),
- Scottish Socialist Party (Scotland),
- Socialist Party (England and Wales)
- Socialist Workers Party (England and Wales),
- SolidaritéS (Switzerland)

► *The European Anti-Capitalist Left brings together a range of broad parties from across Europe to co-ordinate policy discussions and practical actions.*

USA

Transit union shuts down New York

Steve Downs

What do you get when you mix together 35,000 angry workers, an arrogant management, a union leadership under pressure from its membership, a decades-long drive to shrink the public sector, a racial divide between bosses and workers, and miscalculations? In December 2005, you got a transit strike in New York City.

Responding to management’s 11th hour demand that future workers pay a greater percentage of their income into the pension fund than current members do, the leadership of Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union called a strike on Dec. 20.

While Local 100’s president, Roger Toussaint, had made it clear that the union would not accept reduced wages or benefits for future workers and that the union was determined to preserve transit jobs as an entry into the ‘middle-class’ for future generations of workers, management continued to press the issue and precipitated the strike. But, on both sides, the roots of the strike go back years.

On the union’s side, Toussaint had won office in 2000 as the candidate of the New Directions slate. ND had gotten its start in the late 1980s by opposing the givebacks being accepted by the union’s leadership - including lower wages and benefits for new hires.

Although ND no longer exists, there remains strong opposition to givebacks among officers and members of the Local.

Indeed, in the five days between the strike authorization vote and the contract expiration, hundreds of members concerned that Toussaint might not stand firm against givebacks had signed forms pledging to vote against any proposed contract that contained givebacks.

In a display of Toussaint’s sensitivity on the issue, the Local’s security detail had prohibited members from bringing “unauthorized” literature and signs, including ones simply stating “No Givebacks”, into the membership meeting on Dec. 10 where the strike authorization vote was held.

For their part, management wanted to force the TWU to give up something. After high-profile contracts with the teachers and police officers were settled with lower starting pay (police) and longer hours (police and teachers), it was important to both NYC’s Mayor Bloomberg and NY’s Governor Pataki that transit workers be made to accept that no gains could be made without giving something back. (Transit workers negotiate with a state agency, the



Strikers' rally

Metropolitan Transportation Authority, whose chairman is appointed by Pataki. But, since the buses and subways are almost entirely within NYC, the mayor takes a keen interest in the negotiations.)

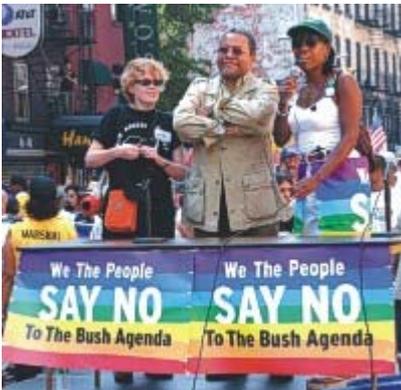
The potential for a strike was increased by the feeling among transit workers that the white billionaires (MTA chairman Kalikow and Mayor Bloomberg) who represented management’s position were not treating the overwhelmingly Black and Latino transit workers and union officers with respect. This dovetailed with the conviction among transit workers that they receive little respect on the job because the transit workforce is largely Black and Latino.

When the strike was actually called, however, it took almost everyone by surprise - including most transit workers. Despite the posturing on both sides, the union leadership had done little to prepare its membership for a strike.

The union had not established strike offices throughout the city. There had been no training for picket captains. In fact, most picket captains were appointed in the days immediately before the strike began! There was no structure in place to link the pickets at the sites spread throughout the city.

More important, the union had not clearly defined the issues for the membership or the workers of the city. These and other preparations in the months leading up to the contract expiration would not only have resulted in a stronger strike, they would have helped to build the union even if there wasn't a strike.

Even though they recognized the poor preparation, the sense among many transit workers was, "It's about time." Given the opportunity to show their importance to the city and its economy, they embraced the strike. Rank and file members stepped up to ensure that picket lines were established and staffed.



Roger Toussaint (centre)

For three days, buses and subways in NYC did not move. Millions of people walked to wherever they had to go. Hundreds of millions of dollars worth of business were lost. But once the workers were out, they and their union were the target of a concerted attack by the bosses in the city.

It's illegal for public employees to strike in NY. If they do, each striker loses two days pay for each day they are on strike. In addition, the union is fined and risks

losing its dues check-off. Since those penalties were not enough to prevent the strike, the MTA and Bloomberg upped the ante.

They got a judge to fine the union \$1 million for each day of the strike and fines up to \$25,000/day were being considered against each worker. The union's top officers were threatened with jail.

