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IV386 - February 2007

Cuba - France - Italy

A new debate is opening	
The Return of Strategy - <i>Daniel Bensaïd</i>	3
Environment	
Official: Capitalism is killing our planet! - <i>Socialist Resistance</i>	10
Cuba Discussion	
Cuban Reality Beyond Fidel - <i>Interview with Samuel Farber</i>	11
"The Battle of Ideas" and the Capitalist Transformation of the Cuban State - <i>Manuel Paz Ortega</i>	13
A rapid glance at the future - <i>Aurelio Alonso</i>	16
The Cuban Revolution at the Crossroads - <i>Jan Konrad</i>	18
After a long wait... "Critical Notes" from Che - <i>Michael Löwy</i>	20
Economy	
Burger giant's revival reveals key to US capitalism - <i>Phil Hearse</i>	22
France	
"The Presidential campaign is rotting French political life" - <i>Daniel Bensaïd</i>	23
On the French Left: - What's going on? - <i>François Duval</i>	25
World Social Forum	
Power to the People - <i>Danielle Fonteyn</i>	29
Africa at the heart of the debates - <i>Jean Nanga</i>	29
Italy	
Solidarity with Franco Turigliatto - <i>Appeal</i>	30
Romano Prodi Challenged on the Left - <i>Flavia d'Angeli</i>	30
Palestine	
The Water Crisis in Gaza - <i>Alice Gray</i>	31
Britain	
Blair Faces Endgame - <i>Phil Hearse</i>	34
Portugal	
Badajoz is over, welcome to the 21st century! - <i>Alda Sousa</i>	36
Japan	
Neoliberal counter-reform and militarisation - <i>Kenji Kunitomi</i>	37
Pakistan	
Massive peasant conference demands end of feudalism - <i>Farooq Tariq</i>	39
Aisha Amin: peace hero - <i>Farooq Tariq</i>	40



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A new debate is opening

The Return of Strategy

Daniel Bensaïd



Daniel Bensaïd is a leading member of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) in France. This article takes up issues arising in a discussion on revolutionary strategy to be found in the LCR's theoretical journal *Critique Communiste* in March 2006 and continued at a seminar in Paris in June. Other participants included the editor of *Critique Communiste* Antoine Artous, LCR members Cedric Durand and Francis Sitel, and Alex Callinicos of the British SWP. The issues involved ranged from the nature of socialist revolution today to the attitude taken to non-revolutionary but anti-neoliberal forces in France [1].

There has been an 'eclipse' in the debate about strategy since the beginning of the 1980s, in contrast with the discussions prompted by the experiences in the 1970s of Chile and Portugal (and then Nicaragua and Central America). The neoliberal offensive made the 1980s at best a decade of social resistance, characterised by a defensiveness in the class struggle, even in those cases when popular democratic pressure forced dictatorships to give way—notably in Latin America.

The withdrawal from politics found expression in what could be called a 'social illusion', by analogy with the 'political illusion' of those criticised by the young Marx for thinking 'political' emancipation through the achievement of civil rights was the last word in 'human emancipation'. There was an illusion about the self-sufficiency of social movements reflected in the experiences after Seattle (1999) and the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (2001).

Simplifying somewhat, I call this the 'utopian moment' of social movements, which took different forms: utopias based on the regulation of free markets; Keynesian utopias; and above all neo-libertarian utopias, in which the world can be changed without taking power or by

making do with counter-powers (John Holloway, Toni Negri, Richard Day).

The upturn in social struggles turned into political or electoral victories in Latin America—Venezuela and Bolivia. But in Europe the struggles ended in defeat, except with the movement against the CPE attacks on the rights of young workers. The push towards privatisation, reforms in social protection and the dismantling of social rights could not be prevented. This lack of social victories has caused expectations to turn once more towards political (mostly electoral) solutions, as the Italian elections showed. [2].

This 'return of politics' has led to a revival in debates about strategy. Witness the polemics round the books of Holloway, Negri and Michael Albert, and the differing appraisals of the Venezuelan process and of Lula's administration in Brazil. There has been the shift in the Zapatistas' orientation with the sixth declaration of the Selva Lacandona and the 'other campaign' in Mexico. The discussions around the project for a new LCR manifesto or Alex Callinicos's *Anticapitalist Manifesto* [3], belong in the same context. We are coming to the end of the phase of the big refusal and of stoical resistance-

Holloway's 'scream' in the face of 'the mutilation of human lives by capitalism', slogans like 'The world is not a commodity' or 'Our world is not for sale'. We need to be specific about what the 'possible' world is and, above all, to explore how to get there.

There is strategy and strategy

Notions of strategy and tactics are military terms that were imported into the workers' movement—above all from the writings of Clausewitz or of Delbrück. However, their meaning has varied greatly. At one time strategy was the art of winning a battle, with tactics being no more than troop manoeuvres. Since then there has been no halt to the expansion of the field of strategy over time and space, from dynastic wars to national wars, from total war to global war. So we can make a distinction today between global strategy operating on a world scale and 'limited strategy' concerned with the struggle for the conquest of power within a particular area.

In some ways, the theory of permanent revolution sketched out a global strategy. The revolution starts from the national arena (in one country) to expand to the continental and world level; it takes a decisive step with the conquest of

NB: Bold letters in brackets refer to explanatory notes at the end of the text. Highlighted numbers in square brackets are the author's end notes.

political power but is prolonged and deepened by 'a cultural revolution'. It thus combines act and process, event and history.

This dimension of global strategy is even more important today than it was in the first half of the 20th century, faced as we are with powerful states whose economic and military strategies are worldwide. The emergence of new strategic areas at the continental or world level shows this. The dialectic of the permanent revolution (as against the theory of socialism in one country), in other words the intertwining of national, continental and world levels, is tighter than ever. One can seize the levers of power in one country (like Venezuela or Bolivia), but the question of continental strategy (etc) immediately becomes a matter of domestic policy—as in the Latin American discussions over Alba versus Alca, (a) the relationship to Mercosur, to the Andes Pact. More prosaically, in Europe resistance to neoliberal counter-reforms can be reinforced by the balance of forces at the national level and by legislative gains. But a transitional approach to public services, taxation, social protection, ecology has to be pitched at the European level from the outset. [4]

Strategic hypotheses

I confine myself here to the question of what I have called 'the limited strategy'-the struggle for the conquest of political power at the national level. The framework of globalisation can weaken national states and some transfers of sovereignty take place. But the national rung, which structures class relationships and attaches a territory to a state, remains the decisive rung in the sliding scale of strategic spaces.

Let us straightaway put aside the criticisms from those like John Holloway and Cédric Durand [5] that ascribe to us a 'stagist' vision of the revolutionary process, according to which we would make the seizure of power the 'absolute precondition' for any social transformation. The argument is either a caricature or it stems from ignorance. Vaulting from a standing start is not something we have ever been keen on.

The concepts of the united front, of transitional demands and of the workers' government-defended not just by Trotsky but by Thalheimer, Radek and Clara Zetkin [6]-have a precise aim. This is to link the event to its preparatory conditions, revolution to reforms, the goal to the movement. The Gramscian notions of hegemony and 'war of position' operate along the same lines. [7] The opposition between the East (where power would be easier to conquer but more difficult to maintain) and the West arises from the same concern. [8] We have never been admirers of the theory of the mere collapse of the system. [9]

We have insisted on the role of the 'subjective factor' as against both the spontaneist view of the revolutionary process and the structuralist immobilism of the 1960s. Our insistence is not on a 'model' but on what we have called 'strategic hypotheses'. [10] Models are something to be copied; they are instructions for use. A hypothesis is a guide to action that starts from past

experience but is open and can be modified in the light of new experience or unexpected circumstances.

Our concern therefore is not to speculate but to see what we can take from past experience, the only material at our disposal. But we always have to recognise that it is necessarily poorer than the present and the future if revolutionaries are to avoid the risk of doing what the generals are said to do-always fight the last war.

Our starting point lies in the great revolutionary experiences of the 20th century-the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the German Revolution, the popular fronts, the Spanish Civil War, the Vietnamese war of liberation, May 1968, Portugal, Chile. We have used them to distinguish between two major hypotheses, or scenarios: that of the insurrectional general strike and that of the extended popular war. They encapsulate two types of crisis, two forms of dual power, two ways of resolving the crisis. As far as the insurrectional general strike is concerned, dual power takes a mainly urban form, of the Commune variety-not just the Paris Commune, but the Petrograd Soviet, the insurrections in Hamburg in 1923, Canton in 1927, Barcelona in 1936. Dual power cannot last long in a concentrated area. Confrontation therefore leads to a rapid resolution, although this may in turn lead to a prolonged confrontation: civil war in Russia, the liberation war in Vietnam after the 1945 insurrection. In this scenario the task of demoralising the army and organising the soldiers plays an important part. Among the more recent and meaningful experiences in this respect were the soldiers' committees in France, the SUV 'Soldiers united will win' movement in Portugal in 1995, and the conspiratorial work of the MIR (b) in the Chilean army in 1972-73.

In the case of the extended popular war strategy, the issue is

one of territorial dual power through liberated and self-administered zones, which can last much longer. Mao understood the conditions for this as early as his 1927 pamphlet *Why is it that Red Political Power can Exist in China?* and the experience of the Yen-an Republic (c) shows how it operates.

According to the insurrectionary general strike scenario, the organs of alternative power are socially determined by urban conditions; according to the extended popular war scenario, they are centralised in the (predominantly peasant) 'people's army'.

There are a whole range of variants and intermediary combinations between these two hypotheses in their ideal form. So the Cuban Revolution made the guerrilla foco ('focus') the link between the kernel of the rebel army and attempts to organise and call urban general strikes in Havana and Santiago. [11] The relationship between the two was problematic, as shown in the correspondence of Frank País, (d) Daniel Ramos Latour and Che himself about the tensions between 'the sierra' and 'the plain'. Retrospectively, the official narrative privileged the heroic epic of the Granma (e) and its survivors. This contributed to bolstering the legitimacy of that element in the 26 July Movement and of the ruling Castro group, but was detrimental to a more complex understanding of the process.

This simplified version of history was set up as a model for rural guerrilla war and inspired the experiences of the 1960s in Peru, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Colombia, Bolivia. The deaths of De La Puente and Lobatón in Peru (1965), Camillo Torres in Colombia (1966), Yon Sosa and Lucio Cabañas in Mexico, Carlos Marighela and Lamarca in Brazil, the tragic expedition of Che to Bolivia, the near annihilation of the Sandinistas in 1963 and 1969, the disaster of

Teoponte in Bolivia in 1970, mark the end of that cycle.

The strategic hypothesis of the Argentinian PRT (f) and the MIR in Chile made greater use, at the beginning of the 1970s, of the Vietnamese example of extended popular war (and, in the PRT's case, of a mythic version of the Algerian war of liberation). The history of the Sandinista front up to its victory over the Somoza dictatorship in 1979 shows a mixture of different outlooks. The Prolonged People's War tendency of Tomás Borge stressed the development of a guerrilla presence in the mountains and the need for a long period of gradually accumulating forces. The Proletariat Tendency of Jaime Wheelock insisted on the social effects of capitalist development in Nicaragua and on the strengthening of the working class while retaining the perspective of a prolonged accumulation of forces with a view to an 'insurrectional moment'. The 'Tercerist' Tendency of the Ortega brothers was a synthesis of the other two tendencies which allowed for coordination between the southern front and the uprising in Managua.

Looking back, Humberto Ortega summed up the differences thus:

"The politics which consists of not intervening in events, of accumulating forces from cold, is what I call the politics of passive accumulation of forces. This passivity was evident at the level of alliances. There was also passivity in the fact that we thought we could accumulate arms, organise ourselves, bring human resources together without fighting the enemy, without having the masses participate." [12]

He recognised that circumstances shook their various plans up:

"We called for the insurrection. The pace of events quickened, objective conditions did not

Strategy

allow us greater preparation. In reality, we could not say no to the insurrection-such was the breadth of the mass movement that the vanguard was incapable of directing it. We could not oppose this torrent. All we could do was to put ourselves at its head in the hope of more or less leading it and giving it a sense of direction."

He concluded, 'Our insurrectional strategy always gravitated around the masses and not around some military plan. This must be clear.' In reality, having a strategic option implies a sequencing of political priorities, of when to intervene, of what slogans to raise. It also determines the politics of alliances.

Mario Payeras's narrative of the Guatemala process [13] illustrates a return from the forest to the town and a change in relationships between the military and the political, the countryside and the town, and Régis Debray's 1974 *A Critique of Arms* (or self-criticism) also provides an account of the start of this evolution in the 1960s. There were the disastrous adventures of the Red Army Fraction in Germany, of the Weathermen (g) in the US (to say nothing of the ephemeral tragi-comedy of the *Gauche prolétarienne* (h) in France and the theses of July/Geismar (i) in their unforgettable *Vers la Guerre Civile* ('Towards Civil War') of 1969. All these and other attempts to translate the experience of rural guerrilla war into 'urban guerrilla' war came to a close in the 1970s. The only instances of armed movements to have lasted successfully were those whose organisations had their social base in struggles against national oppression (Ireland, the Basque Country). [14]

These strategic hypotheses and experiences were not simply reducible to militarism. They set political tasks in order. Thus the PRT's conception of the Argentinian Revolution as a national war of liberation meant

privileging the construction of an army (the ERP) at the cost of self-organisation in workplaces and neighbourhoods. Similarly, the MIR's orientation of putting the stress, under Popular Unity, on accumulating forces (and rural bases) led to its downplaying the threat of a coup d'état and above all underestimating its long term consequences. Yet as MIR's general secretary Miguel Enriquez clearly perceived, following the failure of the first, abortive, coup of 29 June there was a brief moment favourable to the creation of a combat government which could have prepared for a trial of strength.

The Sandinista victory in 1979 no doubt marked a new turn. That at least is the view of Mario Payeras who stressed that in Guatemala (as in El Salvador) revolutionary movements were not confronted by clapped out puppet dictatorships but by Israeli, Taiwanese and US 'advisers' in 'low intensity' and 'counter-revolutionary' wars. This increasing asymmetry has since gone global with the new strategic doctrines of the Pentagon and the declaration of 'unlimited' war against 'terrorism'.

This is one reason (in addition to the tragic hyperviolence of the Cambodian experience, the bureaucratic counter-revolution in the USSR, and the Cultural Revolution in China) why the question of revolutionary violence has become a thorny, even taboo, subject, whereas in the past the epic sagas of the Granma and of Che, or the writings of Fanon, Giap or Cabral made violence appear innocent or liberatory. What we see is a groping towards some asymmetrical strategy of the weak and the strong, an attempt to synthesise Lenin and Gandhi [15] or orient towards non-violence. [16] Yet the world has not become less violent since the fall of the Berlin Wall. It would be rash and otherworldly to bet on there being a 'peaceful way'. Nothing from the century of extremes ratifies this scenario.

The hypothesis of the insurrectional general strike

The guideline for our strategic hypothesis in the 1970s was the insurrectional general strike, which, for the most part, bore no resemblance to the variants of acclimatised Maoism and its imaginary interpretations of the Cultural Revolution. It is this hypothesis of which we are now the 'orphans', according to Antoine Artous.(j) What might have had a certain 'functionality' yesterday is lost today. He does not deny, however, the continuing relevance of notions of revolutionary crisis and dual power. The hypothesis needs, he insists, serious reformulation-one that avoids wallowing in the term 'rupture' and in verbal trickery. Two points crystallise his concern.

On the one hand, Antoine insists that dual power cannot be totally situated outside existing institutions and be made suddenly to spring from nothing in the form of a pyramid of soviets or councils. We may once upon a time have surrendered to this oversimplified vision of real revolutionary processes that we used to pore over in political study groups. But I doubt it. Be that as it may, other texts [17] swiftly corrected whatever vision we may have had. We may even, at the time, have been disturbed or shocked by Ernest Mandel coming round to the idea of 'mixed democracy' (k) after he had re-assessed the relationship between the soviets and the Constituent Assembly in Russia. Yet clearly one cannot imagine a revolutionary process other than as a transfer of legitimacy which gives preponderance to 'socialism from below' but which interacts with forms of representation, particularly in countries with parliamentary traditions going back over more than a century, and where the principle of universal suffrage is firmly established.

In practice, our ideas have evolved-as they did, for example, during the Nicaraguan Revolution. In the context of a civil war and a state of siege, organising 'free' elections in 1989 was open to question but we did not challenge the principle. Rather we criticised the Sandinistas for suppressing the 'council of state', (l) which might have constituted a sort of second social chamber and have been a pole of alternative legitimacy to the elected parliament. Similarly, though on a more modest scale, the example of the dialectic in Porto Alegre between the municipal institution (elected by universal suffrage) and participatory committees over the budget is worth consideration.

The problem we face is not in reality that of the relationship between territorial democracy and workplace democracy (the Paris Commune, the soviets and the Setubal popular assembly of Portugal in 1975 were territorial structures), nor even that of the relationship between direct and representative democracy (all democracy is partially representative). The real problem is how the general will is formed.

Most criticism of soviet-style democracy by the Eurocommunists (m) or by Norberto Bobbio (n) is targeted at its tendency to corporatism: a sum (or pyramid) of particular interests (parochial, workplace, office), linked by a system of mandation, could not allow for the creation of the general will. Democratic subsidiarity has its drawbacks too. If the inhabitants of a valley are opposed to a road passing through it or if a town is against having a waste collection centre (in order to palm both off on their neighbours), then there really has to be some form of centralised arbitration. [18] In our debates with the Eurocommunists we insisted on the necessary mediation (and plurality) of parties so that a synthesis of propositions could emerge and a general will arise out of particular viewpoints. Our

Revolutionary

programmatic documents have increasingly incorporated the general hypothesis of a dual chamber. But we have not ventured into speculation about institutional nuts and bolts-the practical details remain open to experience.

Antoine Artous's second concern, notably in his criticism of Alex Callinicos, bears on the assertion that Alex's transitional approach halts at the threshold of the question of power. This would be left to be resolved by some unconvincing *deus ex machina*, (o) supposedly by a spontaneous tidal wave of the masses and a generalised outburst of soviet democracy. Though defence of civil liberties figures prominently in Alex's programme, he would appear to make no demands of an institutional nature (for example, the demand for proportional representation, a constituent assembly or single chamber, or radical democratisation). Cédric Durand, on the other hand, would seem to conceive of institutions as mere intermediaries for autonomous protest strategies. This, in practice, might boil down to a compromise between 'below' and 'above'-in other words, crude lobbying by the former of the latter, which is left intact.

In reality all sides in the controversy agree on the fundamental points inspired by *The Coming Catastrophe* (Lenin's pamphlet of the summer of 1917) and the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International (inspired by Trotsky in 1937): the need for transitional demands, the politics of alliances (the united front [19] the logic of hegemony and on the dialectic (not antinomy) between reform and revolution. We are therefore against the idea of separating an ('anti-neoliberal') minimum programme and an (anti-capitalist) 'maximum' programme. We remain convinced that a consistent anti-neoliberalism leads to anti-capitalism and that the two are

interlinked by the dynamic of struggle.

We can argue about exactly how the balance of forces and existing levels of consciousness should structure transitional demands. Agreement is easy, however, on targeting the privatisation of the means of production, communication and exchange-whether in relation to public sector education, humanity's common goods or the increasingly important question of the socialisation of knowledge (as opposed to intellectual private property). Similarly, we can easily agree on exploring ways to socialise wages through systems of social protection as a step towards the withering away of the wages system altogether. Finally, in opposition to the generalisation of the market we open up the possibilities of extending the free provision of, not merely services, but basic items of consumption (thus of 'de-marketisation').

The tricky question about the issue of transition is that of the 'workers' government'. The difficulty is not new. The debates at the time of the fifth congress of the Communist International (1924) on the record of the German Revolution and the Social Democrat-Communist governments of Saxony and Thuringia in the late summer of 1923 before show this. They reveal the unresolved ambiguity of the formulae that came out of the early congresses of the Communist International and the range of interpretations which they could give rise to in practice. Treint (p) underlined in his report that 'the dictatorship of the proletariat does not fall from the sky; it must have a beginning and the workers' government is synonymous with the start of the dictatorship of the proletariat.' Nevertheless he denounced the 'saxonisation' of the united front: 'The entry of the communists into a coalition government with bourgeois pacifists to prevent an intervention against the revolution was not wrong in theory' but governments of the

Labour Party or Left Bloc type cause 'bourgeois democracy to find an echo within our own parties'.

The Czechoslovak Smeral declared in the debate on the activity of the International: 'As far as the theses of our congress in February 1923 on the workers' government are concerned, we were all convinced when we drew them up that they were in line with the decisions of the fourth congress. They were adopted unanimously.' But 'what are the masses thinking about when they speak of a workers' government?' 'In England, they think of the Labour Party, in Germany and in other countries where capitalism is decomposing, the united front means that the communists and social democrats, instead of fighting one another when the strike breaks out, are marching shoulder to shoulder. For the masses the workers' government has the same meaning and when we use this formula they imagine a united government of all the workers' parties.' And Smeral continued: 'What deep lesson does the Saxon experiment teach us? Above all, this: that one cannot vault from a standing start-a run-up is needed.'

Ruth Fischer's (q) answer was that as a coalition of workers' parties the workers' government would mean 'the liquidation of our party'. In her report on the failure of the German Revolution Clara Zetkin argued:

"As far as the workers' and peasants' government is concerned I cannot accept Zinoviev's declaration that it is simply a pseudonym, a synonym or god knows what homonym, for the dictatorship of the proletariat. That may be correct for Russia but it is not the same for countries where capitalism is flourishing. There the workers' and peasants' government is the political expression of a situation in which the bourgeoisie can no longer maintain itself in power but where the proletariat is not yet in

a position to impose its dictatorship."

In fact, what Zinoviev defined as the 'elementary objective of the workers' government' was the arming of the proletariat, workers' control over production, a tax revolution...

One could go on and quote other contributions. The resulting impression would be of enormous confusion. This expresses a real contradiction and an inability to solve the problem, even though it was raised in a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation. It would be irresponsible to provide a solution that is universally valid; nevertheless, three criteria can be variously combined for assessing participation in a government coalition with a transition perspective:

a) The question of participation arises in a situation of crisis or at least of a significant upsurge in social mobilisation, and not from a vacuum;

b) The government in question is committed to initiating a dynamic of rupture with the established order. For example-and more modestly than the arming of the workers demanded by Zinoviev-radical agrarian reform, 'despotic incursions' into the domain of private property, the abolition of tax privileges, a break with institutions like those of the Fifth Republic in France, European treaties, military pacts, etc;

c) Finally, the balance of forces allows revolutionaries to ensure that even if they cannot guarantee that the non-revolutionaries in the government keep to their commitments, they have to pay a high price for failure to do so.

In this light participation in the Lula government in Brazil (r) appears to have been mistaken:

a) For ten years or so, with the exception of the landless movement, the mass movement has been on the retreat.

Strategy

b) the colour of Lula's social-neoliberal politics was clearly shown in his electoral campaign and in his Letter to the Brazilians (promising to keep to the previous government's financial commitments). The financing of his agrarian reform and 'zero-hunger' programme was mortgaged in advance

c) Finally, the social balance of forces within both the party and the government was such that to be a half-minister in agriculture was not to support the government 'like a rope supports a hanged man' but rather like a hair that could not. That said, and taking into account the history of the country, its social structure and the formation of the PT, we chose not to make this a matter of principle (though we expressed our reservations orally to the comrades about participation and alerted them to the dangers). We preferred to go along with the experiment so as to draw up the balance sheet alongside the comrades, rather than give lessons 'from a distance' (s). [20]

About the dictatorship of the proletariat

The question of the workers' government has inevitably brought us back to the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat. An LCR conference decided by a majority of more than two thirds to remove mention of it from its statutes. That was fair enough. Today the term dictatorship more readily invokes the military or bureaucratic dictatorships of the 20th century than the venerable Roman institution of temporary emergency powers duly mandated by the Senate. Since Marx saw the Paris Commune as 'the political form at last discovered' of this dictatorship of the proletariat, we would be better off understood as invoking the Commune, the soviets, councils or self-management, rather than hanging on to a verbal fetish which history has rendered a source of confusion.

