

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV372 November 2005

CUBA/MARXISM

"Welcome" ... Trotsky

SRI LANKA

Power to the Left - For a new era

World Social Forum 2006

Pakistan Earthquake

Poland

Brazil

China

Europe

**Portuguese presidential
election**

Belgium

Sri Lanka

Letter to readers

Italy

France

Britain

Cuba/Marxism

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WORLD SOCIAL FORUM 2006

A polycentric forum...

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

Defining priorities and common axes

Interview with Eric Toussaint by Sergio Ferrari in collaboration with UNITE (Platform of Swiss NGOs for cooperation and solidarity).

To grasp the potential of the World Social Forum (WSF) you first need to evaluate the present state of the social movement on a global scale, given the close relationship between the forums and mobilisation. *«In that respect, I am very optimistic, if the increase in mobilisation in 2005 is anything to go by»*, asserts Eric Toussaint, a Belgian historian and activist and president of the Belgium-based Committee for the Abolition of the Third World Debt (CADTM). Eric Toussaint - who is also a member of the WSF's International Council (i.e. the coordinators) considers that this next step *«needs a clear definition of the priorities of the citizens' agenda on a global level»*. The process is already under way ... or at least, it has begun.

Sergio Ferrari (S.F.) : A year after the 5th World Social Forum at Porto Alegre (in Brazil, in January 2005), in what frame of mind is the international social movement?

Eric Toussaint (E.T.) : In 2005, there was a significant revival of mass mobilisation after a slump between mid-2003 and late 2004. In fact, the next WSF will take its place in a two-sided world picture. One side is very gloomy: the barbarity in Iraq, the continuing brutal repression of the Palestinians, the determined attacks on the mechanisms of collective solidarity throughout the world by businesses and governments, mass redundancies, the undermining of economic, social and cultural rights. In a word, the neo-liberal offensive is forging ahead, despite the fact that its ideological

foundations have lost all credibility in the eyes of the world's populations.

On the other side is a glimmer of hope : a significant revival and spread of social and citizens' struggles, with an increased ability to foil specific political projects, such as the European Constitutional Treaty, or economic ones, such as the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA). Without a doubt, 2005 is ending on more positive and interesting perspectives for the social movements than did 2004 (see below).

S.F. : Given the context, then, what are the main aims of the coming polycentric session of the WSF, in January 2006?

E.T. : First of all, it's important to remember the success of the 5th WSF at Porto Alegre, at the beginning of this year, with its 150,000 participants. And the 1st Mediterranean Social Forum in Barcelona, in June 2005, where over 1000 delegates from the Arab world and numerous Europeans took part.

The 6th WSF presents us with a challenge that was not planned for. In 2004, the frenetic rhythm of the « World Social Forum process » was opened up to debate within the International Council. A number of national and continental forums, as well as various campaigns and movements (including the CADTM), considered that the frequency of WSFs was far too high and that it would be preferable to organise them on a biennial basis. Finally, it was agreed to carry on holding an annual session throughout 2005, 2006 and 2007, but to decentralise it to several venues in 2006.

From Porto Alegre to the three continents

S.F. : So the new polycentric forum, will also be held in Caracas and in Bamako, at the end of

January 2006, then in Karachi a few months later...

E.T. : That's right. But again, instead of avoiding overload, all the WSF actors will be coming under intense pressure at an even faster pace all through the first half of 2006. In January, there will be a North-African pre-forum to prepare the forum at Bamako (capital of Mali), due to take place from 19 to 23 January. From 24 to 29 January, the Caracas meeting will attract particular attention due to the Bolivarian revolutionary process in that country.

The third decentralised session will be held several months later in Karachi (Pakistan), preceded in January by a national preparatory meeting in Lahore. The Pakistani organisers of the WSF have had to delay their session by a few months after the recent earthquake in Kashmir. Other activities are also planned in South-East Asia. Then in late April or early May, the 4th European Social Forum will take place in Athens (Greece). In other words, we have a very busy programme ahead...

S.F. : What are the biggest challenges of the poly-centric process?

E.T. : The main aim is to develop regional dynamism while avoiding fragmentation. There is a definite risk of this in 2006, since by not having a single venue, there will not be the opportunity for campaigns and movements to exchange views and to discuss and define their priorities of action, just when the need to progress in defining collective action is felt to be most pressing.