The city's papers tried to whip up public sentiment against the strike. (However, polls showed that a majority of city residents supported the union and this support was shown to the pickets everyday.) Mayor Bloomberg's calling the strikers "thugs" and "selfish" fueled the strikers' sense that they were being targeted because they were Blacks and Latinos.

While the MTA was prepared to escalate the fight, the union was not. Although many strikers called for pickets to be sent to the commuter railroads, the union leadership didn't act. The city's labor leaders, who had vowed their support at pre-strike rallies, did not organize any demonstrations or even bring their members out to the picket lines. On the third day, Toussaint recommended that the strike be ended so that talks would resume.

This was despite his pledge that the union would not return to work without a contract. Many transit workers returned to work with a mixture of pride, relief, and concern that they now faced givebacks in their contract, givebacks that could have been prevented if the union had been better organized and prepared to conduct its strike.

We were right to be concerned. The contract presented to the membership five days after the strike ended contains significant givebacks and only minor gains. The wages are the same as those offered by the MTA before the contract began. They will not enable transit workers to keep up with inflation. Before the strike, the union had taken the position that we would accept neither changes to the pension plan nor paying for medical benefits.

Afterwards, the leadership accepted a deal that, for the first time, requires all members to pay a minimum of 1.5% of their wages for medical insurance (the percentage rate will rise over the life of the contract). And, after transit workers finally used the leverage that a contract expiration during the holiday shopping season gave, Toussaint agreed to push the expiration back a month to mid-January.

A key selling point (some say the only selling point) of the agreement is that about half the members will get a refund of excess money they had paid into the pension fund in the late 1990s. But even that has been thrown into question by Governor Pataki's office announced intention to veto the legislation needed for the refund to go through.

Although the proposal was endorsed overwhelmingly by the Local's Executive Board, it is meeting strong opposition among the membership. Opponents of the contract, including some union officers and many of the strike's picket captains, are organizing to persuade the Local's members to reject the contract when it comes to a vote.

Many members who were initially proud of themselves and their co-workers for saying "no" to the MTA and walking off the job are now wondering what the point of the strike was. Indeed, whether the contract is approved or rejected, its most important effect may be to undermine the feelings of accomplishment and solidarity that flowered with the strike.

If Local 100 members who were willing to strike and pay fines in defense of workers who are not yet on the job end up feeling that they were suckers to do so, a contract fight that could have strengthened the union will end up weakening it instead.

► Steve Downs is a subway train operator in NYC and was one of the founders of the New Directions caucus. He can be reached at downs100@gmail.com.

Iraq

Joint Statement Issued by the Iraqi Trade Unions

Concerning the Programs of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Iraq

The Iraqi economy has been severely affected by decades of sanctions, wars and occupation. The Iraqi trade unions and federations believe in the capacity of the country with all its oil and mineral resources to provide a decent living standard for Iraqis. The federations and unions consider that the wars and occupation have caused a dramatic decrease in the living and social standards of Iraqis and especially of workers.

The federations and unions stress the importance of complete sovereignty for Iraq over its petroleum and natural

resources so as to develop them in a way that assures a complete reconstruction of the country. We wish to stress the

following points in regard to the policies of the IMF and World Bank in Iraq:

- 1) Increasing transparency and additional representation for Iraq in the decision-making structures of the IFIs.
- 2) To stop imposing structural adjustment conditions for loans.
- 3) Agreeing to provide funding for public services and state-owned enterprises without demanding their privatization.
- 4) Canceling debts owed by Iraq that have resulted from the policies of the former regime.
- 5) Rejecting the reduction of spending on social services especially the elimination of government support for the food distribution system or the reduction of the number of items covered.
- 6) Strongly rejecting the privatization of publicly owned entities and especially of

the oil, education, health, electricity, transportation and construction sectors.

- 7) Rejecting the increase in the price of petroleum products, considering the negative impact of the increase on the living standards of Iraqis.
- 8) Adopting a new labor law and a pension and social security law that assure workers' rights and are in conformity with international labor standards and human rights conventions. The World Bank and the IMF must also respect these standards.

The unions and federations that have signed this statement announce the formation of a permanent coordinating committee that will make its positions known to the Iraqi Government and to the IFIs. They also demand that the IFIs engage in dialogue, discussion and

negotiations with the trade union federations regarding their policies in Iraq. Finally, they request the assistance of international trade union organizations to provide all possible support to the above-mentioned demands.