For all that we haven't done with the question raised by Marx's formula and the importance he gave it in his celebrated letter to Kugelman. Generally speaking, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' tends to carry the image of an authoritarian regime and to be seen as a synonym for bureaucratic dictatorships. But for Marx it was the democratic solution to an old problem—the exercise for the first time by the (proletarian) majority of emergency power, which till then had been the preserve of a virtuous elite as with the Committee of Public Safety of the French Revolution, even if the committee in question emanated from the Convention and could be recalled by it. The term 'dictatorship' in Marx's time was often counterposed to 'tyranny', which was used to express despotism.

The notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat also had a strategic significance, one often raised in the debates of the 1970s upon its abandonment by the majority of (Euro)communist parties. Marx clearly grasped that the new legal power, as an expression of a new social relationship, could not be born if the old one remained: between two social legitimacies, 'between two equal rights, it is force that decides'. Revolution implies therefore a transition enforced by a state of emergency. Carl Schmitt, (t) who was an attentive reader of the polemic between Lenin and Kautsky, understood perfectly what was at issue when he distinguished between the 'chief constable dictatorship', whose function in a state of crisis is to preserve the established order, and the 'sovereign dictatorship', which inaugurates a new order by virtue of a constitutive power. [21] If this strategic perspective, whatever name we give it, remains valid then there necessarily follows a series of consequences about how power is organised, about legitimacy, about how parties function, etc.

The actuality or otherwise of a strategic approach

The notion of 'the actuality of revolution' (u) has a double meaning: a broad sense ('the epoch of wars and revolution') and an immediate or conjectural sense. In the defensive situation the social movement finds itself in, having been thrown back for more than 20 years in Europe, no one will claim that revolution has an actuality in an immediate sense. On the other hand, it would be a risky and not a minor matter to eliminate it from the horizon of our epoch. Perhaps Francis Sitel intended to use this distinction in his contribution to the debate. If he wants to avoid 'a wild-eyed vision of the actual balance of forces' as 'a current perspective' and prefers instead a 'perspective for action which informs present struggles about the necessary outcomes of these same struggles', then there is not much to quarrel about. But more debatable is the idea according to which we could maintain the objective of conquering power 'as a sign of radicalism but admit that its realisation is currently beyond our horizon'.

For him the question of government is not linked to the question of power, but to 'a more modest demand', that of 'protection' against the neoliberal offensive. The debate about the conditions for participation in government does not go 'through the monumental gate of strategic reflection', but 'through the narrow gate of broad parties'. Our fear here is that it may no longer be the need for a programme (or strategy) which dictates the construction of the party but the size of an algebraically broad party which determines what is seen as the best party policy. The issue of government would then be scaled down as a strategic question and recast as a mere 'question of orientation' (which, to some extent, is what we did with Brazil). But a 'question of orientation' is not disconnected from the strategic perspective unless we fall into the classic

dissociation between minimum and maximum programme. And, if 'broad' is necessarily more generous and open than narrow and closed, there are different degrees of broadness: the Brazilian PT, the Linkspartei in Germany, the ODP in Turkey, the Left Bloc in Portugal, Rifondazione Comunista, are not of the same nature.

'The most erudite developments in matters of revolutionary strategy appear quite airy fairy,' Francis Sitel concludes, 'compared with the question of how to act in the here and now.' Certainly, this worthy pragmatic maxim could have been uttered in 1905, in February 1917, in May 1936, in February 1968, thus reducing the sense of the possible to one of prosaic realism.

Francis Sitel's diagnosis, and his programmatic adjustment to this side of the horizon, is not without practical implications. Once our perspective is no longer limited to seizing power but is inscribed in a longer process of 'subverting power', we would have to recognise that 'the traditional [22] party which concentrates on the conquest of power is led to adapt to the state itself' and consequently 'to transmit within itself mechanisms of domination which undermine the very dynamic of emancipation'. A new dialectic has therefore to be invented between the political and the social. Certainly; this is the practical and theoretical task we set ourselves, when we reject 'the political illusion' as much as 'the social illusion', or draw principled conclusions from past negative experiences (about the independence of social organisations towards the state and parties, about political pluralism, about democracy within parties).

But the problem does not lie in the way a party 'adapted to the state' transmits the state's mechanisms of domination so much as in the deeper and commoner phenomenon of bureaucratisation, rooted in the

division of labour. Bureaucratisation is inherent in modern societies: it affects trade union and associative organisations as a whole. In fact, party democracy (as opposed to the media-driven, plebiscitary democracy of so called 'public opinion') would be, if not an absolute remedy, at least one of the antidotes to the professionalisation of power and the 'democracy of the market'. This is too easily forgotten by those who see in democratic centralism only a mask for bureaucratic centralism. Yet some degree of centralisation is the very condition for democracy, not its negation.

The stress on the adaptation of the party to the state finds an echo in the isomorphism (picked up by Boltanski and Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*) between the structure of capital itself and the structures of the workers' movement, which are subordinate to it. This question is a crucial one and cannot be evaded or resolved easily: the wage struggle and the right to a job (sometimes called the 'right to work') is indeed a struggle that is subordinate to (isomorphic with) the capital/labour relationship. Behind that is the whole problem of alienation, fetishism and reification. But to believe that 'fluid' forms-organising in networks and the logic of affinity groups (as opposed to the logic of hegemony)-escape this subordination is a grotesque illusion. Such forms are perfectly isomorphic with the modern organisation of computerised capital, flexible working, the 'liquid society', etc. That does not mean that the old forms of subordination were better or preferable to the emergent forms-only that there is no royal road of networking to lead us out of the vicious circle of exploitation and domination.

On the 'broad party'

Francis Sitel is fearful that talking of 'the eclipse' or 'the return of strategic reason' means simply bracketing things off,

returning to the same old themes or taking up the question in the terms posed by the Third International. He insists on the need for 'fundamental revisions', for reinvention, for 'constructing something new', as fitting the requirements of the workers' movement. Of course. But we are not speaking of a blank screen. The rhetoric of novelty is no guarantee against falling back into the oldest, and most hackneyed, ways of thinking. Some new ways of thinking (about ecology, feminism, war and rights) are genuine. But many of the 'novelties' our epoch indulges in are no more than fashionable effects (feeding like any fashion on quotations from the past), which recycle old utopian themes from the 19th century and the workers' movement in its infancy.

Having rightly recalled that reforms and revolution form a dialectical couple in our tradition and not an opposition of mutually exclusive terms, Francis Sitel hazards the prediction that a 'broad party will be defined as a party of reforms'. That's as maybe. But it's an idea that is speculative and sets up a norm in advance. And that certainly is not our problem.

We don't have to put the cart before the horse and invent among ourselves a minimum programme (of reforms) for a hypothetical 'broad party'. We have to define our project and our programme. It is from that starting point that, in concrete situations and with tangible allies, we shall weigh up what compromises are possible, even if it means accepting some loss in clarity, in exchange for greater social spread, experience and dynamism. This is not new. We participated in the creation of the PT. Our comrades are active as a current in Rifondazione. They play a decisive part in the Left Bloc in Portugal. But these are all specific configurations and should not be brought together under some all-inclusive category of 'broad party'.

The structural situation in which we find ourselves certainly opens up a space to the left of the major traditional formations of the workers' movement (social democrats, Stalinists, populists). There are many reasons for this. The neoliberal counter-reform, the privatisation of the public arena, the dismantling of the welfare state, the market society, have sawn off the branch on which sat social democracy-and populist administrations in certain Latin American countries. The communist parties in Europe have suffered the after-effect of the implosion of the USSR at the same time as the erosion of the social bases they acquired in the pre-war years and the period of liberation from the Nazis, without gaining new roots. There really does exist what we often call a radical 'space', which has found diverse expression in the emergence of new social movements and electoral formations. This is the present day basis for reconstruction and regroupment.

But this 'space' is not homogenous and empty so that all we have to do is fill it. It is a highly unstable force field, as shown spectacularly by the conversion in less than three years of Rifondazione from lyrical movementism, at the time of Genoa and Florence, [23] to government coalition with Romano Prodi. This instability stems from the fact that the social mobilisations have suffered more defeats than they have won victories and that their link to the transformation of the political landscape remains overstretched. In the absence of meaningful social victories, the hope of the 'lesser evil' ('anything but Berlusconi-or Sarkozy, or Le Pen!') moves, for lack of real change, to the electoral terrain where the weight of institutional logic remains decisive (in France, that of plebiscitary presidentialism and a particularly anti-democratic electoral system). That's why the symmetry of the happy medium, between an opportunist and a conservative

danger is a false perspective: they don't carry the same weight. We must know how to dare to take risky decisions (the most extreme example being that of the October insurrection)-but we must also know how to weigh up the risk and calculate the chances if we are to avoid pure adventurism. As the great dialectician Pascal said, we are already committed-we must wager. Yet racegoers know that a bet of two to one is small time, and that a bet of a thousand to one, though it may hit the jackpot, is a desperate throw. The margin is between the two. Daring too has its reasons.

The evolution from right to left of currents like Rifondazione or the Linkspartei remains fragile (even reversible) for the very reason that the effects of social struggle on the field of political representation remain limited. It depends in part on the presence and weight within them of revolutionary organisations or tendencies.

There are very general common factors. But over and beyond these, conditions vary enormously, depending on the specific history of the workers' movement (for instance, whether social democracy is totally hegemonic or whether there subsist important communist parties). It also depends on the balance of forces within the left. Apparatuses are determined not only by ideology, but by social logics. They cannot be shifted by whispering in the ears of their leaders, but only by modifying the real balance of forces.

The perspective of a 'new force' remains an algebraic formula for now (this was true for us before 1989-91 and is even truer since). Translating it into practice cannot be mechanically deduced from formulae as vague and general as 'the broad party' or 'regroupment'. We are only at the start of a process of reconstruction. What counts in the approach to this is our programmatic compass and strategic aim. This is one condition that will allow us to

Strategy

discover the organisational mediations we need and to take calculated risks. That way we avoid throwing ourselves headlong into some impatient adventure and dissolving ourselves into the first ephemeral combination that comes along. Organisational formulae are in reality very variable, depending on whether at issue is a new mass party (like the PT in Brazil in the 1980s, though this is an unlikely pattern in Europe), minority splits from a hegemonic social democracy, or yet again parties that we might previously have termed centrist (Rifondazione five years ago), or a coalition of revolutionary currents (as in Portugal). This last hypothesis remains, however, the most likely for countries such as France, where there is a long tradition of organisations like the CP or the far left and where, without a really powerful social movement, for them simply to merge in the short or medium term is difficult to imagine.

But, in every case, reference to a common programmatic background, far from being something that obstructs future reconstruction, is on the contrary its precondition. Strategic and tactical questions can then be prioritised so that we are not torn apart because of this or that electoral outcome. We can distinguish the political base on which organising open theoretical debate makes sense. We can assess which compromises allow us to forge ahead and which pull us back. We can adjust to forms of organisational existence (whether to be a tendency in a shared party, part of a front, etc.), depending on our allies and how their dynamic fluctuates (from right to left or left to right).

Daniel Bensaïd is one of France's most prominent Marxist philosophers and has written extensively. He is a leading member of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International).

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Explanatory Notes

a: Alba - the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean, proposed by Chavez. Alca - the Free Trade Area of the Americas, proposed by the US.

b: MIR - Chilean Movement of the Revolutionary Left.

c: The remote region of China run by the Chinese Communists from the mid-1930s to their taking of Beijing in 1949.

d: The leader of the urban resistance in Cuba, killed in 1958 shortly before the victory of the revolution.

e: The boat from which the group of guerrillas led by Castro landed in Cuba at the end of 1956.

f: PRT - Revolutionary Workers Party, an Argentinian section of the Fourth International with a guerrilla group, the ERP.

g: A guerrilla group formed from a split in Students for a Democratic Society, led by Bernadine Dohn and Mark Rudd.

h: A French Maoist organisation formed in 1969.

i: Serge July was editor of the daily Liberation from 1974 to 2006, steering it from Maoism to the neoliberal 'centre-left'; Alain Geismar, secretary of the lecturers' SNE-Sup union during the events of May 1968, then a Maoist, now Inspector General of Education.

j: Antoine Artous-editor of the LCR's theoretical journal Critique Communiste. Bensaïd is referring to Artous's article in that journal, translated as 'The LCR and the Left: Some Strategic Questions' in the International Socialist Tendency's International Discussion Bulletin 7 (January 2006), www.istendency.net

k: ie of a combination of parliament and workers' councils.

l: A body of around 50 people nominated from the political parties, the Sandinista defence committees, the unions, professional associations and private enterprise organisations.

m: Communists who broke with Stalinism in the late '60s and '70s to embrace left wing parliamentarianism.

n: Norberto Bobbio - a left of centre Italian political philosopher.

o: Latin phrase - 'A god from a machine', ie sudden emergence of a solution from nowhere.

p: Albert Treint - leader of the pro-Zinoviev wing of the French Communist Party in the mid-1920s.

q: Ruth Fischer-leader of the ultra-left in the German Communist Party in the early and mid-1920s. She later became a fervent cold warrior.

r: By members of the DS current which is part of the Fourth International.

s: The position taken by a leading member of DS.

t: Right wing German legal theorist of the inter-war years, joined Nazi Party.

u: Term used by the Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács in 1922.

NOTES

[1] They are available on the website of the ESSF (Europe solidaire sans frontières). Texts by Artous and Alex Callinicos are translated in the International Discussion Bulletin of the International Socialist Tendency at www.istendency.net

[2] This was Stathis Kouvelakis's emphasis in 'The Triumph of the Political', International Socialism 108 (Autumn 2005)

[3] Alex Callinicos, *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto* (Cambridge, 2003)

[4] I shall go no further on this aspect of the question. It is simply a reminder (see in this respect the theses proposed in the debate organised by Das Argument).

[5] Durand appears to attribute to us a 'stagist view of social change' and 'a temporality of political action centred exclusively on the preparation of the revolution as a decisive moment' (to which he opposes 'an altermondialist and Zapatista historical time' ???!), see Critique Communiste 179. For a detailed critique of John Holloway's approach, see Daniel Bensaïd, *Un monde à changer* (Paris, Textuel 2006); Planète altermondialiste (Textuel, 2006), and in articles in *Contretemps*.

[6] In the debate about the programme in the Communist International up till its sixth congress.

[7] See Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Gramsci', *New Left Review* 100, 1977.

[8] See the debates around the report on the German Revolution at the fifth congress of the Communist International

[9] See Giacomo Marramao, *Il Politico e le trasformazioni*, and the pamphlet *Stratégies et partis*.

[10] As Antoine Artous reminds us in his article in Critique communiste.

[11] Despite the simplified myth of the foco, notably in Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution* (London, 1967).

[12] 'The strategy for victory', interview by Marta Harnecker. Asked about the date on which the insurrection was called, Ortega replied: 'Because a whole series of more and more favourable objective conditions arose: the economic crisis, the currency devaluation, the political crisis. And because after the September events we realised that it was necessary to combine simultaneously and within the same strategic space the rising of the

masses at a national level, the offensive of the military forces at the front and the national strike in which the employers were involved or in practice acquiesced. If we had not combined these three strategic factors simultaneously and in the same strategic space, victory would not have been possible. On several occasions there had been a call for a national strike, but it had not been combined with the mass offensive. The masses had already risen, but the rising had not been combined with strike action and took place at a time when the military capacity of the vanguard was too weak. And the vanguard had already delivered several blows to the enemy but without the presence of the other two factors.'

[13] Mario Payeras, *Los días de la selva* ('Days of the Jungle', Monthly Review Press, 1983) and *El trueno en la ciudad* ('The Thunder in the city', 1987).

[14] Mario Payeras, *Los días de la selva* ('Days of the Jungle', Monthly Review Press, 1983) and *El trueno en la ciudad* ('The Thunder in the city', 1987).

[15] This is notably the theme of recent texts by Balibar.

[16] The debate about non-violence in Rifondazione comunista's theoretical review (Alternative) is certainly not without a bearing on its present course.

[17] Notably Mandel's, in his polemics against the eurocommunists' theses. See his book in the Maspero little collection and above all his interview in Critique communiste.

[18] The experience of the participatory budget at the Rio Grande do Sol state level offers many concrete examples in this respect: credit allocation, ranking of priorities, territorial sharing of collective supplies, etc.

[19] It may be worth coming back to a discussion of this notion of a united front, or a fortiori the anti-imperialist united front which some revolutionaries in Latin America have made flavour of the month, in the light of the evolution of social formations, of the role and composition of political parties, etc.

[20] At stake here, as far as the orientation in Brazil is concerned, was a conception of the Fourth International and its relationship to the national sections. But this question goes beyond the context of this text.

[21] See Carl Schmitt, *La Dictature* (Paris, 1990).

[22] By 'traditional' does Sitel mean communist parties or, more broadly, social democratic parties whose aim is the conquest of governmental power through parliamentary means?

[23] See the book by Fausto Bertinotti, *Ces idées qui ne meurent jamais* (Paris, Le temps des Cerises, 2001), and critical approach to it (which appeared at the time of the ESF in Florence) in Daniel Bensaïd, *Un monde à changer* (Paris, Textuel, 2003).

Environment

Official: Capitalism is killing our planet!

Socialist Resistance



The report of UN's International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on global warming recently published in Paris has changed the terms of the debate on this issue. It is the most extensive study to date and is the first a series of reports to be published this year. Previous IPCC reports (this is the fourth such report) have provided the 'official' benchmark for the debates on global warming and climate change.

The conclusion of this latest report is that global warming will have a far more destructive impact than the IPCC had previously predicted and that it will come in a shorter period of time. The evidence for global warming, it says, is now "unequivocal" and is "almost certainly" [i.e. greater than 95%] a result of human activity.

It concludes that the "anthropogenic signal" - the visible signs of human influence on the climate - has now emerged not just in global average surface temperatures, but in global ocean temperatures and ocean heat content. The IPCC points out that recent changes are far above the range of natural temperature variability over the past 650,000 years

To date, greenhouse gasses have caused global temperatures to rise by 0.6C. The report points out that the most likely outcome of continuing rises in greenhouses gases will be to make the planet a further 3C hotter by 2100, although ominously the report acknowledges that rises of from 2C- 4.5C are now almost inevitable and that rises up to 6.4C could be experienced.

The report points out that 12 of the past 13 years were the warmest since records began; glaciers, snow cover and permafrost have decreased in both hemispheres. Sea levels are currently rising at the rate of almost 2 mm a year.

The report also found that rising global temperatures will erode the planet's natural ability to absorb man-made CO2. This could lead to CO2 concentrations in the atmosphere rising by a further 44 per cent, causing global average temperatures to increase by an additional 1.2C by 2100.

It consequently predicts that the frequency of devastating storms will increase dramatically.

Sea levels will rise over the century by around half a metre, deserts will spread; oceans become acidic, and deadly heatwaves will become more prevalent. Parts of Africa, Asia, South America and southern Europe could be made uninhabitable. Central London will be under water by the end of the century.

The impact will be catastrophic, forcing hundreds of millions to flee their devastated homelands, particularly in tropical, low-lying areas, creating waves of immigrants whose movements will strain the economies of even the richest countries.

The chilling thing about the IPCC report is that all its conclusions are on the lowest common denominator basis. It is the work of several thousand climate experts who have widely differing views about how greenhouse gases will have their effect. Some think they will have a major impact, others a lesser role. Only points that were considered indisputable won acceptance. It is therefore an overall conservative document.

In a sharp rebuff to those who continue to argue natural variation in the sun's output is the real cause of climate change, the IPCC says that in fact. "These changes took place at a time when non-anthropogenic forcing factors (i.e. the sum of solar and volcanic forcing) would be expected to have produced cooling, not warming". It concludes that mankind's CO2 emissions over the past 250 years since the industrial revolution have had five times more effect on the climate than any fluctuations in solar radiation.

The report marks a decisive change in the debate on climate change from what is the cause of global warming, which is now resolved, to what is the solution to it.

In fact socialists and environmental campaigners will not be surprised at the reports findings. Many will have already reached conclusions which go beyond its cautious conclusions. They will, however, be strengthened by the fact that the IPCC has shifted the debate in their direction.

What the report, or the IPCC, or the UN does not and will not offer, however, is a viable solution to the problem. Their answer will be green capitalism achieved through market solutions such as carbon trading. Yet it is already clear that the needs of people and planet cannot be squared with capitalism's relentless expansion for profit (made worse in its current neo-liberal form).

There is an urgent need for global, statutory cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. Most campaigners see a 90 per cent cut in emissions by 2030, alongside major infrastructure changes and massive investments in renewables and energy efficiency by governments as essential if global warming is to be halted. Yet the only treaty agreed so far has been the Kyoto Protocol's paltry consensual 5 per cent. It's principal mechanism, carbon trading, has already failed and emissions continue to rise.

On the contrary the time has long gone when market mechanisms can have any real effect on this situation. We have to struggle for a different system, based on social and ecological needs. One which we ourselves control and plan democratically, rather than leave to the dictates of the market. Only eco-socialist planning can provide the framework for the kind of changes which are necessary to create a long term future for life on this planet.

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

Cuba Discussion

Cuban Reality Beyond Fidel

Interview with Samuel Farber



Cuban Communist youth

Against the Current: *Your book was written, as you explain there, as part of a discussion on the impending post-Castro future of Cuba. We'll get to that; but first I wanted to ask how you perceived the glee of the U.S. right wing and Bush administration when they thought Fidel was on his deathbed or had already died. It was rather grotesque, wasn't it?*

Samuel Farber: In fact this was totally to be expected. They had been salivating about the possible restoration of capitalism - especially the rightwing Cuban exiles - and felt that without Fidel Castro this prospect would be more viable. All the more interest, then, in the U.S. government "transition" plans and commissions and discussion among right-wing Cuban economists about what they're going to do in Cuba.

ATC: *The attitude was what I would call "vulturistic."*

SF: Yes, there was this grotesque spectacle of people honking their horns on the streets in Miami. But that's not important; what matters are these U.S. government commissions propelled by certain elite Cuban-American and U.S. circles.

They aren't really interested in building a popular movement of the right wing - that's not where it's at in 2006. The exiles' focus is on making money in Miami. But of course, right-wing exile organizations will do everything they can to shape the transition in Cuba...

ATC: *You mean, through U.S.-promoted schemes that have been publicized recently for massive privatization and economic neoliberalism?*

SF: That obviously sounds like fantasy in the absence of an (unlikely) U.S. military occupation of Cuba. But not when you see it in the context of how the people on this side of the Gulf of Mexico might ally with circles in Cuba, especially

people today in the Cuban government who are closet neo-liberals and who may surface in the transition. Such a likely alliance would create a new political map that would be unprecedented in the almost 50 years of U.S. attempts to overthrow the Cuban government.

The Wall Street Journal had an article a couple of weeks ago (November 15, 2006) on a number of Cuban exile economists working as functionaries for the International Monetary Fund, who were working on Cuba on their own time. One of them, Ernesto Hernández Catá, was quoted as saying he would be happy to work for a "Cuban Deng," referring of course to Deng Xiaoping's capitalist program in China.