Decentralised unification

S.F. : Should we expect to see certain contradictions arise between the clarification of options and a decentralised process?

E.T. : That is certainly happening, but I am convinced that the dynamics of the social movement will prevail and that priority will be given to unifying the process. I came out of a recent international meeting in Geneva in October feeling very optimistic. A number of active networks and movements from all four corners of the world were present, including Via Campesina, the CADTM,

Focus on the Global South, the CUT of Brazil (the Unified Workers Confederation), several groups of ATTAC and European trade unions. We took stock of the last few years' actions and we made headway in clarifying certain future priorities. Everything points towards a process of broad consultation to draw up these essential axes.

S.F. : With such an unusual procedure, can the International Council, as the coordinating instance of the WSFs, really manage to keep up with the entire process?

E.T. : The next meeting of the International Council is in March 2006, when we will see how the first three forums went. There is a risk that we might find it hard to keep abreast of events, even though we are well aware of the efforts required to respond to the new challenges.

Convergence of contents

S.F. : What will these decentralised forums be about? Will each session have its own programme, or will there be an identical agenda for all?

E.T. : If we analyse the central themes of these three big meetings, we see a clear convergence. In this sense, I don't think there is any risk of political fragmentation. For example, an important axis from the Porto Alegre forum of 2005 was « Political power and struggles for social emancipation » will be present in all three meetings. Still, the biggest and most crucial challenge is to identify priorities for common action. It's nothing new : the same need was emphasized both in the « Porto Alegre Manifesto », presented by a group of well-known intellectuals at the 5th session of the WSF and by the Assembly of Social Movements at the same gathering. At Porto Alegre, in 2005, we agreed on an agenda of common activities. Now we absolutely must decide on our priorities. We can have 2 or 3, but not 15 or 20... I get the impression that most of the constituent members of the WSF, in all their diversity, agree that this is necessary, so I am very optimistic about it.

Consultation on priorities

S.F. : What will these priorities be?

E.T. : Opposition to war, for example. That could be put into effect by a big international mobilisation on the anniversary of the attack on Iraq. Solidarity with the Palestinian people could be added to it as another shared preoccupation; and so could opposition to the occupation of Afghanistan and other war-mongering projects, like Plan Colombia. We're trying to find a single date for all these mobilisations, probably in March 2006.

Anti-debt campaigns are another essential axis, broadly debated at the Havana meeting, in September 2005. It would be highly symbolic if we could organise the occupation of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) premises in several countries on the same day.

Furthermore, if - as all indications seem to suggest - the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), to be held in Hong Kong in December 2005, ends once more in failure, mobilisation against the continuation of the negotiations which this institution orchestrates will become a rallying point for the social movements.

For the time being, I must insist, these are only proposals. Which is why we need a far-reaching process of consultation to define the two, three or four priorities that will be shared by the entire World Social Movement.

Social Movements : a dynamic upswing

For Eric Toussaint, 2005 saw a dynamic upswing in the social movement on a global scale. "Mass mobilisation against the international institutions has taken off again... In early July 2005, 250,000 people took part in the demonstration against the G8 in Scotland - as many as in Genoa, in 2001. At the end of September in Washington, there was a large mobilisation against the World Bank and the IMF. At the same time, in the United States, thousands were demonstrating against the war in Iraq, which had not happened the previous year. Then there

were the anti-WTO demonstrations in Geneva in July and October, and the big demonstration against the FTAA at the Peoples' Summit in Mar del Plata (Argentina) in early November. And so on."

Parallel to these movements, the Belgian historian reports, "in recent months, certain events have shown that the neoliberal project is undergoing a deep crisis of legitimacy. There have been George Bush's failures in the United States, over his handling of the hurricane disaster which particularly affected Louisiana; his total military failure in Iraq; the fact that the US president cannot travel abroad without provoking huge demonstrations of opposition; the failure of the concept of « Blairism », in Britain and in Germany, and even of " Lula's way" in Brazil. All these elements are part of the neo-liberal crisis".

As for Latin America, Eric Toussaint emphasises certain positive points, which bring hope: " The Zapatistas' new initiative, "The Other Campaign"; the possibility that Evo Morales might win the Bolivian elections in December - and the discussions underway in that country about recovering their natural resources; the mobilisation in Ecuador to overthrow President Lucio Gutierrez; and of course the ongoing Bolivarian process in Venezuela, with its massive popular support".