General Federation of Iraqi Workers (ex-IFTU)

General Union of Oil Employees in Basra (now creating an Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions - IFOU)

Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq

General Federation of Workers Trade Unions in Kurdistan

Federation of Workers and Craftsmen Trade Unions in Kurdistan

Portuguese presidential election

Victory for the Right

..but the Left Bloc keeps its influence

Jorge Costa

For the first time in Portugal, the right wing has won a presidential election. Ex-PM Cavaco Silva, defeated by the Socialist Sampaio in 1996, has now been elected in the first round with 50,6%. Less than a year after the electoral disaster of PSD/CDS coalition, the right wing is celebrating again. But this is mainly a victory for the big, neoliberal center: Cavaco focused his campaign in "strategical cooperation" with the socialist government.

For the Socialist Party, it is a big defeat. Its leadership could not avoid the existence of two candidates. Manuel Alegre was to be the official one. Well-known poet and former exile, Alegre benefits from a 'Utopian' aura (quite unmerited: as a socialist MP for 30 years, all he did was to vote for neoliberal policies).

But after the summer, Mario Soares, 81, ex-PM and ex-president, announced his second thoughts over retirement. Soares, as much as Alegre, was a fifth choice, after the refusal of several potential candidates from the socialist area to face Cavaco.

The SP started as a looser and everything got worse with Soares sticking to the Socrates liberal government. The result was the bizarre situation of an ex-president, formally supported by the government, finishing with 14%. Alegre, in the clothes of an independent citizen against party bureaucraties, proposed a vote of protest against the official SP. He got 20%.

Anyway, no good news is to be expected from this trouble in socialist waters. Alegre, 70, is ready to return to parliament, where he will stay under a cold eye from his colleagues. In the next socialist congress, Socrates will set good order in the house.

It won't be difficult: There's no trace of programmatic alternatives. Alegre's campaigners gathered around sympathy for the character (half antifascist poet, half Portuguese-kind of dandy) and internal complains in the SP. Votes came from popular rage against Socrates.

The Left Bloc candidate faced this complicated scenario in the name of an alternative to build in the Portuguese left. "We will be here tomorrow", chanted Left Bloc militants Sunday evening.

They had reasons to celebrate: it was a long and unforgettable campaign, with some of the biggest meetings ever held by the far left since the 1974-5 revolution, and Francisco Louçã getting 5,3%, almost 300,000 votes, the second best result of the Bloc in its 7 years.

Geographically, Louçã had a very homogeneous vote. And especially good in the island of Madeira (7.8%), governed for 30 years by an authoritarian right-wing cacique.

The candidate of the Communist Party (its secretary, Jerónimo de Sousa) saw a little growth to 8,5%, confirming that changing its leader the CP also changed the mood of the press and gave new breath to the militants. Its national meeting in Lisbon gathered some 20,000, and was quite a demonstration of force.



Left Bloc rally

Unless something out of the ordinary happens, for three years, there will be no election in Portugal. This election stabilized the political framework for a while: the new president will now be a pole of attraction to the right, and socialist PM Socrates will thank this excuse. Bosses supported him last February like they supported Cavaco now: in the name of stability. Bosses' stability is in the way. Time for the left to mobilize.

The results in figures

Cavaco Silva: 50,59% (Social Democratic Party, rightwing)
 Manuel Alegre: 20,72% (Socialist Party, independent)
 Mário Soares: 14,34% (Socialist Party)
 Jerónimo de Sousa: 8,59% (Communist Party)
 Francisco Louçã: 5,31% (Left Bloc)
 Garcia Pereira: 0,44%
 Turnout: 62,61%
 Blank votes: 1,06%
 Null votes: 0,79%

► *Jorge Costa is a member of the editorial board of "Combate", the monthly publication of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (Portuguese section of the Fourth International, one of the three founding organizations of the Left Bloc).*

Spanish state

Urgent solidarity appeal for sacked SEAT workers in Catalonia

Seat/Volkswagen Group announced the dismissal of about 800 Seat workers in Catalonia, one day before Christmas. All this happened with the approval of the unions - the Workers Commissions (CCOO formerly link to the Spanish Communist Party) and the UGT (General Workers Union - formerly linked to the Spanish Socialist Party) and the strong opposition of the union CGT (coming from an anarcho-sindicalist tradition).

The negotiated agreement of the leadership of the unions CCOO and UGT with the Seat/Volkswagen Group to dismiss the 660 is called "Pact of shame" by the left section of the unions and the workers.

Among the 660 dismissed workers they are 20.5% women, which is a lot for a car factory where only about 5% women work and amongst the sacked are pregnant women as well as a lot of workers who have been working for decades in the car plant.