ATC: *In other words, democracy and political freedom don't have much to do with it.*

SF: Of course not. The bottom line for them is a turn to capitalism and the market.

Rewriting History?

ATC: *Where does the argument in your book about the Cuban Revolution come in?*

SF: My book is only oriented to one aspect of the transition, the political and ideological components. In the context of a transition in Cuba, the interpretation of the revolution will involve a rewriting of history.

In the case of Russia, there were always people who were critical

of Russian Communism all the way back to the 1917 Revolution itself. This became very strengthened by the collapse of the Soviet Union; it became the fashion to rewrite the entire history. So I'm not engaging in rocket science to suggest that there will be similar efforts around Cuba.

For example, there will be arguments that the pre-1959 Cuban economy was sufficiently developed not to require a revolution; or that the confrontation with the United States could have been resolved through negotiation. [Farber argues in *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered* that the conflict was not based on misunderstandings or anti-Communist paranoia, but fundamentally rooted in the structures of U.S. imperialism in Latin America - ed.]

This concept (of reconciliation) was very much suggested by Philip Bonsal, the U.S. ambassador to Cuba immediately after the Revolution. He had literally moved from La Paz, Bolivia to Havana, having successfully helped to contain the Bolivian Revolution of the 1950s.

Bonsal was a very smooth and respectful professional diplomat. His whole approach was precisely to come to terms with the liberal right-wing of the Cuban revolutionary government, which did exist although it wasn't nearly as strong as it had been in Bolivia. So I expect, in the context of a Cuban transition, that a lot of

Samuel Farber was interviewed by phone on November 28 by David Finkel from the ATC editorial board.

history will be rewritten; and the analysis in my book might be useful to people who will try to build a revolutionary and democratic alternative.

ATC: *What do you mean by a revolutionary and democratic alternative?*

SF: Essentially you have a Soviet-type system in Cuba, a one-party state without workers' control, freedom to organize trade unions or any other independent organization of blacks and women for example, or free speech and other democratic gains.

The pattern of post-Communist transition is the introduction of capitalism into this undemocratic setup. This is the only way I can foresee capitalism being introduced into Cuba, whether in the outright dictatorial form of China, or in the Russian style; i.e. some cosmetic democratic trappings but very little of the substance of democracy. It would take some form of authoritarian suppression of trade union and political rights.

The revolutionary and democratic alternative would mean organizing people from below in Cuba, first to protect themselves, then to build on that to reshape Cuban society in a collective but democratic form. I'm well aware that the elements for that alternative are not strong in Cuba right now. But I hope to make a contribution to the struggle to win over people to the view that this is the only

Cuba

truly progressive way to go in a transitional situation.

ATC: *What kind of reception have you been getting for the book and your analysis?*

SF: The book has been out about nine months now. Except in several socialist journals, mostly in our anti-Stalinist sector of the left, it hasn't been mentioned or reviewed at all in the general media. The only exception was the chance I got to make a full presentation in the book review channel of CSPAN. This was a nationwide broadcast that was repeated several times. As for academic journals, it's perhaps early to say since they operate on a much longer schedule. But I hope there will be an echo beyond our corner of the left.

ATC: *There's a term you use in the book without explanation, "elective affinity," which you apply to the attraction between Castro's early populist caudillo politics and his eventual adoption of Soviet-style Communism. Can you say a little about this?*

SF: Yes, I should have explained this terminology for an audience outside the social sciences. "Elective affinity" means a kind of inherent mutual attraction of people or forces from different origins that are compatible, and may eventually join with each other. It may seem more profound than it really is. I took it directly from Max Weber [the 19th century German "father of sociology" - ed.], who got it from Goethe [German classical poet and dramatist].

Differing ideologies may have areas of compatibility that facilitate somebody moving from one to the next. Weber uses that notion a lot. [The most famous example is the "elective affinity" between Puritan ethics and rising capitalist business practices in 17th century England - ed.]

What's After Fidel?

ATC: *Let's get back to the actual Cuban situation. What are your*

thoughts on Fidel Castro's condition and what can be observed from the Cuban leadership's behavior during this uncertain period?

SF: First, I refuse to speculate on what's physically wrong with Fidel Castro; I've learned from hard experience that you don't talk about things you know nothing about. But there will be an early test by the end of this week, marking the 50th anniversary of the Granma landing [1] and a belated celebration of his 80th birthday.

If he doesn't show up at all, it would suggest that his condition has deteriorated, whether because his life is in danger or because he looks even worse than during his last appearance. He'd already said that he's lost 40 pounds. [2]

Right now, however, the situation is most unclear because Fidel is neither in nor out. He's passed the running of the country to Raúl Castro, but he's been receiving visitors and on the phone. So whatever plans Raúl might have for a departure from Fidel's strategy will not take place while his older brother is still around.

The country went on a high state of alert in the days subsequent to July 31. A couple of ministers have been fired but that can't necessarily be attributed to Raúl as such, so there's really no news so far.

There are many indications, however, of Raúl Castro's outright support for China's direction. Visiting Shanghai in April 2005, Raúl said: There are people who are worried about the Chinese model - I'm not; China today proves another world is possible.

I find this comment obscene, in appropriating the slogan from Seattle and the global justice movement to promote the Chinese model. But it's more than statements alone: there's the role of the Cuban army, Raúl's stronghold, as a big player

in joint enterprises, including the tourism industry.

You have a number of army officers who are businessmen in uniform, deeply involved in transactions with international capitalism through the Cuban armed forces. The military has also been involved in what they call "enterprise improvement" [3], i.e. organizational efficiency, the kind of economic experimentation that would be consistent with the Chinese model.

Raúl of course will not move a finger so long as Fidel is active. The question will be what kind of forces will exist in Cuba both for and against this kind of direction. I believe those forces exist in embryo. So the whole relation with Washington and Miami will be entangled with the emergence of that kind of "party."

ATC: *In short, you see the impetus for this kind of capitalism coming from the existing institutions, especially the military, rather than from existing small enterprise?*

SF: The existing small enterprise sector in Cuba has been sharply reduced since the concessions of the 1990s. It was never that important; at one point there were up to 150,000 people licensed to operate very small independent enterprises (e.g. beauty parlors, small family restaurants, the so-called "paladares"), but now fewer.

I see it [the impetus toward authoritarian capitalism] coming from people in the army and outside civilians who are engaged in joint-venture capitalism. It's interesting here to contrast what Raul Castro said in Shanghai in April 2005 (cited above) with an interview with Fidel Castro by Ignacio Ramonet, Spanish-born editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*. When the topic of China came up, Fidel's answer was pure evasion.

Politically of course Fidel wasn't about to openly criticize China, but he certainly didn't praise it.

So within the Cuban regime there's clearly this difference over the Chinese model. But in pointing to tendencies, one can't predict events that will be brought about by a combination of internal and external forces.

There will be people in the apparatus who will resist these changes, people who are called "Talibanes" (i.e. ideological fundamentalists) such as Felipe Perez Roque, the foreign minister, who was essentially Fidel Castro's chief of staff and became foreign minister when the previous one got into trouble. He's young, in his forties.

But I must caution that there are elements of speculation in all these things.

ATC: *On a possibly related subject - though I can't really say whether they're connected - some recent writings of Celia Hart have attracted the attention of the left because of her favorable references to Trotsky. Do you see her work as part of the internal debate on Cuba's future, or what else should we make of it?*

SF: First, what Celia Hart Santamaria has written is overwhelmingly for the foreign left. Very few people in Cuba know about it. That aside, her "Trotskyism" is a peculiar sort that says nothing about workers' democracy. It's a "Trotskyism" that worships Fidel Castro and talks about the expansion of the revolution without talking about the question of democracy in the revolution.

There's nothing in her writing about the post-1933 Trotsky, who emphasized the importance of workers' democracy and moved away from the theory of the one-party state. I would submit that Trotskyism minus workers' democracy is very, very close to Third-Period, left-wing Stalinism. In other words, she's projecting the line of a more militant Stalinism as opposed to the Popular Front kind.

Cuba Discussion

"The Battle of Ideas" and the Capitalist Transformation of the Cuban State

Manuel Paz Ortega



Celia Hart clearly opposes any kind of capitalist transformation in Cuba. So she would line up with the hardliners in the context of the existing regime. She has talked about the dangers of capitalist restoration in Cuba, without mentioning names.

But there's another interesting group of people in Cuba who aren't well known, whose parents aren't famous like Celia Hart's (Haydee Santamaria and Armando Hart), who are more seriously interested in Trotsky, who have written in journals such as *Temas* which circulates among intellectuals and academics.

These are journals that have developed as critical a voice as you can get in Cuba without touching a number of sacred cows such as Fidel Castro and the single-party state. In this milieu there are writers like Ariel Dacal, who have written about Trotsky - and they don't say a word about Cuba.

That's the irony: They can say a lot about why the Soviet Union collapsed, and in that connection they can bring up Trotsky and questions about bureaucracy and the democratic alternatives to it. But you can tell they're really writing about Cuba although they don't mention it. Paradoxically, that's what shows they're serious and far more relevant to our democratic revolutionary point of view.

This article was taken from the recent issue of Against the Current, journal of the US socialist organisation Solidarity. See their website at <http://www.solidarity-us.org/atc>.

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[1] the beginning of the guerilla struggle in Cuba - ed.

[2] The day following this interview, Cuban media announced that Fidel Castro would not be attending the celebrations - ed.

[3] perfeccionamiento empresarial

The present state of Cuban society is critical. [1] This is only palpable after having lived for a certain time in Cuba and in any case it is very difficult to come to this conclusion without possessing a level of information to which the average Cuban does not have access. In other words, to construct a reasonably serious picture of what is happening in Cuba at present is an extremely delicate process of social analysis, because of the lack of information and its manipulation by the state.

To try and construct this picture Cubans have no alternative other than generalization. However, the mechanisms by which Cubans can obtain statistical information are extremely primitive and difficult to apply: it is a question of personal experience (fairly inoffensive without the necessary link with other practices); of the detailed analysis of the information which appears in the mass media (extremely reduced and controlled); of free comments, which have a real basis in fact, which travel from mouth to mouth, are born of collective or individual experiences; and finally of jokes, another kind of comment which may or may not have a basis in reality and whose verification is hypothetical, but which always provokes, on certain topical subjects, the most dissimilar reactions among the population, going from disinterest to fear.

The Cuban people does not possess many valuable tools to resist the rubbishy information, recycled and recyclable, that the state "offers it". One could reply to that by saying that the different political regimes that exist do the same thing, and that it is not a reason to treat the Cubans differently from the other citizens of the world. But there exist two powerful reasons for opposing these two phenomena:

First of all, citizens must fight to have alternative means of information which enable their experiences to be listened to by

others, within their society or in the world, in order to counter the hegemonic action of states.

Secondly, the Cuban state has historically proclaimed itself to be socialist. But socialism without plurality of criteria and without freedom of discussion, without the freedom to organize debates, not only theoretical (the freedom which comes from tolerance for the concepts and the ideas of the other and not the abstract freedom of liberal theoreticians), is only a hollow term. Such a socialism does not even deserve to be looked at, so much is its organization so rigid, this rigidity that the hegemonic "socialist" sectors have taken the responsibility of producing.

To revalorize this last criteria, manifestly forgotten by those who proclaim themselves "Friends of the Cuban people", we propose to briefly reflect on one aspect of present-day Cuba, an aspect that is indispensable in order to produce this picture that we were talking about. This is the "Battle of Ideas", which has already broadly affected Cuban society and which is viewed positively by many people in the world.

From the Defense of the Rights of a Child...

Five years after it started, the Battle of Ideas is a political operation of the Cuban state which aimed, in December 1999, to maintain in power the historic bureaucracy of the "revolution" through a deepening of the

cultural and media struggle against American imperialism, and whose principal object is the Cuban people.

Like any political operation, the Battle of Ideas began to function with a real fact: the defense of the rights of a Cuban child to continue to live with his family in Cuba. What interests us here is not the detailed examination of the saga of Elian nor how it was finally possible to win. We just want to underline some points.

First of all, the case of Elian, independently of its real humanitarian basis, is an example of a family quarrel into which both international law and the particular law of the states concerned had to intervene.

Secondly, both the American state, through the intransigent voluntary Cuban exiles in Miami, and the Cuban state ignored the preceding idea and engage in a struggle that was mediatized and quasi-legal - in fact, the adventure ended by the entry of the forces of the FBI and by the personal decision of President Bill Clinton to resolve the conflict. It should be noted that the marches and the protests of the Cuban people would have been useless if instead of Clinton we had been faced with Bush.

Thirdly, the Elian case signified for the Cuban state a victory without precedent on the international level, which reinforced the legitimacy of the regime and helped it to find a

way to deepen the ideological struggle against Yankee imperialism and to create new methods of politico-cultural indoctrination, by reinforcing in the consciousness of the Cuban population the necessity of the existence of an apostolic Welfare State.

Finally, the battle for Elian came at the time of a complicated political situation for the Cuban state. It could no longer manage to mobilize the people (for a long time already the principal personalities of the establishment had appealed in the first instance to the confidence of the people in its leaders as the main arm of legitimacy of the system) while immigration, legal or illegal, aiming for an improvement in personal well-being, was becoming a social project because of the increase of the number of immigrants. The case of Elian played an important role in changing the discourse of the Cuban state on immigration: it had to recognize that the Cuban emigrants were leaving the country in search of material improvements.

... to the Battle of Ideas

After the outcome of the Elian case, the Cuban state and its Commander-in-chief Fidel Castro began to formulate "propositions" (impositions) of cultural, social and economic development in order to define the future of the nation. However it also became obvious that it was just a question of attempting to justify a struggle that had been undertaken a long time ago and which had only one objective: the maintaining in power of the "revolutionary" bureaucratic elite and of the new managers and the recycling of the methods of state manipulation and repression, now covered by material and cultural novelties proper to a patriarchal Welfare State.

It is then that the Battle of Ideas was born. This political operation produced the whole army - that is the term - of political cadres and an ideology aimed at carrying out a project which, if we take seriously the

declaration of the main leaders of the state, is the regime's last card. If the Battle of Ideas fails - the regime knows this and so that it will not happen it uses all its strength to proclaim daily the invincible nature of the attempt - it is Cuban socialism which will fail.

In order to understand the importance of this last effort of the historic Cuban bureaucracy it is necessary to study its principles, its postulates and the means for accomplishing them.

Modernizing the Means of Communication

In order to popularize the Battle of Ideas it was necessary to create a logistical basis for an optimal functioning. It was necessary to adopt the political offensive to the new technologies of the period and the Cuban state recognized that the number of units who were receiving existing political signals was insufficient. So it was indispensable to make television available to the largest possible number of people.

That is how the idea of Panda televisions emerged. The Cuban government started from an agreement signed with the Peoples Republic of China, which undertook to sell at reasonable prices a million television sets of a high technological level. In order to distribute them, the Cuban state again used the distribution mechanism of the 1970s and the 1980s: the delivery of household electrical appliances to deserving workers. In addition, by using the monopoly that it had over the majority of services, it withdrew TV sets from sale in the shops operating with foreign currency and replaced them by Pandas at a high price (around US\$450). Now it is impossible to find a million vanguard workers, and the shops selling goods for foreign currency quickly had to lower the price of television sets by 50 per cent, because of the refusal of the population to invest so much money in an apparatus which they did not have a guarantee (many people justified their refusal by the

logical pretext of distrust towards an unknown brand, which reflects the existence of consumerist reflexes).

The Internet has also played a fundamental role over recent years in the activity of the Cuban state. Its use in the "battle" for Elian was indispensable and after that the Cuban government became conscious of the possibilities of exploiting it by creating its own numerical arms and by controlling its use by citizens. At present Internet can only be used by enterprises and by people designated by the state. However the population gets round these rules and connects itself clandestinely to telephone lines, and people obtain computers thanks to travel abroad for their work or as a present from state functionaries.

The Illusion of Culture

The access of the population to what is called "integral general culture" is one of the essential components of the Battle of Ideas. According to the Cuban government and the social and mass organizations, this term defines the average level of culture that citizens must possess.

Obviously it is useless to say that all the political and mass organizations, like all the institutions in the country, must try to attain these objectives at any price, without thinking about the ideological and cultural price that this campaign could imply for Cubans. The latter, without saying so, do not forget that the other campaigns of the same kind were a complete failure (the media campaign for the harvest of ten million tons of sugar; the educational campaign for a complete identification of the Cuban population with real Soviet socialism, just to quote two examples). In order to obtain the final objective of integral general culture the Cuban state has put it in place a series of cultural and scientific mechanisms which, while surpassing it by their advanced logistics, do not constitute a substantial break with the

modern philosophy of progress, and at the end of the day in no way contribute to creating the New Man which has been the objective of the Cuban political leadership since the 1960s.

In 2004, in underdeveloped Cuba, there were only 4 television channels. Up until the last years of the last century we only had two. The television programmes have essentially been kept as they were, except for one important aspect; if they have increased in number, but not yet in quality, it is thanks to the Battle of Ideas.

Ideological Recruitment of Youth

The new "emergentes" projects [2] of training "professionals" in health and education have as their objective the improvement of the situation of these indispensable services in Cuban society, something which has become complicated since the beginning of the 1990s.

During those years there began a process of desertion of the sectors of health and education by professionals, which provoked a big crisis. In the case of health, the solution was guaranteed; given the acceptance that this profession has always had in Cuban society it was enough to increase the number of places in the first year of studies in order to rapidly resolve the problem.

However, the decision was well thought out politically, because it began by a campaign to get young people to study general medicine. Thus we saw the appearance of Family Doctors, a positive attempt which obtained success in preventive medicine. But in the last few years the population has complained greatly of the low quality of the services of these students who were trained in massive numbers, without the same demanding criteria as in previous decades. That is also the case for nurses and health technicians (therapists, physiotherapists, etc.). Thousands of young people coming from the horde of those

Discussion

who did not attain the level necessary for university studies form armies of "emergentes" specialists in medicine who are helping the government to make up for the lost time.

In the case of education the problem is more serious. The same phenomenon is taking place but in other forms: the creation of "emergentes teachers" in several disciplines with the implicit aim of stopping the process of pauperization of teachers and of the educational system.

According to the government, the "emergentes teachers" have been established to enable young people from every social level to have access to university-type careers and thus to make society benefit from the new socio-cultural projects and progress of the revolution. At the present time the basis of this idea is becoming palpable: the crisis of the education and health services in Cuba; and another no less important reason, the existence of hundred of thousands of young people who do not find their place in the present society, neither in the education system nor in the labour market.

This is a result of two factors. First of all, of the logic of the creation of elites who were to be the scientific vanguard of society. So the universities produced elite citizens and all pupils could not enter them, whereas they could be trained through a socialized and general education system.

Secondly, in present-day Cuban society there are no attractive jobs on offer for young people because the state refuses to increase the salaries for a big majority of jobs (through fear of inflation).

Because of this, young people increasingly turn to jobs which bring them benefits and access to a higher standard of living; in tourism and small private activities in services and the production of consumer articles, both industrial and agricultural. So since the end of the 1990s thousands of young people had

been excluded from work and from the Cuban educational system. This is "normal" in any society but in Cuban socialism, where we can suppose that modern (capitalist) rationality does not operate because it is a new society, or a society which is fighting to become new, the idea that thousands of young people find themselves in the streets with nothing to do and that it is the state's fault is inconceivable.

So the state is creating formulas to keep them occupied: the urgency of new educational and work projects, which enable it to control the young people's exuberance and temporarily resolve the problem of the lack of available professional people.

But the most extraordinarily absurd idea of these plans is the creation of a new kind of teachers and social workers over the last three or four years. Young people of 18 and 19 years old are transformed into social workers with only one year of preparation beforehand in sociology, psychology, history, and... a lot of politics. On the other hand, "integral" teachers in the colleges - that is teachers of Spanish, natural sciences, history and geography, in one single person - are produced in thousands to "educate" Cuban children and adolescents in the best Cuban socialist tradition.

The new social workers, these "doctors of the spirit", as the government has christened them, are responsible for identifying and transmitting to the appropriate institutions the cases of families or individuals who need immediate and reliable social assistance. However there are very many complaints about the uselessness of these badly prepared young people, who are entrusted with responsibilities that even the best professionals have difficulty in discharging.

Once again, we are not denying that there exist young people with enough of a vocation to take on the big responsibilities that they are being given, nor that many of them sincerely believe in what they are doing.

But taking account of all factors we can come to the conclusion that this manoeuvre by the Cuban state is playing with the negative consequences brought about by the opening of the Cuban society to the outside. The idea is to co-opt these young people, who could represent a potential threat to the regime, by keeping them busy, which makes it possible to control them thanks to their subsequent insertion into the mass organizations in their place of work.

Preserving the Elites

What is involved is a long term project whose aim is to maintain the new political elites, the new leaders, the consolidation of Cuban "socialist power", the new leading figures in all the political practices on the island. The present political operation of the Cuban state is a thorough manipulation of the people - fundamentally of young people - so that they will accept without resistance the successors of the regime. This system teaches them to become careerist and to take more or less cynically what the state offers them, which enables the old nomenclatura to maintain a certain equilibrium and to guarantee the future. We can imagine that the young people trained in this context will later on support the initiatives of the Cuban state, because it will guarantee them a minimum of satisfaction, by working on their interests, their preoccupations, and their aspirations. And those who will have got into the train without thinking, unconsciously, will have to follow them because they have no other way out.

These are the most important postulates and the mechanisms of the Battle of Ideas. Perhaps some of the international friends of Cuba should become conscious of these reflections before giving their unconditional support to this project.

The Battle of Ideas is a mechanism of the Cuban government to dominate its citizens. We do not consider that we should submit uncritically to the hegemonic practices of the bureaucracy and the new

managers in Cuba, while both the former and the latter consider politics as a tool of careerism in order to maintain their jobs and their privileges at the price of the labour of the millions of citizens. We also consider that these state practices are trying to win the support of citizens by any means.

In the Cuban case the government is relying on the manipulation of humanist ideals and of the most elementary conceptions of justice in order to carry through its plans. Let us say it clearly: every state does it. The problem for Cuba is that the state is doing it from positions that seem to be on the left, whereas they are not.

For many people the Battle of Ideas is one more form of the fight against imperialism, by creating an alternative way of thinking. Nothing could be more mistaken: if it is a new form of struggle against North American imperialism, it has no other class objective than that of the state bureaucracy and the new managers. It is in no way creating a way of thinking that is alternative to capitalism; on the contrary it is completing and developing it by using the same mechanisms of domination as capitalism in the framework of a totalizing and alienating nationalism.

Manuel Paz Ortega is an intellectual in Cuba, writing under a pseudonym, who defines himself in terms of "libertarian socialism".

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[1] This document, "circulating among friends", was written before the illness of Fidel Castro and the passage of power to his brother Raul. We publish here a shortened translation of the original document.

[2] The term "emergente" (urgent) has an ambiguous double meaning which creates confusion. On the one hand, the state uses it to indicate urgency, that is, the birth of a new kind of professionals thanks to the project of the revolution to create a new society. But we can also understand by urgency the imperative need to create new specialists in order to satisfy the social needs for services as important as health and education, which are historic pillars of the practice and the ideology of the Cuban state.

Cuba Discussion

A rapid glance at the future

Aurelio Alonso



May Day in Revolution Plaza

Revolutionary socialist construction in Cuba has been carried out under the leadership of Fidel Castro for nearly half a century. For obvious biological reasons the personalities of the generation which led the struggle for power and established the bases of the new society will leave the scene in the fairly near future. The problem of the succession is not then a possibility; it is a fact which inexorably imposes itself.