In Europe, he goes on, " three things seem to me to be important: firstly, the multiplication of 'classic' social struggles waged by workers (in France, Belgium, Italy, etc.). Secondly, the riots that have erupted in the proletarian suburbs of several French towns, which are perfectly legitimate and which will force the various social movements and political parties to reconsider their positions and to take action - not just to talk more about it. That also concerns the World Social Forum. Finally, the resounding failure of the draft project for the European Constitutional Treaty, enacted by the French and Dutch referenda. Not forgetting the critical struggle against the " Bolkestein Directive" - fought with the participation of the European Confederation of Trade Unions (ECTU). The Directive aims to increase competition in the

labour market between workers within the European Union".

Eric Toussaint concludes that it has been a year of citizens' struggles, a year of renewed social mobili-

sation which also affects, in one way or another, and with their own characteristics, several Asian and African countries.

Sergio Ferrari

PAKISTAN EARTHQUAKE

Relief work pays off

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

The Paniola district of Rawalakot in Kashmir was chosen to concentrate our relief and rehabilitation work. The main reason was our local contacts in the area. Working in an area comprising 38 villages, scattered over 200 kilometres of mountainous area with 62,000 registered votes, was not an easy task. With over 300 casualties, thousands wounded and over 80 percent houses demolished, it was difficult to cover the area with immediate relief and some rehabilitation.

Now after 45 days of the earthquake, there are signs that our relief and rehabilitation work is paying off. I visited the area with two representatives of Action Aid Pakistan on 22nd of November, my second tour of the area since the earthquake. A day long visit gave us some sign of hope; a hope that we saw among the affected people that life must go on and we must rebuild what we have lost. 100 houses are being built in the area with the active participation of the local community. Many have been helped to build some sort of shelter homes to fight the freezing temperatures. Many tents have been erected, provided by LRC and other organizations. Community is there to help each other in every aspect.

We saw the happy face of Nazeeran Bibi, a widow, who told us near the site of her under-construction home that her home will be completed in three days. "I will have a roof once again" she told us with pride. Her house was levelled with the total loss of every household item she had. Nazeeran is at present living in a tent provided by the LRC.

"Who will have the first fifty houses to be built by the LRC?" was a difficult question. It was solved by the local committees by pointing out the neediest

and those who had casualties. Women were given the top priority.

Nazar Mohammed, a local teacher and a member of the committee, showed us his house which was not totally demolished but they were not able to live there. "I have not awarded myself a home in this phase because there are more who deserve the priority" he told us. While his mother, an elderly woman, asked us when her turn would be and when we will have the home build. We told her it is the decision of the committee, "Ask your son". "But he is a comrade and is very principled person" she replied.

Nazar Mohammed told us that he got a loan from the government to build his house, which was completed only two months before the earthquake. "I have spent two hundred thousand rupees (US \$3,500) to build the house. It is now a total loss, but the government is still sending us notices to pay the loan". We advised him not to pay the loan and that the LPP will launch a campaign on the issue. It will demand that all the debts of the earthquake area must be abolished.

This is a working class area where most of the men have gone for jobs in different parts of Pakistan. There is neither industry nor an area friendly to agriculture. Most of population depends on the remittances of their family members. Some goats, cows, chickens and buffalo were bringing in some small income. There were some fruit trees but was not sufficient to make a proper living. The area has no large land holding. It was not a tourist area like some other parts of Kashmir and North West Frontier Province. It was an ordinary mountainous area.

It was the first truck load of relief items like cloths, blankets, tents, medicine and food that reached

here from the Labour Relief Campaign. Then there were other 10 trucks afterwards that were distributed by newly formed local relief committees.

A team of volunteers from the LRC started work in this area a day after the earthquake. Headed by Nisar Shah, the chairperson of Labour Party Pakistan, it was able to convince the community to form committees at village level to help in distribution the relief items and to organize the rehabilitation.