In the last weeks they have been numerous marches in solidarity with the sacked workers in Catalonia and the rest of the Spanish State, for example in Martorell, Barcelona, València, Murcia, Navarra, and other places.

Three days ago the 'United committee in solidarity with the sacked Seat workers' was founded in Barcelona. Supporters of this committee were delegates from the sacked Seat workers, different networks, movements, unions, socialist and

republican parties and neighbourhood and local support groups.

The committee planned a lot of actions and marches for the next two weeks, but they know they may have months ahead to struggle.

The sacked workers urgently request solidarity with their demands, which is immediate re-employment of all 660 sacked. Representatives from the union CGT speak of a so called "black list", because among the sacked are a huge number of long term organizers of working-class struggles.

One sacked worker, who had been working 36 years for the car factory said that this was the worst Christmas he ever had, after one in 1971 when he was arrested and tortured for building the then under fascist dictator Franco, when the Workers Commissions were illegal in the Seat factory.

Another sacked worker, a shop-steward and CGT member aged 57, fought as well against Franco's fascism in the 1970s and

is a life-long union activist. All these comrades deserve our solidarity.



Please send union or social movements solidarity messages addressed to:

revoltaglobal@revoltaglobal.net

For further information:

www.kaosenlared.net (in Spanish and Catalan)

www.revoltaglobal.net (in Catalan mainly)

Bamako World Social Forum

Another Africa is Possible

Matt Panthers

This year the World Social Forum is being held on three continents. Before the Forum in Caracas, the first big gathering of the global justice movement took place in Bamako, the capital of Mali, from 19th to 23rd January. More than 20,000 activists from social movements discussed and proposed initiatives for "another Africa in another world". The following report of the Forum appeared in the January 26th, 2006 issue of Rouge, weekly paper of the LCR.

At the World Social Forum (WSF) in Bamako, Mali, the existence of two camps in the global justice movement was palpable. A global justice "seeking respect", trying to find a "more human" compromise with neo-liberalism, contrasted with a radical African global justice.

The initiatives of the "stars" of the global justice movement were in contrast with the debates that were organized by the peasants of Niger, the community radio Kayira, the miners and the wives of union leaders who are at present in living in clandestinity from Morilla (Malian gold mines belonging to the French company

Bouygues), the youth of the Union of Democratic African Youth, the cotton producers of CMDT (Malian Textile Development Company), the rail workers and citizens in struggle of Cocardirail (Citizens' Collective for the Restitution and the Integrated Development of Malian Railways).

On the one hand, an official summit, on the other, the summit of an African social movement which is building its structures and developing outside of the control of states and international bodies.

The differences between these two camps, about the project to be put forward for another world and about possible ways of



getting there, could be symbolized by what happened with the Malian sans-papiers (undocumented migrants) who were recently expelled from France. These militants proposed a solidarity demonstration in front of the French Embassy on the question of the sans-papiers and the racism that immigrants suffer from.

Unfortunately, the former Malian Minister of culture, Aminata Traore, a leading figure on the institutional wing of the forum, intervened at the starting point of the demonstration with the aim of cancelling it.



This intervention discouraged some of the people who had begun to assemble. The several hundred demonstrators who finally decided to continue found themselves, a little further on, faced with the police, who prevented them getting any closer to the Embassy.

A few hours earlier, a representative of Chirac had been invited to the debate on “What kind of African youth, faced with imperialism?” organized in the “Thomas Sankara” youth camp [1].

So we were able to hear her say, in front of an assembly of astounded militants, that Chirac liked “Africa and African students”. Of course, the emissary of the French government quickly fled in the face of the radical interventions of African militants who were revolted by her provocative behaviour.

So, the French government is able to come and disrupt a militant debate on imperialism, while French imperialist policies - creating sans-papiers by the thousand - cannot be challenged when they concern Africans. Everyone had to take account of the different positions adopted at this point, which showed up the limits of the forum.

The JCR, the LCR and militants of the Fourth International from several African sections were able to organize a series of meetings with radical global justice militants who were present in Bamako.

Our presence in the demonstrations, the contacts that were exchanged with comrades from the left of the African

social movement, the idea that was put forward, during the debate on “African youth faced with imperialism”, of a joint campaign in France and on the African continent for the dismantling of French bases in Africa, all this will enable us to strengthen our activity in solidarity with Africa. The Nairobi Forum in 2007 will be the occasion to draw a first balance sheet of the work that was begun in Bamako.

► *Matt Panthers was the Rouge correspondent at Bamako.*

NOTES

[1] The young army captain Thomas Sankara came to power in Bukino Faso in 1983 and headed a radical regime until his assassination in 1987