Until recently this subject was avoided in Cuba, perhaps so as to avoid suspicions of illness emerging on the basis of such speculation. When we were asked what would happen in Cuba when Fidel was no more (a way of not mentioning death) we generally limited ourselves to ingenious and elliptical responses, or judgements which were hollow to the point of ridicule, to ensure that nothing would change, that all would continue as before, that Cuban society was totally prepared, that the "succession" was ready and that the party is immortal.

What is certain is that we have not taken enough time to reflect and still less to debate publicly this future; we Cubans, who live through this reality and must live through that which comes, we have left the debate in the hands of foreigners, who were not necessarily adversaries and were often concerned about the future of socialism, in Cuba and elsewhere. Once more then, on this subject as many others, a debate, primarily Cuban in its content, comes to us on the rebound.

The importance of the affair stems from the impact of such a fact for Cubans, for the road of construction of a society of equity and justice, of intense solidarity, proclaimed socialist, having been led for a half century in a clearly personalised fashion, as much concerning the general orientation of the project as the conjunctural decisions. An orientation which has been forced - by an implacable blockade - to carry

out strategic zigzags to guarantee its survival, to resist in the conditions of an austerity imposed on the population, under a permanent threat of aggression which becomes stronger at critical moments, thus restraining the capacities of ensuring the satisfaction of a great part of popular basic needs. It is not necessary to pursue this rosary to sketch out the socio-economic landscape the country has traversed. I try to allude here to concrete reality, not value judgements.

There are neither motives nor arguments to prognosticate that the Cuban socialist project will become unviable when Fidel is no more. Nonetheless his exit from the space of political decision taking will be the strongest shock that the leaders of Cuban socialism will have experienced. I think that nobody should doubt that and thus, without need of any other considerations, responses should not minimise the significance of this fact.

Concentration of leadership

When I am asked about this perspective, I respond that I cannot predict what will happen, but I can state what I would like to happen. I base myself now on this reflection, which I have had the opportunity to repeat, because it concerns this future which is linked to all the questions that I am going to deal with. .

The leadership of our revolutionary process (I do not wish to generalise here) is based on a double legitimacy. On the one hand the charismatic legitimacy (a category well defined at the theoretical level by Max Weber), based on the capacities and the consensus around a historic leadership, that the figure of Fidel embodies, and which is unique and cannot be passed on for various reasons, including the genius or talent of this leader. On the other hand, an institutional legitimacy, based on the political and legal instruments adopted since the mid-1970a and which were partially renovated at the beginning of the 1990s, even if they kept to a large extent the imprint of the structural and functional conception of the Soviet bureaucracy, with positive aspects but undoubtedly also with certain faults, which led to the death of socialism in such a powerful country.

Between these two legitimacies of organs of power it is, for obvious reasons, the charismatic leadership which has dominated the institutional aspect. For today the authority of the Commander in Chief (the only title which includes all the powers and which, from its formalisation during the restructuring of the military grades, should disappear with Fidel, if my memories are correct) is decisive and is questioned neither in the Political Bureau of the Communist Party, nor in the National Assembly of Popular

Power, nor inside the Council of State. The same goes obviously in the armed Forces, of which the head of state becomes Commander in Chief in wartime under all latitudes. Thus the decision-making organs, which are explicitly and intentionally collegial and which were thus conceived, are subject to the personal leadership.

Let us note, between parentheses, that many have noted the apparent equivocation according to which in the sphere of civil power a form stemming from a state of war predominates, whereas the country lives in peace. That implies that the country had been forced to live through the state of peace as if it was a state of war.

Such a concentration of the leadership has led to some errors (I am not capable of judging them), but has allowed a coherence of the revolutionary project, a continuity of consensus concerning sovereignty and the vitality of the ideals of social justice and solidarity, which after a hazardous itinerary have found their place and an appropriate echo on our continent. But the preservation of these gains and the development of new ones will demand, in my opinion, a change in the apparatus of power.

Ideally the effacement of the historic leadership of the first political level should lead to a transition of this form of leadership to a new relationship, in which collegial relations prevail over individual will concerning the taking of decisions and the conception of strategies. In fact, that is what the Constitution states: that the President is not at the head of

Discussion

the country, but chairs the work of the Council of State and that, when his proposals do not have majority support there, he should submit to the majority. Something similar should have taken place concerning the role of the head of state before the National Assembly.

That does not mean that the head of state should not legislate or that one cannot make pertinent institutional changes. Such changes would in no way mean the need to artificially implant the models of liberal democracy, but would stem from the specific demands of the system, based on an institutionalism which, insufficient as it is, has not yet given all that of which it disposes. For it amounts to an area where "outside advice" however well intentioned, contributes little.

The intervention of Fidel Castro at the Aula Magna of the University of Havana on November 17, 2006 impressed the audience, for it presented concerns which had not been previously made public. [1] They surely assail the great statesman, who knows that his days are numbered. The socialist experience born out of the October revolution has proved itself to be reversible. This catastrophe has dismantled the myth of its irreversibility. The epicentre of post-capitalism inside the world system has been disarmed (and the second nuclear power of the planet has been cast to the winds on the néolibéral ocean, pauperised and dependent).

Not surprising in this situation that the first preoccupation of Fidel turns around the reversibility of our own process, taking account of the fact that in Europe it is not only the experience and its conception which have failed, but that the defeat has affected socialism (and even the utopia around which the Bolshevik project was established). All that was supposed irreversible. And it is not that they have decided to do otherwise. No, they have abandoned. A catastrophe which has provoked a generalised crisis of the socialist paradigm. Not because it is

completed, but because obviously it is necessary to think otherwise and take account of the fact that socialism has proved itself reversible.

Democracy?

If this model has engendered the germs of its own destruction, any socialist experience can then engender them. Fidel believes that if the revolution cannot be destroyed from outside, it can scupper itself. And he indicates corruption as being at the centre of the evil which could bring about this destruction. I think he is right, but he has not said everything. I wonder moreover if the collapse of the Soviet system was, essentially, an effect of corruption, even if corruption was certainly present in the framework of the deformations. I believe that socialism can be damaged as much by bureaucracy and the lack of democracy as by corruption. And I am not referring there to electoralist systems, multi-party confrontations, campaigns of struggles, or alternation in the exercise of power. I speak of democracy, that we have not been capable of creating on Earth, although we believe we know all about it.

We have not created it under capitalism - what is of interest is that which has imposed itself historically - because democracy serves there as a support to the empire of the market and money, to the dynamics of enrichment which make what we call corruption constitute the substantial dynamic of reproduction and thus reduces the notion of corruption to the violation of its own rules of the game.

We have not created it in the socialist experiences, because efforts to allow to the people an effective participation in the decision-making mechanisms, laudable in certain cases, have been insufficient. Che noted that "the masses should have the possibility of leading their destiny, of deciding what would go to accumulation and what would go to consumption; economic technique should work with these choices; the consciousness of the masses will guarantee its implementation".

This is a long-term project, which we will not arrive at if, for example, corruption submerges us. For this reason we should not only consider corruption as an offence, but also as a moral problem. Because success in relation to an offence does not guarantee its suppression and the corrupted of tomorrow can take the place of the corrupted of today.

It is only to the extent of the construction of a society committed in a consensual manner to the transcendence of inequality, poverty, submission to the tyranny of capital that it will become obvious that democracy, as the power of the people, for the people and by the people is a political category which is only compatible with socialism, for it is already shown that - unlike capitalism - it cannot maintain itself without it.

We should accustom ourselves to thinking that Fidel will not have the time to find a practical solution to problems that will inevitably require time. It is very probable that the generations to come will regret the absence of his vision in facing these problems. We also, who have lived together with him, would have wished to find practical responses to several of the concerns that face us today. And I am sure that is also the case with him and that this justified anxiety is apparent in his speeches in recent years.

New situation, new challenges

But the most important thing in my opinion is to take account of the current scenario. To sum it up briefly: the collapse of socialisms created illusions inside the Empire. They collapsed rapidly and the world is beginning to experience another wave of transformations. This wave, which could be more promising than that which has led to the appearance of the bipolar world that we have known, has begun in Latin America with motors which coincide harmoniously with the Cuban project. This scenario has seen an opening to Fidel's Cuba and this Cuba of Fidel has, in many ways, helped what has also started in

America. The famous dictum of Margaret Thatcher - "there is no alternative" - used to justify the application of the neoliberal model, is now turned against its creators. Today there is no alternative for imperialism and for its centres of power it could be very difficult to accept even a different capitalism, and not only the progression of a reinvented socialism. Fidel Castro could not experience his reality in withdrawal, as a simple witness, nor would the world which is beginning to arise want him to.

The reconstruction of paradigms already allows new signs to emerge. No conception should be copied, no sovereignty should subject itself, no interest should be subordinated, and no leadership should be copied. We inherit an apprenticeship for a socialism different from everything previously experienced and Fidel, disposing of more experience than any other statesman in the area of escaping from traps and harassment, can still have things to contribute to us.

It is certain that for many years we have committed errors and that we will continue to do so in believing we know what socialism is. And also in believing we know what democracy is. And beyond that it is true that economics is far from being an exact science. The term "political economy" is not born out of caprice, which economists imbued with their science tend to forget, as they tend to depreciate the pertinence of the debate opposing the econometric criteria to the extra-economic criteria. [2] This is not a local disease of Cubans, nor even a specificity of socialism. John Kenneth Galbraith, who died recently at the age of 97, was not even proposed for the Nobel Prize in economics because his theories went too far from the narrowly economic framework, and this despite the quantity and importance of his writings and despite the fact that he was an adviser to three US presidents. But by chance, it appears that we are arriving at a consensus: it is the socialism of the 21st century that needs to be invented.

Cuba Discussion

The Cuban Revolution at the Crossroads

Jan Konrad

With all these insufficiencies Cuba's socialist society - even if this term expresses above all still what it aspires to be and not what it is - disposes of an intelligence, a know how (a "human capital" in the fashionable formulation) which is exceptional and decisive for the changes which are on the agenda for the continent. Also to conceive the future starting from a perspective which is political, economic, sociological and ethical.

None of this allows us to cease concerning ourselves with the conjuncture when Fidel is no more. But it will not be that imagined by the enemies of the revolution, more preoccupied, in truth, by the fact that he can remain alive than by his death. .

The article we reproduce here "was drawn up in response to a questionnaire presented to a group of Cuban researchers" writes the author, with a view to its publication under the title: "Cuba, the dilemmas of the future - a debate on Cuba on the basis of Fidel's speech to the University of Havana" (November 17, 2005), by the Cuban review "La Jiribilla". Subtitles, notes and headline are by IV.

Aurelio Alonso, philosopher and Cuban revolutionary militant, has undergone all the experiences of the Cuban critical left, from the review "Pensamiento Crítico" in the 1970s to that of the Centre for American Studies in the 1980-1990s. Both institutions suffered police and bureaucratic harassment while crystallising the best of the country's revolutionary thought. In 1994 he published, with Julio Carranza, "La economía cubana: ajustes con socialismo" ("The Cuban economy: adjustments and socialism") and in 1998, "Iglesia y política en Cuba revolucionaria" ("Church and politics in revolutionary Cuba").

NOTES

[1] In this speech, Fidel Castro said: "This revolution can destroy itself all alone and the only ones who cannot destroy it is them [the US, imperialism]. But we, we can destroy it and this will be our fault". He spoke of "tens of thousand of parasites who produce nothing and gain everything..." in Cuba.

[2] The author here alludes to the economic debate conducted by Che Guevara before he left Cuba, a debate for which the Cuban revolutionary invited notably the economists Ernest Mandel and Charles Bettelheim. The economic conceptions of Che were then abandoned under Soviet pressure

Since 1989 a very large part of the world press - and not only the newspapers that are linked to the "anti-Castroist" emigration in Miami - have regularly announced the end of the Castroist regime. Fidel Castro's hospitalization in the summer of 2006 has once again been the occasion of what must be described as disinformation.

Because 15 years after the implosion of the USSR and the strengthening of the US trade blockade which immediately followed it, in spite of the instantaneous ending of 85% of the foreign trade that Cuba had with the countries of so-called "really existing socialism", the society and the regime produced by the revolution of 1959 still survive. And they do so in spite of the political and economic pressure of imperialism and of the world market. In spite too of a serious degree of bureaucratization and worrying signs that certain bureaucratic sectors are aspiring to the restoration of capitalism, and despite poverty, shortages, and social differentiation.

What is at stake

But if the reports that are regularly published in the world press insist especially on the numerous mistakes and failures of the Cuban regime, it is not only because a big majority of the reporters are trying to understand a different society according to the criteria of capitalist society, it is also because this press, like capital which dominates the planet, is hoping for an end to the Cuban experience, because important things are at stake there.

Whereas capitalist relations of production have been re-established practically everywhere on the planet and the last barriers to the penetration of commodities are being removed, facilitating the realization of surplus value (that part of the value of labour that

capital appropriates for itself, but whose realization is only possible on condition of being able to sell everything that is produced), Cuba is still resisting. And this resistance encourages people to think what another world could be like... Because even if the Cuban system is bending under the pressure of the world market, it has not yet capitulated in the face of the absolute domination of the commodity.

The length of time that the Cuban experience has lasted is not without influence on the struggles in Latin America. Although in the whole world the offensive of capital against labour is provoking popular resistance, and although neo-liberal ideology is continuing to lose its legitimacy, it is only in Latin America - in Venezuela, in Bolivia, and most recently in Ecuador - that governments which result from the rejection of the neo-liberal model are talking not only of social transformations but also of ... "socialism of the 21st century".

Because in spite of its numerous faults, Cuba remains a model of reference on this continent where poverty continues to worsen. What is more, the emergence of governments that are breaking with imperialism in the three countries we have just mentioned loosens the stranglehold that imperialism has imposed on Cuba. The recent failures of US imperialism in Latin America and in particular the failure of its project of the Free Trade Area of the Americas are proof of this. And so is the

rehabilitation by the Venezuelan and Bolivian governments of the very idea of nationalization, after 20 years of absolute world domination of a model whose aim is to privatize everything.

It is nonetheless true that the survival of the system that came out of the Cuban revolution is something of a miracle. First of all, because Cuban resistance in the face of imperialism is rather like the mythical fight of David against Goliath. But also because Cuban society has undergone a process of bureaucratization, which the serious mistakes in orientation of the Castroist leadership have made worst.

An Economy in Crisis

Isolated by the imperialist economic blockade, the Cuban revolution had no other choice but to re-orient its economy towards the Soviet bloc. But this re-orientation had to bend to the demands of the Kremlin. First of all by imposing an economic model which excluded the establishment of collectivist relation of production, based on workers' self-management, the free cooperation of the producers and their democratic planning. Instead of which it was a centrally administered economy, leaving no space for the initiative of the producers, which came into existence, a wasteful and completely dependent economy...

Such a central, hierarchical administration is the very basis of inequality. Especially when shortages increase, as has been the case since the reduction and

Discussion



then the ending of trade with the Soviet camp. Today that model - which continues to be wrongly identified by the Cuban leadership with socialist planning - is in the process of collapsing.

One example is enough to indicate the scope of the phenomenon: the most official Cuban statistics indicate that with an average wage it is not possible to satisfy 100% of essential food requirements. And the economists are still discussing whether the percentage of satisfaction that such a wage makes possible is 80%, 60% or still less... But if everyone has noticed that the Cuban population is not living in luxury - with the exception of a minority of the new rich - people are not dying of hunger on the island, although this ought to be the case if for more than a decade wages have not made it possible to satisfy food requirements.

Formulated differently, that means that a significant percentage of economic life is outwith the plan and that consequently other social relations enable the Cuban population to survive. What relations? Market relations based on the enlargement of the sector of petty commodity production, on tourism and on everything that it brings in terms of relations of domination, including prostitution. And of course the whole informal economy, from the "light grey" market to the black market.

But there are also all sorts of non-market relations which escape the administrative economy, services that citizens do for each other by breaking or circumventing the administrative rules. These services can sometimes lead to monetary compensation, but even in such cases it is not a question of market relations, in the absence of a unified market that fixes prices.

In the same way as the development of a sector of petty commodity production and of

the "foreign currency market" (in convertible pesos) are indicators of the inability of the Cuban economy to break with the market and of the utopia that the centrally administered economy represents, the generalization of non-market relations of exchange shows the inability of the bureaucracy to plan the economy, as well as the aspiration of society to different social relations, which thus manifests itself in a "deviant" way.

And every Cuban citizen, like all those who knew what life was like in the societies of so-called "real socialism", knows what an incredible expenditure of energy and what inventiveness are necessary to circumvent both market relations and the administered (and defended by the police) economy in order to satisfy, at least in part, their needs. An energy and an inventiveness which could have been put at the service of the free cooperation of the producers...

Bureaucratization

Imposed by the Kremlin - against the criticisms that Che Guevara was beginning to formulate [1] - this administered economy produced a parasitical and useless social layer which weighs heavily on Cuban society. Fernando Martinez Heredia, a well-known critical Cuban Marxist, said on this subject: "Although state bureaucratization cannot be measured by the number of its bureaucrats, the figures are nevertheless eloquent: according to the 1986 statistics, in 12 years (between 1973 and 1985), the number of functionaries has been multiplied by 2.5". And he continued: "The mass means of communication lost the function that they were supposed to fulfil. From instruments of popular struggle favourable to the transition to socialism, they were completely transformed into an instrument of propaganda, which is obviously not at all the same thing.

East European ideology was imposed everywhere, to the extent that the official discourse was full of praise for the supposed successes of the Soviet Union and its system, even going so far as to consider as ideologically unsound any criticisms of it". [2] The historic leadership of the Cuban revolution, particularly Fidel Castro, had always kept a certain distance from this bureaucratic layer, sometimes publicly treated with a certain attitude of superiority. But at the same time it relied on this bureaucratic layer in order to govern the country.

The process of rectification, begun when the Soviet Union started, in 1985-86, to put in question its economic relations with Cuba, and then the discussion initiated in March 1990 to prepare the Fourth Congress of the Party (held in October 1991), which led to several tens of thousands of assemblies, during which a million criticisms were taken note of, did not lead to the running of the economy by the producers themselves. Whereas the Cuban economic system remains a prisoner of the contradiction between the collective property of the means of production and their individual management, a contradiction which can be resolved either by privatization - and therefore the restoration of capitalism as in the former Soviet Union, in the countries of Eastern Europe, in China, and in Vietnam - or by the collectivization of management, the Cuban leadership is trying to maintain the status quo of a not very efficient administrative management.

And if in the face of the collapse of the Soviet system we have seen economic reforms - depenalization of the possession of dollars in 1993, re-opening of free peasant markets in 1994, authorization of foreign investments in 1995 - it has to

be recognized that they do not at all go in the direction of collectivization of management, quite the contrary. Finally let us note that the various measures that have been taken since then with the aim of limiting the possibilities of private accumulation on the basis of these reforms repose, once again, not on the development of mechanisms of social control, but on the recourse to an administrative and bureaucratic control.

Transition and Market

The principal effects of the economic reforms of the 1990s were a very clear social differentiation. "No doubt - Fernando Martinez Heredia explained in the interview that we have already quoted - it is minimal compared to other countries in Latin America or in the world. But for Cuba it is extraordinarily significant, insofar as the distribution of income per capita was the opposite of that in the rest of Latin America. Nevertheless, we cannot yet say that there are different social classes". [3] Social differentiation has however challenged one of the principal elements of the legitimacy of the system, while at the same time money has greatly increased in esteem... And if in spite of the very strong penetration of market relations and the presence - controlled especially by the military hierarchy - of foreign investments (which, as is normal, accumulate and export capital), we do not yet have the freedom of the Cuban new rich to accumulate capital, we can nevertheless see the appearance of very important monetary savings held on bank accounts by a tiny minority. We have there transformations which could tomorrow constitute the social foundations of a restoration of capitalism.

The re-establishment of market relations and the recourse to the monetary standard were undoubtedly necessary. The centralized administration of an economy based on shortages can in no case represent an alternative to the market. The market is a social relation, which only a superior social relation could make wither away. "The plan - wrote Trotsky in 1932, when there appeared the first disastrous results of so-called planning (in fact a central administration that was not based on knowledge of social needs) - is checked and, to a considerable degree, realized through the market.

The regulation of the market itself must depend on the tendencies that are brought out through its mechanism. The blueprints produced by the departments must demonstrate their economic efficacy through commercial calculation. The system of the transitional economy is unthinkable without the control of the rouble. This presupposes, in its turn, that the rouble is at par. Without a firm monetary unit, commercial accounting can only increase the chaos". [4] And criticizing the abandoning of the market, he continued: "This means that correct and economically sound collectivization at this stage should lead not to the elimination of the NEP, [5] but to a gradual reorganization of its methods.

The bureaucracy, however, went the whole way (...). Confronting the disproportions of the NEP, it liquidated the NEP. In place of market methods, it enlarged the methods of compulsion". [6] And he finally concluded: "After the adventurist offensive, it is necessary to execute a planned retreat, thought-out as fully as possible". [7]

I refer here to the terms of the Russian debate at the beginning of the 1930s because the economic schemas borrowed from the Stalinists have deeply marked thinking on transitional societies, above all Cuban society, and because criticism of the negative effects of the market could lead to the hasty conclusion that it would be enough to abandon it. Now market relations, which are social relations, corresponding to a certain level of material production, cannot be "liquidated".

If they are banned they will manifest themselves in a clandestine fashion, undermining all the other economic mechanisms. But since it is a question of social relations, it is by building other social relations that it is possible to have the means of controlling them. The market can only be effectively controlled by the conscious and collective cooperation of producers and consumers. Not by bureaucratic administrators who have recourse to coercion. Because these administrators, as has been demonstrated by the Soviet, East European, Chinese and Vietnamese experiences, sooner or later end up by adapting to and being shaped by the social relations that they were supposed to control. And by becoming in this way a new ruling class.

Defence of Gains

At the moment when the generation which led the Cuban revolution is beginning, of necessity, to leave political scene, Cuban society is at the crossroads. It has succeeded during the last 15 years in maintaining its non-capitalist course, even if that took place at the price of developing its internal contradictions. There is no doubt that this was a conscious choice by its leaders. In the same way, the Cuban leadership has shown itself to be capable of establishing internationalist relations with governments thrown up by the struggle against imperialism and its neo-liberal globalization, in Venezuela, in Bolivia, and - at the present time - in Ecuador. Cuban aid has been of great importance for the advances made by the "Bolivarian revolution" in Venezuela. At the same time, in the absence of a framework that would allow the self-activity of the masses in Cuba, the re-establishment of market social relations, even partial and subject to administrative control, reinforces the passivity of the population, as well as cynical and disabused attitudes among the young generation [8] and weakens the legitimacy of the Cuban system, even in the eyes of those who are in the final analysis the only ones capable of defending it against capitalist restoration.

Manuel Vazsquez Montalban proposes the following rather

neat formula: "The Cuban revolution deserves to safeguard the best of itself, and to offer that to the globalized peoples as an alternative paradigm to present globalization. But to do that it must break with the worst of itself, that which is inimical to the mechanisms of participation, to criticism, and to a modification of the architecture of power". [9] The question that is waiting for an answer suspense is whether the Cuban revolution still has enough vitality to enable it to break "with the worst of itself", in other words if the workers of Cuba have not suffered such a strong and long-lasting atomization that they no longer are capable of collectively opposing the restoration of capitalism and taking their future into their own hands.

Jan Konrad is the pseudonym of a militant of the Fourth International.

NOTES

[1] In particular his criticism of the Soviet economic manual. See the articles by Michael Lowy and Celia Hart in our series on Cuba.

[2] From an interview by Eric Toussaint with Fernando Martinez Heredia, conducted in July 1998 in Havana and published in *Le Pas Suspendu de la Révolution, Approche critique de la réalité cubaine* (edited by Yannick Bovy and Eric Toussaint), Editions de Cerisier, Mons, 2001, p. 80. For those who read French, this collective work, comprising contributions by critical Marxists, Cuban and non-Cuban, is not at all dated and constitutes an invaluable guide to any discussion of Cuba today.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 85

[4] Leon Trotsky, "The Soviet Economy in Danger", in *Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1932), Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, p. 274.

[5] The New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced in 1921, and involved a partial return to market relations in an economy that had been devastated by four years of civil war and on which the coercive methods of the system of "War Communism" had become ineffective.

[6] *Op. cit.* p. 275.

[7] *Op. cit.* p. 279.

[8] The coexistence between capitalist enclaves (in particular the tourist sector) and others which are centrally administered (and officially defined as socialist planning) give rise to jokes like: "socialism means shortages and capitalism means abundance...".

[9] From the Introduction to *Le Pas Suspendu de la Révolution*.

Cuba

After a long wait...

Critical Notes

Michael Löwy

We have been waiting a long time, a very long time, for this book to be published... [1] It consists of critical notes on the Manual of Political Economy of the USSR (the Spanish language edition of 1963), notes which Che Guevara edited during his stay in Tanzania and in Prague in 1965-66, after the failure of his mission to the Congo and before leaving for Bolivia.

For decades, this document remained "out of circulation"; after the collapse of the USSR some Cuban researchers were allowed to consult it, but without being allowed to take notes. It is only now, forty years after they were written, that it has been decided to publish these notes in Cuba, in an enlarged edition which contains other unpublished materials: a letter from Che to Fidel Castro in April 1965, which constitutes the prologue to the book, notes on the writings of Marx and Lenin, a selection of notes of conversations between Guevara and his colleagues in the Ministry of Industry (1963 to 1965) - which were already published in part in France and Italy in the 1970s - letters to various personalities (Paul Sweezy, Charles Bettelheim) and extracts from an interview with the Egyptian periodical *El-Taliah* (April 1965).

Why were these notes of Guevara not published sooner? From the outside, we can understand that before the end of the USSR, there were (bad) "diplomatic" reasons for keeping them confidential. But after 1991? What "danger" did these notes represent? This concealment is really strange... Who decided that they should

Discussion

... "Critical Notes" from Che

on Political Economy



Che in Bolivia

be kept in a drawer? Who finally give the "green light" for their publication? The preface to the book, by Maria del Carmen Ariet Garcia, of the Centre of Che Guevara Studies in Havana, explains nothing and confines itself to observing that "this document has for years been one of the most awaited ones" by Che.

Finally this material is now at the disposal of interested readers, and it is really very interesting. It bears witness to Guevara's independent spirit, to the critical distance that he had taken towards the Soviet model of "really existing socialism" and to his search for a radical alternative. But it also shows the limits of his thinking.

Let us begin by these limits: Che, at this time - we do not know whether his thinking had moved forward in 1966-67 - did not understand the question of Stalinism. He attributed the impasses of the USSR in the 1960s to ...the NEP of Lenin! Certainly, he thought that if Lenin had lived longer - he made the mistake of dying, he noted ironically - he would have corrected the most retrograde effects of this policy. But he was convinced that the introduction of elements of capitalism by the NEP led to the nefarious tendencies that could be observed in the USSR in 1963, which were going in the direction of the restoration of capitalism. All of Guevara's criticisms of the NEP are not without interest, and they sometimes coincide with those of the Left Opposition in 1925-27: for example, when he remarks that "the cadres allied themselves to the system, constituting a privileged caste". We are left wondering whether he hadn't read Trotsky, who is nowhere mentioned in these

notes... But the historic hypothesis which made the NEP responsible for the pro-capitalist tendencies in the USSR of Brezhnev is quite clearly not very applicable. It quite simply ignores Stalinism and the monstrous deformations that it introduced into the economic, social, and political system of the USSR. We find few references to Stalin in these notes; one of the rare ones is quite critical: "the terrible historical crime of Stalin: to have treated communist education with contempt and instituted the unlimited cult of authority". That is accurate, but it's a little bit insufficient as an analysis...

Most of Guevara's criticisms of the Soviet manual closely correspond to his economic writings of the years 1963-64, which we already know, during the polemic in which both Charles Bettelheim (against Guevara) and Ernest Mandel (supporting him) took part: defence of central planning against the law of value and against "self-managed" factories, that is to say those which were autonomous and functioned according to the rules of the market; defense of communist education against individual monetary incentives. He was also worried, and correctly so, about the material incentives for factory managers, which he considered as a principle of corruption. We also find a criticism of the absence of internationalism in the commercial practices of the USSR - unequal exchange with dependent countries - and this affirmation, of capital importance: "we cannot build communism in a single country". Lenin, remarked Che, "clearly affirmed the universal character of the revolution, something which was subsequently denied" - a transparent reference to

"socialism in one country", but once again there is no question of Stalinism.

Trotsky is absent from these notes, but we find an interesting reference to him in the debates at the Ministry of Industry: you cannot destroy opinions with blows from a club, that would be the death of any free development of intelligence. "It is obvious that we can learn a series of things from Trotsky's thinking", even though his subsequent activity was a mistake. Guevara ironically adds that the Soviets accused him of Trotskyism, putting this label on him like a "San Benito" - that is the clothing in which the Spanish inquisition dressed heretics when it led them to the stake...

Guevara correctly defends planning as a central axis of the process of building socialism, because it "frees the human being from the condition of an economic thing". And he recognizes - in the letter to Fidel! - that in Cuba "the workers do not participate in the working out of the plan". Who should plan? The debate in 1963-64 did not reply to this question. It is on this subject that we find the most interesting steps forward in the critical notes of 1965-66. The masses, he writes, must participate in the formulation of the plan, whereas its execution is a purely technical question. In the USSR, in his opinion, they had replaced the conception of the plan as "an economic decision of the masses, conscious of their role", by a placebo, where the economic levers determine everything. The masses, he insists, "must have the possibility of directing their destiny, of deciding how much goes for accumulation and how much for consumption"; economic technique must

operate with these figures - decided by the people - and "the consciousness of the masses must ensure its accomplishment". This theme returns on several occasions: the workers, he writes, the people in general "will decide on the big problems of the country (rate of growth, accumulation/consumption)", even though the plan itself will be the work of specialists. We can criticize this too mechanical separation between economic decisions and their execution, but with these formulations Guevara came considerably closer to the idea of democratic socialist planning, such as - for example - Ernest Mandel formulated it. He did not draw all the political conclusions from that - democratization of power, political pluralism, freedom of organization - but we cannot deny the importance of this new vision of economic democracy.

We can consider these notes as an important stage in Guevara's path towards a communist/democratic alternative to the Stalinist Soviet model; a path that was brutally cut short by Bolivian assassins in the service of the CIA in October 1967.

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NOTES

[1] Ernesto Che Guevara, *Apuntes criticos a la Economia Politica*, Ocean Press, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, Havana, 2006, 397 pages.

Economy

Burger giant's revival reveals key to US capitalism

Reviled McDonalds makes spectacular comeback

Phil Hearse

In the late 1990s McDonalds was a basket case among major transnational corporations. Sales slumped as people in Europe and the US tired of burgers and turned to the multitude of fast food alternatives, especially Tex-Mex style food in the US. The company was hit by a wave of criticism of the health and environmental damage of its food and by attacks on its fiercely anti-union labour practices. Shares slumped to an historic low, a programme of restaurant closures started and some of its franchisees went bust - bad news for a company which relies on franchises for around half its restaurants.

Now the news is very different. Every quarter sees burgeoning sales - income was up 6.4% in the last quarter of 2006 and its share price have risen 25% in the last year. And the reasons for this resurgence are utterly revealing about modern capitalism, and US capitalism in particular. Although the biggest area for McDonalds' international expansion is China, a huge potential market, the biggest turnaround is in its crucial US home ground.

Here McDonalds has responded by two key steps: first its restaurants stay open longer and second they have greatly diversified the menu. The latter step was a transparently obvious move given a burger-jaded public. The first would have been less obvious in the 1950s and 1960s, but is a winner today. It's summed up by restaurant analyst John Glass, quoted in *Business Week*, "People's days are longer. So are McDonalds restaurant hours. This is a natural evolution to capture more business".

"Natural evolution" it might be in terms of McDonalds' sales strategy, but natural evolution it most certainly is not in terms of the lifestyles of American workers. Now more than 40% of all McDonalds are open 24 hours a day - a spectacular increase in the last five years. More of those who do have a few hour closure period have extended their hours beyond the previously typical 17-hour 6am-11pm open period. Being open all night is there to capture the business of the growing army of shift workers, or workers who just work very long hours, in the country which is the sleep-deprivation capital of the world. As a successful franchisee in North Carolina puts it, "There are so many customers out there at all times of the day, we have to be out there too".

A key change - initiated around 1998 when the company's reform programme began - is the prominence of breakfast items on the menu. Sales from 5am-11am in the US amount to around 30% of a typical day's sales. Eating breakfast out is a big deal in US cities, much more than in Europe. It tells you a lot about the structure of the working day on the other side of the Atlantic. Careful watchers of US TV series like *NYPD Blue* will notice that suspects, when questioned, always left their house "around 6.45am" or "7am". Of course there are many European workers who leave home at these early hours, but many millions who typically start their day at 9am and leave not before 8am.

But it's not just the longer opening hours and concentration on breakfast that are tell-tale symptoms of a country where people are made to work continuously longer and harder. The type of meal is revealing as well. Nearly two-thirds of McDonalds US business is done at drive-through windows. A popular meal for these drivers tends to be the specially designed Snack Wrap - a strip of deep-fried chicken, with cheese, lettuce and a sauce in a folded tortilla. Before it was launched last August the company experimented with the size of the tortilla and the consistency of the sauce to discover one crucial thing - was it easy to eat with one hand while driving, and did the sauce drip?

So it's not just the more and more American workers don't have time to eat at home, many have to eat on the go, while travelling to and from or during their work.

The process of turning the day into a 24-hour profit opportunity is a circular one. While McDonalds with its huge number of outlets currently dominates the breakfast market,



Police in Quito, Ecuador, guard McDonalds after demo

competitors like Burger King, Wendy's, Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts are rapidly trying to address the same market. Which means a bigger section of the restaurant workforce, hundreds of thousands of people, having to work night hours too. Another twist of the neoliberal screw.

While the company is trying to address burger-resistant customers with a range of new products and with its McCafé initiative, the most popular foods remain the double cheeseburger and fries. Both are high in fat and sodium. Other companies have tried to reduce or eliminate trans-fats from their foods, but McDonalds says this impairs the flavour. Which makes the comment of Michael Jacobson, director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, self-evident, "More people going to McDonalds means poorer health".

And there's another health twist. A 2004 scientific report showed that sleep-deprived people have enhanced levels of the hormones that cause hunger, and are thus more likely to be overweight. Overweight people are much more likely to have sleep problems, setting up a vicious circle of declining health.

It's 150 years since Marx pointed out that the crucial way for capitalism to increase surplus value and hence profits was extending the working day. Neoliberalism means people working longer and harder. It means much less opportunity to have sit-down meals with family and friends. It means less time for sociability and more atomisation, more stress, more sleep deprivation and more loneliness. This is the core area for the transformations that neoliberalism has brought - a counter-revolution in the work process, increasing both the length of work and its intensity (and supervision).

Marx said, "To be really rich means being rich in free time". Not an option for most of today's workers, in the advanced countries or anywhere else.

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France

"The Presidential campaign is rotting French political life"

Daniel Bensaïd

The philosopher Daniel Bensaïd, a militant in the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), looks at the electoral campaign in an interview conducted for the Swiss daily *Le Courrier* by Benito Perez.

In the prolific panorama of the French left, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) undeniably occupies a place apart. Anti-Stalinist Communists, this movement born out of the student struggle of May '68 was always marked off from its Trotskyist co-religionists by its opening to the new social movements and to those that proletarian orthodoxy characterised as "petty bourgeois".

Yet the party of Alain Krivine and Olivier Besancenot has remained firm on its anti-capitalist positions. No question of becoming the appendage of the left of the Socialist Party, nor of conceding to the zeitgeist of "politics without parties". Inflexibility? Coherence? Whatever, the LCR of the popular postman Besancenot is today a little isolated. Its refusal to rally to the "unitary anti-neoliberal candidacy" proposed in the midst of the élan of the "left no" to the European Constitution has chipped away at this image of openness that it carefully tends.

Often presented as the theorist of the LCR, the philosopher Daniel Bensaïd, a renowned specialist on Marx and Benjamin [1], was recently in Switzerland at the invitation of the bimonthly "solidarités". In an interview given to the "Courrier", the Toulouse intellectual defends the intransigence of his movement, while leaving the door open to a future anti-neoliberal union. The former leader of May 68, today a lecturer in philosophy at Paris-VIII, also enlightens us on the electoral process underway in France. BP.

After a presidential election in 2002 marked by the law and order question, the traditional themes of the left - housing, taxation, ecology - are very much to the fore this year.

Daniel Bensaïd: This early in the campaign, it's a very significant change! The question of housing has allowed the debate to be placed on the terrain of social rights and justice. That's a good thing. And I think that this will continue, because it combines both the gravity of the social crisis and the necessities of each candidate's electoral strategy.

The polls show that social concerns, notably unemployment, are considered more

important than law and order. As for the sociological surveys, they reveal an increased fragility and a relative pauperisation of the so-called middle classes which in fact includes today a number of employees whose status is nearer to that of the worker than that of the manager.

So all the candidates are competing to win back the popular electorate which was lost in 2002 notably to the Front National and to a certain extent to the radical left it is not then by chance if we hear Ségolène Royal mentioning Rosa Luxembourg and radicalising her discourse, including against the European Central Bank. Or that Sarkozy spoke of Zola and Jaurès during his nomination speech.

What other themes should the campaign be about in your view?

First, it would be good if there were themes... For the moment, more is said about the gaffes of the candidates. Unhappily, I fear that both sides are skirting around the European question. This latter is not only crucial but is already on the agenda, [German Chancellor] Angela Merkel announcing a constitutional vote for 2009! The question of war and the role of France in Africa, in the arms economy or in NATO is also forgotten by common agreement.

It is however a fundamental element of the world situation today.

Finally, I think that the candidates will avoid too much emphasis on the institutional question. It is however a significant debate. The current crisis of the regime is worsened by the introduction of five yearly presidential terms, which has again strengthened the presidentialist logic. Indeed this latter is rotting the whole of French political life. Its plebiscitary character renders any debate over programmes difficult. And this at all levels, with campaigns focused on image and personality now being reproduced at the level of the regions, or indeed any institution.

We should however also look into the majoritary voting system. Personally, I am for introducing a good dose of proportional



Olivier Besancenot interviewed. Behind him, Daniel Bensaïd.

voting. Consider: at the parliamentary elections of 2002, 30% of voters were excluded from all political representation. If we add the abstentionists, that is half of the population which is not represented in the Assembly. And then they complain about the political crisis...

Faced with this nebulous bipolarity, some on the left are tempted to say that there is no difference between Royal and Sarkozy. Others, however, are ready to do anything to avoid the victory of the candidate of the right.

In my view, these represent two pitfalls to avoid. When Ségolène Royal raises the stakes about a certain moral order, about family policy, on law and order, she effectively flirts with Sarkozy's themes. All the same, her campaign for the nomination - appealing over the head the PS institutions - marked the victory of the democracy of public opinion over the parties. All this emphasises the "Blairite" turn of the socialists. The intention and the discourse are there. And yet, in fact, things are more complex. Ségolène Royal had to work to mend the breach opened by the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty.

The support she has had from Montebourg and Chevènement (partisans of the "no" vote, contrary to the majority of socialists - ed.) have shown her capacity to relegate this fracture to the second level, at least symbolically. That isn't nothing. Blinded by the discourse "Anyone but Sarkozy", a part of the critical left has finally rallied without fighting. The big difference between Sarkozy and Royale is that the latter cannot free herself from the electoral and social realities of the left! She is in a force field that she cannot escape, above all since the "no" victory in the referendum... The socialists know that they are not sheltered from a social explosion.

Do you think that Nicolas Sarkozy represents a rupture on the right?

I think so. His candidacy turns the page on Gaullism, this French oddity. Since the war, France has been marked by the twin roles of Gaullism and the Communist Party. They



Ségolène Royal

represented two discourses with populist concerns, two forms of nationalism, with an anti-American connotation. With Nicolas Sarkozy, we are in an entirely different register.

Even if the death of Gaullism was inevitable given the evolution of the world and the construction of Europe in particular, his victory will seal this disappearance and will inaugurate an offensive of great violence against the public services, pensions and the labour code.

The presidential election of 2002, the rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty (ECT), then the victory of the anti-First Employment Contract law [2] show the weight of the radical left in France. Isn't it paradoxical that the socialists have not taken account of this in choosing Royal and that no real alternative has emerged to the PS?

The paradox stems perhaps in the reading of the political dynamic. In 2002, the left critical in relation to the PS had fully fulfilled its electoral potential, that I estimate at 10%-13% [3]. It was a vote sanctioning a socialist legislature that hadn't changed much in social policy, nor in Europe, and which had spectacularly rallied to privatisation.

Today, the electoral reflex is not the same. We have had a rightwing government and the fear of a new presence of Le Pen in the second round favours the idea of the useful vote from the first round. I think, moreover, that the demoralising effect of the defeat of the social movement of 2003 on pensions and education is underestimated. It was a struggle much more rooted than that against the First Employment Contract, of which nearly nothing remains twelve months later.

All that weighs on and explains the fact that the potential of votes to the left of the PS is less significant today. And that's true whether the far left presents a single candidate or not. To say, as some have done, that we could obtain a score in double figures, is a joke! The so-called votes of the radical left do not necessarily add up. If you count things up, a single candidacy of José Bové or Clémentine Autain [4] would amount to less votes than you would have with a number of left candidates, because Bové would have lost a big part of the CP electorate while Autain is absolutely unknown among working class voters.

That explains the defeat of the unitary anti-neoliberal approach?

No. A single candidacy was despite that desirable. For its dynamic and to consolidate the political space opened during the left campaign against the ECT in 2005. It was nonetheless illusory to believe that the significant dynamic of the "left no" could prolong itself in a linear manner to the presidential election. In a referendum, it is a question of yes or no, not a programme or a well defined political orientations. Of course, a platform had been drawn up by the anti-neoliberal collectives [former "no to the ECT" collectives - ed]. Despite some points of disagreement, inevitable in this type of unitary approach, we would have been able to follow on this basis a pluralist but common programme.

But, in our view, there was an unavoidable question, which would become increasingly present the closer we got to the vote, that of the future governmental and parliamentary majority [the parliamentary elections are scheduled for a month after the second round of the presidential - ed]. Would there have been a "new left majority", as Marie George Buffet [candidate of the CP - ed], said, under the domination of a Socialist Party whose programme and candidate are known?

The LCR will do all it can to beat Sarkozy but we refuse to see the alternative unitary project dissolve itself immediately in a "plural left mark 2" coalition of which we know in advance the results. We have the responsibility to not make promises that we know we will be obliged to betray.

I can understand that the animators of the collectives chose to temporise on this question while waiting to see if Laurent Fabius was chosen for the socialist candidacy. But starting from the choice of Ségolène Royal, there was no longer any reason to be indecisive: Yes or no, was it possible to envisage such an alliance?

For us it was ruled out. For the CP, it was not, for two reasons: it needs the Socialists to save its parliamentary group next June and because some Communists are counting on returning to government. Negotiations have moreover begun. There has not been a misunderstanding but a political disagreement. While convergences exist between us, there is no agreement as to a strategy of reconstruction of a left worthy of the name.

Has the failure of the anti-liberal collectifs closed the door on the possibility of a union?

It's a handicap because it has created a lot of frustration. But the political scenery won't stop changing with the 2007 elections. The question of unity of the anti-liberal left - or anti-capitalist, I don't see an impassable barrier between the two - has been on the cards for 20 years, since the presidential candidacy of Pierre Juquin. In our opinion this union will not be possible around one single political forces but nor will it be possible without the political parties. Whatever anti-



Nicolas Sarkozy

party demagogu says they won't disappear or be made to disappear like that. There is no other choice than to bring together with patience and conviction an arc of political forces. This union can't be tactical and punctual but has to be built around a real project of rebuilding the left. The LCR contacted the PCF along these lines even before the referendum.

What are the other forces that could come together?

There is the left of the Greens and Lutte Ouvrière. Even though there is not much hope of convincing LO to get involved we must continue to call on them to do so.

In this context what's the meaning of Olivier Besancenot's candidacy?

First of all to defend a programme, an alternative project on the left of the PS - and independent of the PS - which will not compromise on principles at the first elections. This is a long-term project. We also want to put the social questions at the centre of the ensure that the election campaign is a serious argument about social rights, public services and so on, that there is real disagreement expressed. Our goal is to speak to young people, Olivier Besancenot was one of the only people to be listened to during the suburban riots in November 2005. His strength is to be able to speak to many different social categories because he has both developed political thinking and a social image.

Daniel Bensaid is one of France's most prominent Marxist philosophers and has written extensively. He is a leading member of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International).

NOTES

[1] Author notably of "A Marx for Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique" (Verso, London, 2002)

[2] The "CPE" was an employment contract for the under-26s which had no protection against being sacked. It was withdrawn by the government last spring after major student and trade-union mobilisations.

[3] Arlette Laguiller (Lutte ouvrière, 5,72%), Olivier Besancenot (LCR, 4,25%), Robert Hue (PC, 3,37%) and Daniel Gluckstein (Parti des travailleurs, 0,47%). On the left were also Lionel Jospin (16,18%) and 13% accumulated by the Green Noël Manère, the radical Christiane Taubira PS and the MDC Jean-Pierre Chevènement

[4] The peasant leader and the feminist activist - a deputy mayor in Paris - were two of the main candidates for the candidacy in the anti-liberal collectives.

France

On the French Left: What's going on?

François Duval



Bové, Besancenot and Buffet

The political divisions on the left in France in the run-up to the Presidential elections have provoked much debate internationally. François Duval, from the LCR national leadership recently set out the position of the LCR in a report to the European Anti-capitalist Left.

Many friends from the anti-capitalist Left in Europe (and elsewhere) are worried about what's happening now in France and are asking questions about the political orientation and behaviour of the LCR. [1] This document intends to give some information in order for "non French readers" to understand the French situation, and some explanations about the way the LCR has tried to deal with it.

There is no doubt about it: having - at least! - four candidates to the left of social-democracy standing for the next presidential election (end of April 2007) is not the best thing that could have happened! So, inevitably, it raises some questions, such as:

- ❖ Regroupments of the Left and/or united coalitions have been possible in various European countries such as England and Wales with Respect, or Germany with the WASG/Linkspartei. So why not in France?

- ❖ Is the LCR responsible for that? Has the LCR wasted a major opportunity to reshape the French left? As you probably guess, we plead "not guilty"!

A dramatic situation in France? Yes, but...

First of all, it is necessary to provide a more complete and better-balanced approach to the long-lasting trends of the French situation. One generally considers that since 1995 there is a rich and powerful social movement in France with big strikes and huge demonstrations, and even political successes for the Left. And one could easily enumerate:

- ❖ The result gained by Arlette Laguiller [2] for the presidential election in 1995;
- ❖ The strikes and demonstrations against the government six months later;
- ❖ The election of five revolutionary MPs [3] to the European Parliament in 1999;

- ❖ The cumulated results of revolutionary candidates in the presidential election in 2002: 10% of votes. Even 13% if you add the result of the CP leader.

- ❖ The huge strikes of March and April 2003: almost a general strike;

- ❖ The victory of the "No" during the referendum on the neo-liberal European constitution, on 29 May 2005;

- ❖ The rebellion of the youth and riots in the French suburbs, in November 2005;

- ❖ The victory of youth and workers' movement against CPE [4] in May 2006.

All these events are very important. They show the strength of the resistance - both social and political resistance - against liberalism and corporate capitalism. They obviously suggest the need for a political expression through the emergence of a political alternative, embodied by a new broad anti-capitalist party, a new political representation for the exploited and the oppressed.

But these events are just one side of the situation. If you look at the other side of the situation, you will see an especially low level of "days of work lost because of strikes", a succession of neo-liberal reforms that have been implemented through workers' defeats - or even without any resistance at all -, a very limited membership of unions and parties, a growing rate of abstention for elections, an avalanche of laws in favour of cops and against youngsters and immigrants, an uninterrupted shift to the right of the political elite, including the leadership of trade unions and the social-democrat party. And so on ...

In the political and electoral arena, real life has not been a continuous increase of the results for the radical and/or revolutionary Left. A few weeks after the presidential election in 2002, for general elections, the cumulated results of the LCR and LO (Lutte

Ouvrière) represented an average rate of 2.5%. In 2004, common slates (LCR and LO) reached an average rate of 3 to 5%.

In fact the situation in France is more complex and contrasted:

- ❖ On one side, long periods where everything is "quiet": no strike, no movement and hard attacks from right wing parties and bosses.

- ❖ But, on the other side, (very) short periods of impetuous social explosion.

It does not mean a "downturn", like in the 1980s and the first part of the 1990s. But, at least, it means that the situation is unstable and volatile. The short periods of social explosion have not succeeded in reversing the relationship of forces between the ruling classes and the working class. And because the periods of social movements are intense but very short, the lessons drawn by significant sectors of the working class or even groups of activists are very heterogeneous. That is the first substantial obstacle confronting any attempt to change resistance into a political alternative. And that point really explains a lot of things that have happened since May 2005!

After the victory

Actually, after 29 May 2005, we have been faced with a succession of missed rendezvous, false hopes and distorted debates. To put it simply, it was not so easy - and perhaps impossible - to change the coalition against the European Constitution into an electoral coalition for 2007.

The revolutionary Left (mainly the LCR), the French CP, a platform inside the Green Party, a platform inside the Socialist Party, activists from the trade unions movement, from associations, from the feminist movement, from the global justice movement and thousands of ordinary people with left wing ideas agreed to campaign against the EU Constitution. Obviously, that was the rich basis we had to build on. But some political clarifications were needed.

A shared refusal of the neo-liberal European Constitution does not mean that all these

France

people could automatically or, even, easily agree on a common approach for elections. More precisely: specific elections, general elections, where what is at stake is political power, government, parliamentary majority. Or, to say it with "old" words: state power.

The most widely shared explanation for the failure of the process for a common candidate of the anti-liberal Left is: because of the sectarianism of LCR and/or because of the hegemonic behaviour of the French CP (and its desire to keep control of the movement).

This explanation is so widely shared because it is a simple one, it is an easy one and it is a comfortable one. I don't share that explanation. Precisely because I feel it is too simple, too easy and too comfortable. And is not - political!

If the only problem has been the sectarianism of the LCR, then what would have occurred? A united coalition and a common candidate of everybody from the anti-liberal Left, eventually without the LCR! But that did not happen ...

If the only problem has been the hegemonic behaviour of the CP leadership, then what would have occurred? A united coalition and a common candidate of everybody from the anti-liberal Left, eventually without the CP! But that did not happen, either ...

My explanation is that the process for a united coalition and common candidates failed for substantial political reasons. It failed because there was - and there still is - a central political disagreement on a central political question: what kind of relationships can the anti-liberal movement have with the leadership of the Socialist Party, related to the issues of government, parliamentary majority and state power.

The sectarianism of the LCR, really?

Let's make things as clear as possible! We think that our organisation has a good programme, built on social and democratic emergency measures. But, we were perfectly aware that a united anti-liberal coalition could not just endorse our programme! And we were ready to accept compromises, as long as the compromises were not opposed to our own proposals.

By the way, the 29 May collectives have adopted a programme. We agreed with many of their proposals. We also have differences. Just enumerate a few of them.

The LCR thinks that a genuine anti-liberal candidate must be clear on the level of minimum wage we are fighting for. Neither Marie-George Buffet nor Jose Bové is clear.

The LCR thinks that a genuine anti-liberal candidate must say clearly that he (or she) is in favour of getting rid of nuclear power as

soon as possible. But the programme of the "29 May collectives" did not say that, mainly because the Communist Party is deeply involved in the pro-nuclear lobby!

The LCR thinks that a genuine anti-liberal candidate must not just act for the dissolution of imperialist coalitions: she (or he) must say clearly that France has to withdraw immediately from NATO, without waiting for any consensus on that issue with other European countries.

But, during the debates about the programme for election, the LCR has not made any overbidding. We just stated that these points (and some others) were not an absolute obstacle for a united coalition, but temporarily unsolved questions we could deal with. Of course, the main problem was not that these very "cautious" ideas were not shared among the activists of the "anti-liberal collectives". Most of them agreed with our more advanced demands. The main problem was the orientation of the CP, which was also by far the main political current involved in the process.

So, during several months, in Spring 2006, the LCR tried seriously to organise an open and honest debate with the CP. Common working groups were planned, with two or three "experts" of the CP and two or three "experts" from the LCR, on each topic, in order to establish the list of measures everybody could agree on and the list of measures that needed additional work or compromises. Some of these groups met once or twice - until the CP decided that there were no reasons to discuss with the LCR and that it was a better idea to discuss with "people"!

The scenario, not the cast

For months, everybody seemed to agree: a political agreement was the most important issue, not the name of the common candidate.

The LCR thought that its own candidate, Olivier Besancenot, was a good candidate, perhaps the best among the various leaders of the anti-liberal movement. Olivier is very popular among workers and young people. But he is our best-known spokesperson and, for that reason, we were perfectly aware he could not be the candidate of a united anti-liberal coalition. We were ready for a compromise, for another candidate. Even after having announced his candidature, we said clearly that we were ready to withdraw his candidature at any moment if a political agreement was found.

But, yes: there was a single issue about which we were not ready to make a compromise. Not an unlimited series of pretexts: just one simple and single issue that needed - and still needs - an answer, a clear answer, an answer without any ambiguity. As you have surely understood it, the question we raised from

the beginning of the process has remained the same: the question of the relationship with the SP, related to government and Parliament.

And the answer we wanted to hear was: no, an anti-liberal candidate will not be member of a government led by the SP. No anti-liberal candidates for general elections, if elected as MPs, will either belong to the same parliamentary majority or support a government led by the SP.

We have not heard such an answer.

Distorted debate

The debate on this issue raged during the first part of 2006. Once again, the main problem was not the average mood of activists from the anti-liberal collectives. A significant number of them more or less shared our point of view, even when they thought that we were exaggerating the importance of that issue. The main problem was and still remains the political approach of the CP.

The leaders of the French CP have a two-faced speech. On one side, they reaffirm that they don't want to reiterate the experience of the so-called "plural left" government between 1997 and 2002, when they participated in Jospin's government and a parliamentary majority with the SP and were obliged to endorse its social-liberal program. The end of that experience was the electoral disaster of April 2002.

But, on the other side, they pretend that it is possible to gather "all the left on an anti-liberal programme", that it is possible to conciliate the parties which were in favour of the No to the referendum and those which were in favour of the Yes! They have not given up the hypothesis of being again members of a government led by the SP.

This was the reason why we tried to have an open and honest debate with the CP on that issue. Both the LCR and the CP agreed to write a document about how each party considers the issue of political power, coalition, common government, and so on. After a little while, the leadership of the LCR wrote this document, specifying our conditions for belonging to a common government. The document was passed and sent to the CP. The CP neither wrote any document nor answered to our own document.

Turning point

The next step was the debate about that issue inside the National Collective and the hundreds of collectives. This debate ended in September 2006 when the National Conference of the "anti-liberal collectives" adopted a document entitled "Ambition and strategy". This document included ambiguous formulas about the hegemony of

France

"social-liberalism". But it does not clearly state that it will be impossible to join a SP government, nor to support it in the framework of a common parliamentary majority with the really existing SP, its programme and its leadership.

The LCR proposed amendments in order to clarify the issues. These amendments were neither accepted by the national Collective nor submitted to the vote of National Conference of the "anti-liberal collectives". A quite similar amendment from a collective from the South East of France was moved out of the way as well. Another amendment from the same collective specifying that the "common candidate cannot be the spokesperson of a political party" was also eliminated in the same way.

That conference was the turning point of the process: our partners from the anti-liberal coalition against the EU constitution decided to get rid of the LCR. It is not paranoia ... though even paranoid persons sometimes have genuine enemies! The main purpose of the other political currents and the other members of the National Collective was not to get rid of the LCR. But they thought that the choice was between keeping the LCR and pushing aside the CP, or keeping the CP and pushing aside the LCR, hoping that sooner or later the LCR will join. But we didn't. Because ... we believe in political ideas!

Many people in the collectives said that, in fact, the document approved by the National Conference should satisfy us. But a few days afterwards, several speeches and articles from CP leaders confirmed our fears. They obviously had a different interpretation of what the collectives were supposed to have agreed on. And they insisted on the fact that the political orientation supported by the LCR had been defeated by the "collectives". Which, I think, was - unfortunately right.

That's the reason why the LCR did not participate in the process of choosing a common candidate: from our point of view, the prerequisite was a political agreement and a shared position on the issue of the relationship with SP.

Misunderstanding

The decision of the National Collective to withdraw any amendment specifying that the spokesperson of a political party could not be the common candidate was another weakness in the process. Actually, the CP thought that, in the end, everybody would agree to support its candidate. And the other currents and the other members of the National Collective thought that, in the end, the CP would agree to withdraw its candidate! But that did not happen.

As usual, the CP wished to gain a unitary cover, but it also wanted to keep control of the movement. And the best way to do so was to have its own candidate standing on

the behalf of the anti-liberal movement! It never intended to do anything different. And that is exactly what had happen...

The process blew up in November 2006 when the CP tried to impose its candidate, Marie-George Buffet, the general secretary of the CP. Of course, the CP used "post-Stalinist" methods to do so, such as a blossoming of "new" collectives populated with CP members in order to gain a majority for choosing the candidate. Some pre-existing and genuine collectives were suddenly invaded by CP activists who came to meetings just in time to vote for choosing the candidate. In some boroughs, local branches of the CP were hastily changed into anti-liberal collectives!

These old methods inherited from the Stalinist past of the CP have worried many people inside the collectives. But, actually, the CP leadership were encouraged to do so by the National Collective, when it decided to blank out and postpone the problem of the designation of the candidate.

Everybody (except us) was sure that the first steps of the process had been completed successfully: the anti-liberal movement had a strategic document and an electoral programme (adopted in October 2006). Deciding the name of the candidate would be the last and easy step...

But it is not so easy to get rid of political issues and political differences!

The question we raised had not been answered. It has led to our political eviction from the process. But the unsolved problem and the divergences between some activists and leaders of the anti-liberal process and the CP leadership has reappeared in the worst manner: the designation of the candidate. Almost 60% of consulted people were in favour of MG Buffet, which only illustrates the real ratio between CP membership and other people in the "collectives".

A major opportunity lost?

Would things have been different if the LCR have remained in the process and have been more involved in the collectives? It is not a serious statement.

For months, we saw reiterated signs that the CP wanted to have its own candidate and would not give any guarantees about its relationship with SP. The involvement of the LCR in the collectives could not change that. We are not so powerful!

Did we underestimate the "dynamic" of the anti-liberal movement after our common victory over the EU Constitution? I don't think so.

This movement raised the issue of a political alternative and we have tried, with our own political orientation, to move forwards alongside people who came together during

the campaign. But, as explained before, the prerequisite for a move forwards was political clarification on central issues.

Some people on the Left have argued that another approach was possible: anyhow, there is never an absolute guarantee. So the clever thing to do was to get involved in the process although its political bases were ambiguous, to rely on its dynamic and, eventually to break with the CP if our fears were confirmed. But life is not that simple.

The LCR has been under heavy pressure from all those who wanted a unique candidate, whatever the political basis would be. If we had accepted an ambiguous basis and got involved in the process, the pressure to remain in this framework would have been higher. If we had tried to break after a while, everybody would have reminded us: there is nothing new, you have accepted the basis, it's a betrayal! We wouldn't have been better understood and we wouldn't have made any demonstration ...

Have we underestimated the crisis inside the CP? I don't think so.

After the disintegration of Soviet Union and the disastrous results of the former coalitions with the SP, this crisis is deeper than ever. Many CP members - and even elected MPs and mayors - are breaking with the CP leadership and its orientation. But this does not indicate the direction of their evolution: from right to left, or from left to right?

Of course, we hope that some of them could make a good choice: leaving the neo-reformist and post-Stalinist tradition in favour of the building of a new broad anti-capitalist party with others. But we must also consider that many of them just like the CP leadership need the support of the SP to be elected again. And that doesn't lead them to move towards left!

In the past, smaller groups of activists or leaders have resigned or split from the CP. Some of them had really broken with Stalinism and were more open to work with the radical Left. But most of them were attracted by the SP and became its satellites.

Have we missed the opportunity to reshape the Left through the good electoral result of a common candidate?

Many people in the movement believed that a unitary candidate of the anti-liberal Left could have a good result because, in 2005, the majority of left voters, including SP voters, were against the EU Constitution. Some dreamed: more than 10% of the votes! Some even forecast that the anti-liberal candidate would have more votes than the social-democrat candidate! And this absolute lack of lucidity has been encouraged by CP leaders and the main spokespersons of the National Collectives ... For the worst possible

reason: why worry about the relations with the SP if the anti-liberal candidate could win?

The LCR isolated?

Our campaign for the Presidential election has already started. The rallies and public meetings with Olivier Besancenot are significant successes. We are receiving encouraging letters and e-mails after each broadcast or TV talk-show or interview. He is warmly welcomed in workplaces and on demonstrations. Social questions and the fight against discriminations are the core of this campaign and thousands of workers, women and youngsters show their interest for that.

It is obviously too soon to establish a serious balance sheet on the orientation, the behaviour and the action of the LCR. The time will come, after the presidential and general election. Most probably, the conclusions will be: the LCR has not done everything in the best way and made some mistakes.

Obviously, the divisions among our own members have increased. Obviously, genuine activists of the anti-liberal movement, very good people, are angry against the CP, but they are also angry against the LCR. Obviously, we have not been understood and have been partly isolated. Obviously, that is not a good result and the failure of the attempt to have a genuine independent and anti-liberal coalition with a common candidate is a political defeat.

But regrets and sorrows are inefficient. It is more important to try to understand what happened. We have been partly isolated because we have raised some difficult and uncomfortable questions. It was not so popular to tell people and activists who desperately want a single candidate of the anti-liberal left that it was not so easy. It was not so popular to tell them that political clarifications were mandatory in order to build a long-lasting coalition. It was not so popular to tell them that the electoral results of an anti-liberal candidate, even a unitary and unique one, will not be fabulous. It was not so popular to tell them: although the majority of the people who usually vote for left-wing parties have voted against the EU Constitution, although the SP was in favour of the Constitution, nevertheless many of them will vote directly for the candidate of the SP for presidential election. It was not so popular to tell them: no, there will not be several dozens of anti-liberal candidates elected as MPs. It was not so popular to try to tell these things (which were true) to people who didn't want to hear them! Of course, our political function is not to smash the hopes of thousands of people. But we are not supposed to feed them with fanciful illusions!

J. Bové, the man we need?

After a lot of developments, the former peasant leader, José Bové, is now the fourth candidate of the anti-liberal" and/or radical Left. He is rather popular for his attacks against McDonalds, his campaigns against genetically modified crops and his involvement in the global justice movement. He is a courageous activist, who has been sent to jail once for several months and he is again under the threat of a new sentence. And, no doubt about that, he has the right to be a candidate, as a representative figure of a specific current (radical ecology, global justice, ...).

But he is neither a unitary candidate nor a "natural" candidate of the anti-liberal movement or of the "29th May collectives". He is supported by none of the political parties or currents involved in the coalition against the EU Constitution: PRS ("for the social Republic"), a platform inside the SP, is now supporting the SP candidate; the LCR is supporting Olivier Besancenot; the CP is supporting Marie-George Buffet; and the small groups from the "republican left" (former supporters of JP Chevènement) don't agree with his candidature. Only "The Alternatives", a small platform inside the Greens and a minority of the collectives are in favour of J. Bové.

The methods used to build this candidature are really worrying. Until November 2006, J. Bové was in competition with others to be the candidate of the collectives. Then, he decided to withdraw his candidature, most probably because the first results of the votes inside the collectives were not very good for him. After that, he said that he would stand only if Buffet and Besancenot withdrew.

Then, after the announcement of the candidature of the CP general secretary and the blowing out of the process for a unitary candidate, a petition was organised by his friends through websites and e-mails to ask him to be a candidate. And he finally decided to be a candidate!

This event is not the result of a democratic and contradictory debate inside the collectives; it is not the result of political confrontation and agreement between political parties. It is the result of a plebiscitary approach, based on the signature of an e-mail petition, with a nasty smell of "anti-parties" mood.

Everybody in the alternative Left must realise that political parties, even alternative and/or revolutionary ones, have disappointed people. But thinking that loose networks can replace them is a dangerous illusion, in terms of political efficiency and in terms of democracy as well.

This is important because the background of all these debates is about the type of new

anti-capitalist movement or broad left party we want to build in the future. [5]

A fight for political independence

Just a few more words about the main question we have raised. The relation with the SP and the issues of government and parliamentary coalitions are not purely theoretical ones. They are not obsessions or nightmares born in the sick imagination of the LCR. They don't rely on the so-called "French exception". They are real challenges for the Left, worldwide.

Revolutionary and/or radical groups have been already faced to these challenges: in Brazil and in Italy, for instance. Becoming satellites of social democracy via common governments or parliamentary coalitions with the centre left can end up with the destruction of the radical Left. We know for sure that new experiences of centre left governments will only lead to greater disappointment, greater bitterness and an increased support for populist and far right parties. If we want to avoid this, the radical Left must not share the responsibility of these social and political disasters.

The difficult debate we had in France was not about Reform and Revolution. It was not about "Party and Movement": the long-lasting tradition of the LCR is to build a (revolutionary) party in close relation with involvement in the movement(s), unitary coalitions and open regroupments.

It was not about "united front" versus sectarian isolation: from the 1970s until now, there is much evidence (such as our involvement in the 2005 campaign against the EU Constitution) that the LCR has always favoured the building of a unitary framework for action rather than the emphasis on our party.

It was not about the false polarity between opportunism and revolutionary purism. By the way, such a reproach - revolutionary purism - has rarely been addressed to LCR!

No, more modestly, it was about subordination to social democracy (and/or social-liberalism) or political independence!

François Duval is a leading member of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International).

NOTES

[1] LCR - Ligue communiste révolutionnaire - French section of the Fourth International.

[2] Candidate for Lutte Ouvrière (LO).

[3] On a joint slate between LO and the LCR.

[4] First Employment Contract.

[5] Those who want to know more about it can read the document written by Pierre Rousset - <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article4979>.

World Social Forum

Power to the People

Danielle Fonteyn

About 40,000 people came to Nairobi for the 7th World Social Forum (WSF). It was characterized by a big participation by Africans and by rich debates. The global justice movement has planned out a series of offensive mobilizations.

In the assembly of social movements, hundreds of activists who had come from all over the world, conducted by a South African woman revolutionary, repeated in chorus the legendary rallying cry of the anti-apartheid struggle: AMANDLA! OWETU! ("Power to the people!"). This image expresses the force and permanency of struggles in Africa and their profound internationalism.

For its 7th edition, around the theme "Peoples' struggles, peoples' alternatives", the WSF thus installed itself on African territory. On a continent marked more than any other by the ravages of neo-liberalism and war it was a question of affirming social movements that are rich from a long history, often little known, of struggles, resistances, and the search for alternatives. The debates at the forum, which began and ended with a long demonstration that started out from the biggest shanty town in the whole region, had a resonance that was both universal and quite particular.

Whether it was on questions of public health - where it is estimated that between now and 2015 nearly 120 million Africans are likely to die through lack of access to medical care, not to mention the present ravages of the AIDS pandemic - or on the question of the anti-war struggle - where a few days earlier American planes were bombarding neighbouring Somalia.

The women's movements were very visible, with the presence of many networks and local community groups. The

significant mobilization of the religious networks and the big NGOs reflected their strong local presence and the reality of their work on the ground. Which was not without contradictions. Thus the organization of debates on women's rights or on the battle against AIDS by religious organizations, not really known for their progressive views on this kind of subject, led to polemics. But we were also able to see, for example, networks like that of African gays and lesbians strongly demanding equal rights, with the support of personalities like the South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The crucial challenge for the WSF is now to pass over to a new stage. For the Egyptian economist Samir Amin, it is a question of moving from resistance onto the offensive, of organizing more effectively, in order to begin to build concrete alternatives. It is around this general perspective that the next dates for international mobilization were established. This should culminate with the World Day of Action in 2008, which will replace the WSF. Among the important dates to remember, there is the international anti-war mobilization of the weekend of March 20th, the mobilization for the right to housing in May, and those against the G8 at Rostock in Germany in June, for the cancellation of the debt in October, and against climate change in December. These mobilizations will be the occasion to reaffirm the urgency, for those below, of building an alternative to the world disorder which today governs us.

World Social Forum

Africa at the heart of the debates

Jean Nanga

This is the first time that so many Africans, men and women, had come to a World Social Forum. The attendance was five to seven times bigger than in the preceding African Social Forums and was more representative of the diversities of the countries of Africa.

They had never been so many workshops concentrating on the African reality of capitalist globalization and making possible the expression of the diversity of opinion that exists. Thus for example the presence of the homosexuals and lesbians of Africa was visible from the opening ceremony onwards, and under the big tent where a diversity of generations and origins mingled, in a continent where the stigmatization, indeed the repression of homosexuality are still considered to be normal. Solidarity links were established for the abolition of foreign military bases in Africa. Chinese activists discussed with Africans the nature of China's present relations with Africa- neo-colonialism or South-South solidarity? African and French associations discussed France's neo-colonial relations with Africa. The Guinean delegation gave information on the criminal repression of strikers which had just led to 50 deaths, and a protest demonstration took place.

This African presence suffered, however, from the large space that was occupied by the Christian churches in relation to the space occupied by the radical currents. Better equipped financially, the churches were able to take charge of the massive participation of Africans, both from Kenya and from elsewhere. The organizing committee closed the door to the radical shanty town associations, by installing a discrimination based on money, with prohibitive registration fees that were the equivalent of a quarter of the local minimum wage. This

was a way of keeping out the "wretched of the earth" of Kenya, who were independent of the opulent NGOs.

The radical current finally managed to show itself with the action conducted by the radical associations for the poor to have free access to the WSF site. The presence of a large number of commercial stands also provoked sharp criticisms of the "commodification" of the social forum. An action demanding "free meals" was organized against a restaurant belonging to the Kenyan Minister of the Interior, which was offering meals at prohibitive prices. The omnipresence of the mobile telephone multinational Celtel was also denounced. Peoples Parliament - activists from the Kibera shanty town - who had been excluded from the preparation of the WSF, organized an alternative forum in a public garden in the centre of the city. The radical nature of the global justice consciousness was demonstrated by its spokespersons, particularly the very calm Wangui Mbatia, who gave a different image of the inhabitants of the shanty towns.

Jean Nanga is a Congolese revolutionary Marxist.



Italy

Solidarity with Franco Turigliatto

Sign this Appeal



Franco Turigliatto in the Senate

Announcing he would resign rather than vote for the government motion in the Senate re-financing the military mission in Afghanistan, Franco Turigliatto declared, "I am against the war in Afghanistan and against the U.S. base in Vicenza." The loss of his vote meant a loss for the government leading to Romano Prodi offering his government's resignation. The Rifondazione leadership is now threatening to take immediate action to expel Franco from the PRC. This international appeal for solidarity with Franco has now been launched:

"The executive of the PRC (Party of Communist Refoundation) has declared that the behaviour of Senator Franco Turigliatto is incompatible with the Party due to his abstention on the vote on the government's foreign policy. For us this is a serious and erroneous decision.

First because this parliamentary act is completely consistent with the historical programme of the PRC as well as with the demands of the peace movements over the last few years. That a centre-left government can try to impose on its supporters a war mission such as that in Afghanistan or the doubling in size of a military base such as that in Vicenza seems to us to be a sign of myopia and the main cause of the current crisis.

But also because Turigliatto's behaviour was accompanied with a spirit of seriousness and rectitude that should not be underestimated. In a political context in which a parliamentary seat is considered to have a value above all others,

to resign from the Senate after forty years of political activity alongside the workers and after having participated in the construction of the PRC from the very beginning, seems to us to be an act which is both unprecedented and morally correct, even if we think that he should withdraw his resignation.

In parliaments, we need representation of the positions of a peace movement with "no ifs and no buts" : we need such a representation now on the threshold of the spring offensive in Afghanistan and against subordination to the foreign policy of the US. We need acts like this, even if they are complicated and difficult, in order to reduce the gap between established politics and society.

We express all our solidarity with Franco Turigliatto and our willingness to build with conviction a peace movement with "no ifs and no buts".

To express your solidarity with Franco Turigliatto, send your signature to : con-turigliatto@libero.it

Italy

Romano Prodi Challenged on the Left

Flavia d'Angeli

The balance sheet of the participation of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) in the government of the Union, the centre-left coalition led by Romano Prodi, is catastrophic. The militants of Sinistra Critica (Critical Left), a current within the PRC, drew this balance sheet during their January 27-28 conference.

After two days of discussion, on January 27-28, with more than 400 people present, the Critical Left current of the PRC decided to found its own association, without however splitting from the PRC.

The meeting opened with the intervention of a comrade from the permanent assembly of Vicenza, who is involved in a struggle against the enlargement of the NATO base there. He recalled how the government has betrayed the demands for peace of the majority of the population and called for support to the national demonstration on February 17th. Next, Giorgio Cremaschi of the FIOM (the metal workers' union), criticized the government's social policies, in particular the new threats to pensions. Elisa Coccia, of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer movement (LGBTQ) denounced the lack of courage of the Union over the rights of homosexuals, who are refused measures that exist in other European countries, such as civil partnerships. Daniel Bensaïd of the LCR recalled the need to coordinate the anti-capitalist left on the European level.

A balance sheet was drawn of the neo-liberal and warmongering policies that have been conducted over the last 15

years in Italy, by governments of both the right and the centre-left. With the adoption of a budget for 2007, the most austere budget in the entire history of the Republic, the sending of troops to Lebanon, the maintenance of those in Afghanistan, the confirmation of submission to the dictates of the Vatican on questions of civil rights and secularism, the comrades of the Critical Left reaffirmed the necessity of building a left opposition to this government, in order to respond to the growing malaise in Italian society.

Today it is no longer enough to limit ourselves to an internal political battle within the structures of the party, as was the case before this government came into existence. It is now necessary to build a real opposition to the majority line of the PRC, which is now jointly responsible for neo-liberal policies and which increasingly plays the role of a brake on social mobilizations which could challenge these policies. The organizational conference of the PRC, which has just begun, will be a test case for verifying the echo that this opposition has among party militants, who are increasingly passive and at a loss as to what to do.

The Critical Left association wants to be an instrument for



PRC leader Franco Giordano (tie, centre)

Palestine

The Water Crisis in Gaza

Alice Gray



UN-supplied water tanks in Rafah

autonomous political initiatives. In the coming period it must demonstrate that it is possible to build another "communist refoundation", one that does not abandon its anti-capitalist vocation. As was said in the debate, "the present line of the PRC is only justified to the militants by the lack of an alternative and the spectre of the return of Berlusconi. It is up to us to demonstrate, with our forces which are not enormous, that such an alternative can exist!" Various interventions dealt with the axes of this opposition to the government, which must start from being deeply involved in the social movements which continue to organize mobilizations.

The assembly ended with interventions by Salvatore Cannavo and Franco Turigliatto, respectively deputy and senator of the PRC and the Critical Left, who confirmed that they would refuse to vote in March for re-financing the military mission in Afghanistan. They will refuse this time, even if the government - which only has a majority of one vote against the right in the Senate - makes it a vote of confidence. In reality, "on the question of war, governments can fall and the left is no longer a left if it agrees to support war".

Flavia D'Angeli is a leader of the Bandiera Rossa current, which organises comrades identifying with the Fourth International within the Critical Left current of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC).

The political rhetoric and frequent violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often serve to mask underlying environmental issues which, if not resolved, may pose an even greater threat to the well-being of the Palestinian population than the guns and bombs of the military occupation.

Environmental degradation threatens to undermine the viability of any future Palestinian state and create conditions that will make life in many parts of the Palestinian Territories impossible. Many environmental problems are accelerated and exacerbated by occupation practices, which prevent effective environmental management. This problem is particularly acute in Gaza in relation to the water resources and the ongoing military conflict.

The roots of Gaza's water problem lie in the overpopulation of the area, due to a high influx of refugees in 1948, when approximately 200,000 people fled to Gaza from the Jaffa and Beersheva areas of what is now Israel, following Israel's War of Independence. The original population of the Gaza Strip at that time was 80,000 people, thus this represented an increase of some 250%. Today, over three quarters of the estimated Gazan population of 1.4 million are registered refugees. [1]

The Gaza Strip is a very small area of land with a total area of only 360 square kilometres (roughly 150 square miles - ed.). It is underlain by a shallow aquifer, which is contiguous with the Israeli Coastal Aquifer to the north. Gaza is the "downstream user" of the Coastal Aquifer system, and hence water abstraction in Gaza

does not affect Israeli water supplies. The Gaza Aquifer has a natural recharge rate of approximately 65 million cubic meters (MCM) of water per year from rainfall and lateral inflow of water from Israel and Egypt. [2] This aquifer is essentially the only source of fresh water in the Gaza Strip.

By 1967, when Israel occupied Gaza, the sustainable yield of the aquifer was being fully utilized. [3] Since then, as the population has grown, so too has the demand for fresh water. No serious attempt was made at exercising any water management strategy in the Gaza Strip during the Israeli administration, with the number of registered wells increasing from 1200 in 1967 to 2100 in 1993. [4]

Abstraction from the aquifer was approximately 110 MCM per year by 1993, resulting in falling water levels and degrading water quality due to seawater infiltration, caused by the over-pumping that had been taking place. Likewise, there was little investment in maintaining or improving the deteriorating water infrastructures of Palestinian municipalities during this period, despite taxes being paid by Palestinians to the Israeli government. [5]

In 1994, the Gaza-Jericho agreement placed water resources in the Gaza Strip under the control of the newly formed

Palestinian Authority (PA) and, in 1995, the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) was formed. It was given the mandate for managing water in the Palestinian Territories. At this time, it was widely recognized that there was a serious environmental problem with the Gaza Aquifer, with experts predicting that if nothing was done, the entire aquifer would become unusable by the year 2000. [6] In addition, the water infrastructure was in a very poor state, with 50% of water being lost through leaking pipes. [7]

Therefore the PWA, with the help of international donors (principally the United States Agency for International Development - USAID), set out to develop a management strategy for the Gaza Aquifer and engaged the engineering firm Metcalf & Eddy to carry out an environmental survey and draw up a management plan. The Integrated Coastal Aquifer Management Plan (CAMP) was drawn up in 2000, with an implementation period of 20 years.

The main components of the CAMP included reducing the amount of water pumped from the aquifer for agricultural irrigation, while simultaneously improving supply of drinking water to the population by providing additional water from sources other than the aquifer. These included the import of water from Israel, construction

Palestine

of seawater desalination plants and improving wastewater treatment to allow it to be used for irrigation and managed aquifer recharge.

It was envisaged that, in the longer term, following a political settlement with Israel, and resolution of the Palestinians' water rights in the West Bank, a pipeline could be constructed between the West Bank and Gaza to ensure adequate supplies for the growing population. If implemented on schedule, it was expected that the CAMP would bring the Gaza Aquifer back into a positive water balance by 2007, whereas "failure to implement the CAMP in accordance with the schedule will result in continuing decline in the quantity and quality of the aquifer water." [8]

The Impact of Conflict

Unfortunately, completion of the CAMP (May, 2000) narrowly preceded the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada in September 2000. Despite initial attempts to implement the plan, and small progress in some areas, little has been achieved since then.

The number of agricultural wells, many of them unregistered, has increased to approximately 4000; [9] the supply of water from Israel has declined by approximately half from 1998 to 2004 in breach of the Oslo Accords; [10] construction of the planned regional desalination plant halted in 2003 when one of the workers was killed; and Gaza's wastewater treatment facilities are still vastly inadequate, with 80 % of sewage being discharged untreated into the environment (UNEP, 2003). [11]

In addition, missile strikes and ground incursions have

repeatedly damaged and destroyed pipelines, and maintenance personnel have been arrested, shot at, or even killed whilst trying to carry out repairs. [12] Inadequate sewage treatment infrastructure and damage to wastewater and drinking water pipelines has allowed sewage water to contaminate drinking water supplies, leading to sharp increases in water borne diseases in many areas.

Failure to control over-pumping has led to sea-water intrusion into the aquifer to the extent that, in 2003, only 10 % of the wells produced water of World Health Organization (WHO) drinking water standards. [13] Most recently, this year's Israeli invasion of Gaza (Operation Summer Rain, June 2006) has caused untold damage to water infrastructure, with destruction of the Gaza Electric Station affecting the operation of the majority of wells, pumping stations and sewage treatment facilities. [14] In short, Gaza teeters on the brink of a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe and urgent action is required to prevent widespread suffering. To compound matters, USAID have recently pulled out of the Palestinian water sector, abandoning ongoing projects and closing their contactors' offices, in an international aid embargo aimed at undermining the Hamas government.

As with so many international sanctions and embargoes (like Iraq for example), the result of this move is the communal punishment of every man, woman and child in the country targeted. It is a clumsy, inept and immoral means of pressuring the government to fall into line; and primarily hurts the most vulnerable members of the

society. The options for improving the water situation in Gaza remain effectively unchanged since 2000. Namely, additional supplies must be made available: through desalination, wastewater treatment and reuse, import from Israel, or import from the West Bank. Currently, the unstable conditions in the Gaza Strip make large scale engineering projects impossible to implement.

The less technically difficult options of water import from Israel or the West Bank are loaded with political implications and complexities. Both require the cooperation of Israel to ensure their implementation as additional pipelines would need to be constructed, and in the first case, the Israeli water company, Mekorot, would have to supply the water; whereas in the second, a pipeline would have to be constructed across Israeli territory. Furthermore, an agreement would have to be reached on Palestinian water rights in the West Bank.

The water situation in the West Bank is almost the exact inverse of Gaza, in that there are relatively abundant water resources in the Mountain Aquifer system and Jordan River, but there is very little access to or sovereignty over them. This is due to the fact that Palestinians have been denied any access to the Jordan River waters since 1967, and 80% of the Mountain Aquifer water is utilized by Israel, which is downstream of the West Bank in terms of water usage. Thus control over water resources was very tight during the Israeli administration (1967 - 1995), with only 23 licenses being granted for new wells, and the

number of working wells, in fact, decreasing from 413 in 1967, to 300 by 1983. [15]

Many communities in the West Bank currently suffer from severe water shortages, and 13% of the West Bank population is not connected to any form of water network. [16] The Oslo Agreements of the 1990s deferred definition of Palestinian water rights in the West Bank to "final status negotiations," which have yet to take place.

Crisis of Dependency

Thus resolution of Palestine's water problems is utterly dependent on cooperation from Israel; and inaction will lead to a serious environmental disaster in Gaza and to continued suffering for many water starved communities in the West Bank. Water shortage also undermines the agricultural sector and prevents it from developing, with consequences for the food security and economic well-being of the Palestinian population.

When considering the likelihood of cooperation being forthcoming from Israel, it is worth reviewing several statements that have been made by Israel's leaders in recent years. Yitzhak Rabin, former Labour Party Prime Minister, during his tenure as Israeli Minister of Defence, in the 1980s, stated that "Israel will create in the course of the next 10 or 20 years, conditions which would attract natural and voluntary migration of the refugees from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to Jordan."

It may be that Rabin had changed his mind by the time he made the historic move of shaking hands with Yasser Arafat and legitimizing the

Palestine

Palestinian Authority. It is possible, although various features of the Oslo Accords, such as the minimal transfer of sovereignty over environmental resources would suggest otherwise. It is possible. No one can tell what Israel and Palestine would have looked like today if Rabin had not been assassinated by a far right Jewish extremist.

However, if Rabin no longer believed in transfer of the West Bank and Gazan populations, Ariel Sharon, architect of the Gaza Disengagement Plan certainly did. Many years ago he explained that "You don't simply bundle people onto trucks and drive them away. I prefer to advocate a positive policy, to create, in effect, a condition that in a positive way will induce people to leave." [17]

Olmert, Sharon's heir, has also recently avowed his commitment to the ideal of 'Eretz Israel' saying that "Only a person in whose soul Eretz Yisrael burns knows the pain of letting go of our ancestral heritage;" [18] and explaining: "I believed, and to this day still believe, in our people's eternal and historic right to this entire land." [19]

What can be perceived here is that many of Israel's leaders, while appearing to make concessions to the Palestinians, have in fact retained an ideological commitment to 'Eretz Israel from the river to the sea,' and have concentrated their policy towards creating 'facts on the ground' that will make life for the Palestinians impossible, hence creating the 'positive conditions' required to induce people to leave.

Creating Mini-Gazas

A close examination of the Gazan water crisis illustrates this point very well. If nothing is done, there will be no usable water resources in Gaza and it will become impossible to live there. Nothing can be done without Israeli cooperation. Thus, whilst Israel may not have intentionally set out to create the Gaza water crisis, it fits in rather well with Zionist expansionist aspirations to perpetuate the situation and prevent meaningful action being taken to resolve it. If one examines the process that is taking place in the West Bank, whereby a series of Bantustans are being created through land confiscation, settlement expansion and the building of the "Separation Barrier," with the population becoming ever more urbanized, and access to resources such as water and land becoming ever more restricted, it is possible to see that what in effect is happening is the creation of a number of "mini Gazas."

To illustrate this point: the building of the Wall in the north of the West Bank led to the destruction of 25 wells and the isolation of 50 more, [20] isolating many localities from their only source of water and destroying the irrigated farming industry. One estimate anticipates that when completed, the Wall will isolate Palestinians from 65% of their water resources (CAABU, 2003) [21], although so much uncertainty surrounds its final route that no solid predictions can be made.

Thus a number of highly urbanized communities will be created, with poor economic and social conditions and inadequate resources to sustain themselves. This is the manifestation of

Sharon's "positive policy," which essentially amounts to ethnic cleansing by other means, causing widespread suffering, illness and death.

It is clear that the viability of the Palestinian state and the livelihoods of the Palestinian people are being systematically undermined. The situation is not yet so far gone that it is irreversible. However, given the advantages to Israel of allowing the current state of affairs to persist, and the urgency of immediate action to avert catastrophe in Gaza, it is clear that international intervention is required to protect the human rights of the Palestinian people and prevent humanitarian and environmental disaster.

The current violent conflict in the region should not blind us to the pressing need to address underlying environmental issues, which have the potential to cause as much, indeed possibly much greater suffering, than direct military actions.

Taken from Against the Current, journal of US socialist organisation, Solidarity.

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[15] Nasser.

[16] WaSH MP (2005).

[17] Ariel Sharon, August 24, 1988.

[18] Ehud Olmert, May 4th 2006, speech to the Knesset while presenting the Unilateral Disengagement Plan.

[19] Ehud Olmert, Israeli Prime Minister, to the US House of Representatives, June 2006.

[20] WaSH MP (2004) Water for Life: Israeli Assault on Palestinian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene during the Intifada. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Monitoring Project (WaSH MP), Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG).

[21] CAABU (2003) Fact Sheet: "Israel's Security Wall: It's Impact on Palestinian Communities." Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding, October, 2003.

Britain

Blair Faces Endgame

Cash for honours scandal threatens to engulf British premier

Phil Hearse



Tony and Cherie Blair on holiday with an Italian friend

British Prime Minister Tony Blair has promised to leave office by the summer, but he could be gone a lot sooner than that. Having already seen his popularity plummet because of the Iraq war and growing discontent with his neoliberal policies on health and welfare, his administration is now mired in a corruption scandal over the sale of honours to wealthy Labour Party donors. The scandal, and the political configuration coming out of it, tell us a lot about society and politics in modern Britain, the most secure bastion of neoliberalism outside the United States.

Why has the scandal arisen? Essentially because Labour has been caught trading knighthoods and peerages to wealthy business people, in return for large cash donations. There is nothing new in that of course. In fact large donors to all three major parties stand a much better chance than average of becoming a 'Lord' or 'Sir' - and all three parties make nominations to the knighthood and peerage. But because of a new law passed in 2001 this process has become more complicated.

Now parties have to reveal the name of any significant donor to the Parliamentary Standards Committee, and donations from abroad are banned. This makes it transparent when people have been given honors for donations, and all the evidence is that Tony Blair's team attempted to circumvent these requirements by the simple device of designating the donations as 'loans' - which (if made on a commercial, interest-bearing basis) do not have to be made public. Prior to the 2005 general election, which Labour won easily, twelve millionaire donors gave Labour almost £14m (about 20 million euros) in secret loans.

But it seems that police investigators, who have interviewed Blair twice, do not believe these were 'commercial loans'; and of course several of these donors later got honours. Among the donors were Rod Aldridge, chair of the outsourcing giant Capita, who has received many public contracts for his company. He loaned Labour £1m last year in 2005. Also on the list is Richard Caring, owner of the high-class Ivy restaurant. He offered Labour £2m.

Sir Gulam Noon, the 'curry magnate' who made a fortune providing pre-prepared foods for supermarkets, is believed to have seen his nomination rejected by the Lords appointments commission because of an

undisclosed loan worth £250,000 given to Labour last year. Ironically the 2001 law was pushed for by Labour (when in opposition) because of the suspicion that the Conservative Party in government was getting secret large donations from wealthy foreign backers - in the Middle East and North America - and was engaged in selling honours to donors. But when in office Blair's government, having distanced itself from the trade unions, found that the unions cut back their donations and the party was cash-strapped. Hence the trawl for rich donors.

Key Blair fundraiser was Lord Levy (more precisely Baron Michael Levy), a wealthy businessman who made his money in the music business, and who is Blair's tennis partner and personal representative to the Middle East (a totally unofficial position, but one with full primer ministerial backing). Lord Levy is close to the Israeli Labour Party, and his son Daniel has worked in the offices of Israeli Labour politicians Edhud Barak (a former prime minister) and Knesset member Yossi Beilin. Described by music producer Peter Waterman as "the best salesman I ever met", Levy earned the nickname "Lord Cashpoint" for his fund-raising efforts for Labour ('cashpoint' is the British term for ATM).

In 1997 Levy secured a £1m. donation from Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone, shortly after which the government changed its policy to allow Formula One be continue to be sponsored by tobacco companies. The subsequent furore prompted the Labour Party to return the donation. The significance of the role of Lord Levy is not so much the rather obvious pro-Israel bias in his international role, but the way it symbolises the closeness of the Blairites to big business leaders. Numerous individuals and businesses have made donations to Labour, something unthinkable 20 or 30 years ago.

According to the London Independent:

"Millionaire tycoons mingled with politicians and flattery was the order of the day. At social events, Labour figures, starry-eyed about the rich and powerful, used to sidle up to successful supporters of the Party and suggest that they, too, deserved a career in politics. 'You are ministerial material', or 'I can see you in the Lords' were the type of unctuous suggestions made, according to one source.

"One wealthy political figure said that Lord Levy, appointed by Tony Blair as his official fundraiser - and the man who was dubbed Lord Cashpoint because of his success at keeping the Labour coffers full - was a past master when it came to the craft of flattery.

"He usually touched your arm or put his arm round you when you met him,' said one successful businessman. The pop impresario was brilliant at engineering meetings between the Prime Minister and businessmen who could financially support Labour. Mr Blair would sometimes make 'surprise' appearances at parties held at Lord Levy's mansion and he was also present at more formal business events.

"But it was not only Lord Levy who schmoozed millionaires. Labour officials, advisers and apparatchiks were also in on the game. A few years ago, Sir Christopher Evans was attending a presentation at Downing Street when a senior government adviser sidled up to him. The official told Sir Christopher, who is the founder of Merlin Biosciences: 'Your stock has risen so high, and a lot of people are saying very positive things about you!'" (Independent 3 February)

Lord Levy has now been arrested twice, once in July 2006 and again in January this year, this time "on suspicion of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice" - in Britain an

Britain



Lord Levy

extremely serious charge. However no charges have been brought against Levy or anyone else involved. Also arrested in January was Ruth Turner, who works in Downing Street with Blair as head of government publicity. Again Turner has not been charged with anything.

The police pressure on Lord Levy is beginning to tell. According to the London Evening Standard (3 February):

"Tony Blair's chief fund-raiser Lord Levy is ready to tell the police that the Prime Minister is to blame for the cash-for-peerages scandal. Tony Blair's chief fund-raiser Lord Levy is ready to tell the police that the Prime Minister is to blame for the cash-for-peerages scandal.

"The Labour peer is furious that he has become the prime suspect. "And he is ready to defend himself by arguing that Mr Blair, not him, should be made to take full responsibility for the affair. He is said to be prepared to 'do whatever it takes' to defend his own reputation.

"He said he is not going to swing for the Prime Minister. He is not prepared to take the rap for what has happened," said a former Cabinet Minister who has discussed the matter candidly with Levy.

"The development came amid reports that one of the Downing Street suspects at the heart of the scandal has been 'singing like a canary' to police to get themselves off the hook." (Standard 3 February)

In many countries it would seem extravagant and fantastic that the Prime Minister could be investigated by the police over political donations. Because Britain doesn't have a written constitution, the authority of government law officers over the police on the conduct of criminal investigations is at best uncertain. In any case it is politically difficult for the government to be seen try to force the Metropolitan Police to back down, although behind the scenes the anger and mayhem is probably immense.

Blair's message to party workers in his February 3 speech was "stay calm" and not to be diverted by "things that embarrass us". But no one thinks he will survive for long if any of his entourage are charged over the scandal. According to the right-wing Spectator

magazine, "Blair has already resigned, he just doesn't know it yet". Forty-three percent of Labour voters think that he should step down now, and a growing number of Labour MPs are worried about the effects on their prospects at the next election.

In truth, Blair's popularity has been damaged beyond repair by a series of issues. First and foremost was the deeply unpopular Iraq War and his perceived position as Bush's poodle. In addition, some of the effects of his government's neoliberal policies - especially on the National Health Service - are deeply unpopular.

At the present time there are numerous campaigns nationwide against Blair's policy of closing down dozens of local hospitals and concentrating health care provision in a small number of huge 'super-hospitals'. Criticism of this measure goes across the political spectrum because of the obvious effects on the availability of local emergency and surgical care (making seriously ill or injured patients travel long distance); the difficulties for those visiting friends or relatives in hospital; the additional burden it puts on hospital workers to travel long distances to work; and the breaking of links between hospitals and local communities.

In December uproar broke out when Labour chairperson, Hazel Blears, a member of the Blair cabinet, was seen on a protest outside Hope Hospital in Greater Manchester, a smaller hospital threatened with closure. Blears said she wasn't against the policy overall, just the effects on this local hospital, which happens to be in her constituency where the Labour Party is fully engaged in the local defence campaign. The cynicism and hypocrisy of the Blairites knows no limits.

Blair is self-consciously trying to 'secure his legacy' by pushing through hugely unpopular public service reforms, and tying Britain to a policy of extensive and adventurist militarism - for example by rushing through the decision to replace the ageing Trident nuclear missile system (at a cost of around £30bn) and lecturing the nation about how the British are 'war fighters' and not just 'peace keepers'. According to Blair, the war we have to fight is against 'Muslim extremism'. The Blair government is complicit in the generation of huge levels of



Ruth Turner

Islamophobia, which numerous commentators have likened to 1930s anti-semitism. Guardian columnist Jonathan Freedland, at best a mildly progressive liberal, recently wrote "If I was a Muslim in Britain now, I would leave the country".

Tony Blair will be replaced, barring major mishaps, by Chancellor Gordon Brown. Despite the delusions of some leftish MPs, like former film actress Glenda Jackson, Brown's policies don't differ one iota from those of Blair. Brown has never hidden his admiration for the United States, and more specifically for their business practices and economic policies.

British politics appears becalmed because the convergence of the three major parties is spectacular. Conservative leader David Cameron has indulged himself with appearing to the 'left' of Blair on questions like hospital; closures, and by trying to become a central advocate of 'green' politics. Liberal leader Sir Menzies Campbell, like Cameron a party leader for just a year, has moved to ditch radical Liberal tax policies, and thus move his party into the tiny space of homogenized neoliberal politics.

For reasons too complex to enumerate in this article, the main beneficiaries outside the neoliberal Big Three in the next period look like being the Scottish National Party in Scotland and - to a much smaller extent - the British National Party in England and Wales. (The relative lack of electoral success of the socialist left in Britain will be dealt with in an article in a forthcoming issue).

Blair's departure while he still apparently dominates Labour politics can be summed up in a single phrase - the public don't trust him anymore and that is becoming an electoral liability for the party.

His legacy is already written: on most issues - all the decisive ones - he continued and deepened the legacy of Margaret Thatcher. Britain is the most thoroughly neoliberalised society in Western Europe. That is a legacy that will take a long to overcome.

Phil Hearse is a veteran revolutionary socialist in Britain. He is the editor of Marxsite (www.marxsite.com).

Portugal

Badajoz is over, welcome to the 21st century!

Alda Sousa



Badajoz [1] is over, welcome to the 21st century! Sunday the 11th of February will remain an unforgettable day in Portugal. It was definitely the most important day for Portuguese political and social life in the last 30 years. A second nationwide referendum on the abortion issue took place, with 44% of electors going to vote: 59.25% voted YES. The question put was the same as in the first one, held in 1998: "Do you agree with decriminalising abortion when requested by women, up to 10 weeks into pregnancy, and performed in an authorised health institution?"

It is worth reminding that, in 1998, only 31.9% voted, a massive abstention for Portuguese standards: the NO had an extremely narrow majority, 50.07% against 48.28% who voted YES. Thus, the penal code which criminalises abortion - with the threat of up to three years in jail - did not change then.

It was a very heavy defeat for women's rights and for the left. It took quite a few years until the question of decriminalising abortion was again in the agenda. For very bad reasons: in October 2001, 17 women were brought to trial in Maia (near Porto) for the "crime" of abortion. They were mostly working-class women. The facts for which they were prosecuted had occurred, in some cases, more than 10 years earlier. Solidarity with those women and opposition to trials started to build a new mood and new initiatives. The pickets outside the court became bigger and bigger, as the trial went on. All of a sudden, Portugal seemed to have woken up to the reality of backstreet abortion and to the deep cruelty of the law. Two women were convicted, but the prison sentence was replaced by a fine in one case and a suspended sentence in the other. Therefore no one went to jail.

Other trials followed: Aveiro, Lisbon, Setubal. The cruelty of the law became more and more visible and more and more intolerable. In 2003, a coalition of Liberals and Christian

Democrats ruled the country. It was impossible then to think of any change of the law in the parliament. Several Left Bloc and Socialist Party MPs, together with a wide range of people, from Catholics to feminists, trade-unionists and intellectuals, launched a "popular initiative" asking the Parliament to call for a new referendum. Although according to the law only 75,000 signatures are needed, 160,000 were gathered over a 3-month period. The proposal was then defeated in Parliament, during March 2004.

In the campaign for general election, in February 2005, after the collapse of the right-wing government, José Socrates, leader of the Socialist Party, promised that if he became prime-minister, the Socialist Party would propose a new referendum. The Communist Party was always against it: they stated that a left majority in Parliament was sufficient to change the law. That was not the position of the Left Bloc. We did not want just a change in law that could be reversed some time later with a different majority. We wanted to provoke a deep change in society, with every man and woman being called to a new vote, and having to assume the responsibility to decide on this matter. Therefore, it was quite natural for us to vote, last October, for the Socialist Party's proposal for a new referendum (while the Communist Party voted against).

As described in a previous IVP article, 5 pro-choice movements

took part in this campaign. They were all very important. Apart from one of them, close to and controlled by the Communist Party, the other four were really able to bring together, within their own specificity, people from different political parties (even a few Christian Democrats!) and quite a lot of individuals with no political affiliation. The movements were in contact with electors all over the country.

The pro-choice groups often worked together, while focusing on their own specific areas of concern. One day, 'Doctors for Choice' gave press conferences reporting several cases of women who died in hospital as a consequence of a backstreet abortion. The following day, 'Catholics for Choice' distributed a letter "from believers to believers" stating why they would vote yes - thereby going against the mainstream of the Catholic Church's hierarchy. Another day, members of the European and national parliament described the situation in other European countries, showing that Portugal was in the same small group as Ireland, Poland and Malta. 'Young People for Yes' organised debates in schools, leafleting at factories or performing street theatre. The campaign was thoroughly multicoloured and fully multigenerational, including women who first made the way to decriminalisation some 30 years ago to young people for whom

this was their first experience in a social movement.

There were also hundreds of debates all over the country, normally having 'yes' and 'no' representatives.

As in 1998, the 'no' started off their "pro-life" (anti-choice) campaign, insisting on the absolute value of the life of the foetus, and depicting foetuses as if they were nearly full-term babies. In addition, their arguments were that we would not put an end to backstreet abortions, that in other countries abortion rates had increased after legalisation, that women had the choice to give their child for adoption, etc. Less than a week before the referendum, they also stated that a 10 weeks' foetus can feel pain (which is against all medical evidence) and also that there was a black market business around selling placental material, etc. They were shameless enough to distribute a leaflet in a primary school ('Letter from a child to his/her mother').

On the question of criminalisation, several 'no' positions developed in the course of the campaign, from the hardest one, those who publicly stated that even if raped a woman should carry her pregnancy to the end, thus defending a change to an even more restrictive law, to others who said that women should go to jail, if not for their first abortion, surely for the second. A former minister of the

Japan

Neoliberal counter-reform and militarisation

New premier adds right-wing nationalism to neoliberal mix

Kenji Kunitomi

Conservative government, known for his anti-working class laws, stated that women should not go to jail but, after pleading guilty, they should have their prison sentence replaced by community work, at a nursery or a small children's school.

A few more generous 'no' campaigners argued that they did not want women to go to prison, but they did not want to change the law. They wanted abortion to remain a crime, but without penalty.

That's one of the major reasons why the Left Bloc campaign was so important and made the difference. By centring our campaign on the question of the trials and the need to put an end to women's humiliation, we also forced other parties, forces and individuals to state clearly whether women should go to prison

Yesterday, although the result of the referendum was not binding (since less than 50% of the electorate voted), José Socrates stated again, as he had done before, that one single additional vote for the YES would be enough for the law to be changed. Apart from the Christian Democrats, all parties in Parliament now agree that voters have shown an unequivocal wish to change the law, and therefore said they will engage in this new process. The first part will be easier: to abolish the article in the penal code which makes abortion a crime; the second one will take longer, as it will have to deal with changes into the health system, whether or not there should be counselling for women beforehand, and also to regulate important issues like the right to conscientious objection from the doctors.

It is clear that backstreet abortion will not end overnight, but the decriminalisation is the first step to make it possible for women to have access to safe abortion in the National Health Service. As 'Doctors for Choice' stated, we want abortion to be safe, early, free and rare.

Yesterday it was a very special day. It was not just another occasion to vote. It was not about electing a prime-minister for the next 3-4 years. It was about a major civilisation change. It was about turning a page in our history. It was about women's rights, it was about our collective future.

For all those, women and men, from political parties, movements or just individuals, who took part in the campaign this is an unforgettable day. We know we were part of this deep change and we are proud of it. We finally entered the 21st century!

Alda Sousa is a member of the national leadership (Mesa Nacional) of the Left Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Political Association (Portuguese section of the Fourth International), and a member of the Fourth International's International Committee.

NOTES

[1] Badajoz is a small town across the Spanish border, known for its clinic where lots of Portuguese women went to have abortions. Hypocrisy is so strong that this clinic advertises in some major Portuguese newspapers. On the night of the referendum, that was one of the slogans shouted by the young people.

After 5 years of the premiership of Japanese prime minister Jun'ichiro Koizumi, his successor Shinzo Abe won the election for the presidency of the Liberal Democratic Party and became the new prime minister of the coalition government between the LDP and Komeito. [1]

Describing himself as the 'destroyer' of his own party, the LDP, former prime minister Jun'ichiro Koizumi gained widespread popularity among Japanese people who had been demoralized after a decade of depression of the Japanese capitalist economy. During the 5 years of his rule, Koizumi had accelerated harsh neo-liberal policies in the name of 'structural reform', culminating in the privatization of the postal system in 2005.



Shinzo Abe

The results of the neo-liberal 'structural reform' policies are very clear. During the post-war era of economic expansion, Japanese society had been seen as one of the most equal societies among advanced capitalist countries. Now this impression has completely disappeared. While big companies such as Toyota have recorded unprecedented profits in recent years, average wages of workers have been pushed down.

Workers who have stable regular jobs have been replaced by unstable non-regular workers who earn only very low wages. Labour laws do not apply to most of these non-regular workers. Many workers are forced to accept illegal over-time work without payment. With privatization of public services, the part of the budget given over to healthcare, education and the

pension system has been severely cut down. 'Economic Survey of Japan 2006' published by the OECD said the following: "Addressing the rise in inequality and relative poverty requires measures to reduce labour market dualism. Reform of the tax system should take into account its potential impact on income distribution, which has become more unequal for the working-age population in recent years.

Indeed, the Gini coefficient measure has risen significantly since the mid 1980s, from well below to slightly above the OECD average, and the rate of relative poverty is now one of the highest in the OECD area'. "The proportion of non-regular workers has risen from 19% of employees a decade ago to over 30%. Part-time workers earn on average only 40% as much as

full-time workers, a gap that appears too large to be explained by productivity differences.

Although the increase in non-regular workers has been partly caused by cyclical factors, there is a risk that labour market dualism will become entrenched, given that thus far only a small proportion of non-regular workers have become regular workers".

Given these social realities, even the conservative mass media pointed out that the results of the neo-liberal policies pursued by the Koizumi administration have created a society of class differentiation. The harsh effects of 'structural counter-reform' policies have particularly hit the young generation. Nearly 50% of youth could not find stable jobs and their income is not enough to sustain their basic needs.

They are now facing 'the race to the bottom'. Alongside the neo-liberal offensive, the Koizumi government strengthened its military commitment to the global 'anti-terrorism' war strategy headed by U.S imperialism. Unconditionally supporting Bush's wars, the Koizumi administration dispatched the Japanese 'Self Defence Force' (JSDF) to the Indian Ocean and Iraq in support of the U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. This was the first case of overseas military operations for the JSDF since the Second World War. It was a typical example of the combination of neo-liberalism and militarism.

On the one hand, the Koizumi administration followed the

global U.S. military strategy, facilitated the relocation of U.S bases in Japan, and provided JSDF forces as an auxiliary force for the U.S in Asia-Pacific-wide military operations, including the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, the Philippines and elsewhere. On the other hand, utilizing cases of the abduction of Japanese people by the criminal North Korean dictatorship, as well as the nuclear tests it carried out, the government deliberately created a climate of anti-Korean and anti-Chinese chauvinist feelings among Japanese people.

As a grandson of Shinsuke Kishi, who had been prime minister in the late 1950's, and who had also been a minister for industry in the Tojo administration during the Second World War, Abe has been famous for his far-right nationalist positions, justifying successive wars, invasions and the colonization of Taiwan and Korea by Japanese imperialism. The title of Abe's manifesto for the LDP presidential election was 'Towards a Beautiful Country', in which he stressed the importance of a respectful attitude towards Japanese traditions, cultures, and history, symbolized by the Emperor system.

In his New Year press conference on January 4th 2007, Abe claimed that his cabinet would promote a political process aimed at scrapping the existing Japanese constitution, which renounces war and all armed forces, in the name of prohibiting any renewed militarist attempts by Japan. Abe described this as a 'departure from the post-war regime'.

According to a set of laws enacted last December, overseas operations have been defined as the primary missions of the Japanese Self Defence Forces.

The Defence Agency was formally renamed the Defence Ministry on Jan 9 2007, giving military officials a greater hand in the government's strategic policy-planning bodies. Defence officials hope that this will allow them to take over some of the responsibilities which have long been monopolized by the Foreign Ministry.

During his visit to European countries in early January 2007, Abe proclaimed that he will not hesitate to send Japanese troops abroad to 'contribute to international peace and stability' and vowed to strengthen cooperation with NATO. On Japan-NATO relations, he said in his speech to NATO's decision-making body on January 12th: 'Both sides should further demonstrate our abilities and work together'. This was very clear announcement that Japanese imperialism would dare to join the 'war against terrorism' on a global level.

The workers' movement and other social movements in Japan still remain very weak. Left political parties such as the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party have only 16 seats between them (JCP-9, SDP-7), out of a total of 480 seats in the House of Representatives (Lower House) and 15 seats (JCP-9, SDP-6) out of 242 seats in the House of Councils (Upper House). The Democratic Party of Japan, the main opposition party, which is

supported by Rengo (the biggest trade union confederation), is another capitalist party with a neo-liberal orientation. In this context, the anti-neo-liberal movement and the traditional peace movement have been facing a very difficult situation. At the same time, many workers and youth are recognising the disastrous outcome of the neo-liberal offensive by the capitalist class.

Small far-left political groups such as the Japan Revolutionary Communist League, which supports the Fourth International, should meet the challenge of presenting another road, a road of anti-capitalist alternatives. The JRCL held its 20th national congress in August 2006 and began to discuss a new pluralist and democratic regroupment of left forces.

Although the JRCL has to tackle this task in a prevailing climate of scepticism among working-class and left forces, it believes that a new space will open up through the beginnings of resistance, even in a very modest way, against the accelerated 'race to the bottom' and the militarization of the Japanese imperialist state.

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NOTES

[1] Komeito (Clean Government Party) is the political expression of a massive Buddhist cult, Sohka Gakkai, mainly based in the lower middle class. In the recent national elections it won nearly 8 million votes, which represents about 15% of total votes. on September 26th 2006.

Pakistan

Massive peasant conference demands end of feudalism

Farooq Tariq



A peasant conference held in Lahore on 4th February 2007 demanded an immediate end to feudalism. Organized by the Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee PKRC (Peasants' Coordination Committee), it was attended by well over 6000 people, making it one of the largest gatherings of peasants in such a conference. During the six hours of the proceedings, speakers stressed the need for land reform and an end to the militarization of agriculture.

The conference was held at the massive Minar-i-Pakistan ground in Lahore. It was here that in 1940 a resolution was passed at a public meeting of the Muslim League for the creation of a separate country for Muslims. The ground has often been the scene of large public rallies in the past.

Today's conference was one of the largest gatherings organized by the forces of the Left in years. The PKRC is an alliance of 23 peasants' organizations and is supported by the progressive forces in Pakistan. By organizing this conference, with thousands in attendance, it has become the largest peasant organization in the country.

The most popular slogan of the conference was "long live worker and peasant unity". The participants raised slogans against the WTO, privatization, military rule, religious fundamentalism and imperialism. They came to the conference in processions led by traditional "Dhols" (drums) and chanting revolutionary songs.

Hundreds of peasant women also participated in the conference and raised slogans against discriminatory laws. They demanded equal rights and an equal share in every field of life. The women demanded an end to feudal behaviour and respect for their views.

Formal permission to hold this rally was only granted a day before the conference. This was done following a Lahore High Court order to the city

government of Lahore to permit the holding of the conference. It is ironic that the Lahore district government has formally announced many times that political parties can only hold public meetings at this ground. But although the PKRC had asked permission a month before, the city government had not even bothered to reply two days before the date of the conference. It was thanks to the intervention of the Lahore High Court that the PKRC was able to hold this meeting as planned.

It was mainly several peasant movements that made this conference a historic one. The Anjuman Mozareenm Punjab AMP (Association of Tenants) is fighting for land rights over military farms at Okara, Lahore, Renala Khurd and Depalpur. They brought over a thousand peasants to the conference. The Labour Qaumi Movement of power loom workers in Faisalabad was another group that brought hundreds. Another tenants' organization from Lahore, the Ghareeb Itehad Anjuman Shamsia, the Pakistan Bhatta Mazdoor Union, the Pakistan Kissan Committee, the Pakistan Ghareeb Kissan Tehreek (Pakistan Poor Peasants Movement), Pakistan Kissan Itehad (Pakistan Peasants Unity), Sind Hari Tehreek, Women Workers' Help Line, the National Trade Union Federation, the Pakistan Workers Confederation and other workers', peasants' and social groups also participated in large numbers in the conference.

Speakers included Abid Hasan Minto, convener of the Awami Jamhuri Tehreek (the Left Alliance) Farooq Tariq, secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan and the PKRC, Bushra Khaliq, secretary of Women Workers' Help Line, Afzal Khamoosh, president of the Pakistan Mazdoor Kissan Party, Shoukat Choudry, secretary of the Pakistan Mazdoor Mehaz, Abdul Hakeem, secretary of the Awami Tehreek, Shama Bhatti Sindhiani Tehreek, Naseem Shamim Malik of the Pakistan National Workers' Party, Mehr Abdul Satar, secretary of the AMP, Taj Marri of the Inqilabi Jamhoori Committee, Irfan Mufti, secretary of the Pakistan Social Forum, Asim Sajad Akhtar of the Peoples' Rights' Movement, Yousaf Baluch, chairman of the National Trade Union Federation and others.

The speakers demanded an end to the feudal system and land reform, protested against the unjust distribution of water and demanded an end to bonded labour. They criticized the policies of the present military regime and declared that it has created unprecedented crises of a social, political and economic nature. They said that without ending feudalism, democracy cannot really be achieved. The feudal class, alongside the capitalist class, is exploiting workers and peasants with a growing intensity. The military government protects the feudal class. The military itself owns more than 12 percent of the land in Pakistan.

Speakers criticized the sloganeering of the MQM (a sectarian political group), which calls for an end to feudalism. But the MQM is part of the present regime and is sharing power with the feudal class. How then can it be anti-feudal? It is only the progressive forces and the Left that are persistently advocating an end to feudalism, capitalism and imperialism.

The speakers declared that it was necessary to build an anti-imperialist movement in Pakistan to oppose the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, to oppose the implementation of the neo-liberal agenda and to fight for the democratic rights of the workers and peasants.

They pointed out that the resent military regime, with the assistance of religious fundamentalist forces, is accelerating the privatization of the economy, leading to widespread unemployment, price hikes and the ending of state concessions to the workers and peasants. We can see no implementation of pro-labour policies in Pakistan. Speakers demanded a minimum wage of Rupees 8000 (\$135) a month and trade union rights for agricultural workers.

The conference rejected the WTO and its agricultural policies. It condemned the multinational companies who are taking over the economy with the help of the military regime. Most agricultural land near the big cities is being bought by the multinational companies, thus forcing a large scale migration of

Pakistan

Aisha Amin: peace hero

Labour Party Pakistan activist confirmed dead

Farooq Tariq

the peasantry into the cities. The WTO "cure" is in fact a recipe for suicide. We reject the idea that the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank can end poverty. On the contrary, they are responsible for increasing poverty. Another demand raised by speakers was to oppose corporate farming in Pakistan.

The conference demanded the restoration of state subsidies to the peasantry and reduced charges for electricity and gas for the farmers. It demanded an end to privatization of agricultural state institutions. Speakers also demanded control of local communities over their natural resources and an end to the exploitation of natural resources by the multinational companies. They demanded an end to military operations in Baluchistan and the tribal areas and the restitution of those who have been "disappeared".

It was also demanded that the Pakistan government issue a Pakistani passport to Ihsan Ullah, an exiled bhatta workers' leader, and for him to be allowed to return to Pakistan.

There were several bookstalls at the conference. Food was available at a cost of Rupees 10 (\$ 0.20). The PKRC leadership thanked Action Aid Pakistan and other radical social organizations for their help in organizing the conference.

Aisha Amin, (73) a Labour Party Pakistan activist from Shahdra Lahore, was declared dead today three days after being listed as missing after the Delhi-Lahore train bomb blast.

Her grandson Kamaran (23) was also one of those who lost their lives on the Shamjhauta Express train, a peace train between India and Pakistan. The train was coming from Delhi to Lahore on 19th February when, after a bomb blast, a fire gripped three compartments of the train. Over 70 are so far confirmed dead.

Aisha Amin was elected as a councillor for Shahdra in an open contest, serving between 2001 and 2005. She got a record 1272 votes to top the list of women councillors. She joined Labour Party Pakistan during that year. She participated in numerous demonstrations and played an important role in expanding the network of Labour Party Pakistan. She was a close friend of Nazli Javed, member of the National Committee of LPP, and helped her to win a council seat as well.

Aisha Amin then went on to build the Women Workers Help Line and also helped the Labour

Education Foundation to open an adult literacy centre at her home. She was one of the pupils at the literacy center although she was over 70. She said, "there is no age limit to learning".

Aisha Amin did not contest the local election in 2005. She was very much a critic of the local government system where women councillors were not given any power to help the local population. She asked me several times "what is the use of being elected as a councillor when we cannot help the people; there are no funds available".

She always participated in demonstrations. During the end of December, she participated in an anti-imperialist demonstration organized by LPP in Lahore.

By profession she was a midwife for the local area, although not qualified she learnt to become a Daiya (midwife). Her brother

died earlier in India and she left Pakistan to grieve with her family. Her family lived in Saharan Pur.

The family waited three days after she went missing during the train fire. Two of her relatives went to India yesterday to check on her whereabouts. This morning they were informed that she was found unconscious in a jungle and would be OK. They also informed us that Kamaran was also ok; But at 2 pm today, the unfortunate news arrived that both are dead.

She is one of the victims of those who want to kill anyone to make a point. It seems that the burning of the train was carried out by some religious fundamentalist group who want no peace between India and Pakistan. Aisha Amin is a peace hero who lost her life in a train that is known as a peace train.

Farooq Tariq is the general secretary of Labour Party Pakistan.



Aisha Amin at a December 2006 demonstration

Farooq Tariq is the general secretary of Labour Party Pakistan.