On 18th October 2005, A Citizen Relief Committee was formed in Lahore and, subsequently, a CRC was also formed in Kashmir. The LRC became part of it to expand the work in this area. The CRC in Kashmir not only helped in the immediate relief work but also played a political role by exposing the militarization of relief work and opposed the intervention of the NATO forces in Kashmir. It issued regular press releases to the national media and tried to break the myth that it is only the religious fundamentalists that are active in relief work.

A mobile medical camp organised by the LRC with the help of Women Workers Help Line treated over 400 women and children in three days: It was the first medical help that came here directly in the community. Another one with 6 doctors and three nurses was planned for three days from November 27th by the same organization.

We give thanks to all the donations that were collected locally, and raised internationally, by the progressive and labour organizations that helped LRC and CRC to bring some hope to the area.

The result is that there is no religious fundamentalist organization in this area that can claim that they the one who did this or that. There is no military government help that has reached here. It is our efforts that have brought some life back to the area.

On the way to Paniloo, we gave a lift to Saeed who guided us to the town. Saeed is a public employee in Islamabad and was not here at the time of earthquake, but he is here to help his village community. I asked him if he knew Nisar Shah, "Yes, from the

Labour Party and he is building houses in the area. He has not visited our village but he is coming here, I heard..." That was also the case with two more people we were able to speak with on the way. They all knew the work we are doing.

Nisar Shah told us that word is spreading very fast in Kashmir about our work. Every day I receive delegations from far-off places who want us to help them build their houses. These are the first houses to be completed at the time when many relief organizations are still distributing tents. We are far ahead in our approach of rehabilitation. Winter is approaching and no-one will be able to survive in the tents.

Nisar Shah told us that we were the first ones who distributed iron sheets only after 15 days of the earthquake. These sheets helped many to build some sort of reliable temporary place of shelter. Now, we are the first ones to build proper houses with concrete blocks and iron sheets. They are able to resist the earthquake. Our houses are built with the help of Action Aid Pakistan who have been helped by DFID. [1]

Nisar Shah told us "We have been approached by Shirkat Ghah, the leading womens' NGO in Pakistan, which will help us to build another fifty houses in the area. We are trying to build very low cost homes. So, more shelter homes for more people".

I led many hundreds of my community people to protest at the wrongful distribution of government help by the military authorities on 20th November. It was distributed to only those very few who were somehow close to the military. They invited us to negotiate and we were able to convince them to provide help without any discrimination against anyone.

We saw some life coming to the area. In the afternoon, we saw children were coming out of schools in their uniforms. Shops were normally open. Fruits and vegetables were available and super stores were full of every day items. Pakoras and samosas were on sale; so were some locally made

sweets and Mathaiy. We did not see people on the main roads waiting for some immediate relief, yet that was the case a month before in most of the roads.

We did not see buffalos, cows and goats. We heard that they were mainly eaten up during the immediate period after the earthquake or they died as the houses collapsed. We saw people working at some sort of construction work. They are not trying to repair the old ones but building new places near the demolished houses.

All is done without any help from the military government according to Arslan, a volunteer of the LRC who has been based here since 11th October. Arslan told us "The government is busy still in the main cities and has forgotten local village areas like this".

How To Donate Money

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Medicines And Food Can Be Sent To:

Labour Education Foundation, Sufi Mansion, 7
Edgerton Road, Lahore, Pakistan.

Tel: +92 42 6303808, Fax: +92 04206271149

Labour Party Pakistan, 40 Abbot Road, Lahore,
Pakistan

Tel: +92 42 6315162

POLAND

The choice of refusal

PRZEMYSŁAW WIELGOSZ ·

These elections however represent something more than a simple changeover of power in Poland. They have brought to light the scale of the social and political crisis in the country after 15 years of the restoration of capitalism. They have shown the growing potential of social protest, which has not found its expression in any of the parties present on the electoral scene nor even, more generally, within the framework of the system of institutionalized parties. If we take account of the fact that just less than 40% of those registered to vote did so, it can be said that the true victors in the parliamentary elections of 2005 were neither the conservatives of the Law and Justice party, [5] nor the neoliberal fundamentalists of the Civic Platform. [6] Perhaps in reality those who did not vote and thus demonstrated their will to reject the false alternatives produced by the Polish political class are the real victors.

Paradoxically the victory of the right does not at all reflect the real state of mind in Poland. Certainly, there is no doubt that the defeat of the post-Communist left was crushing and that it took considerable effort on the part of the SLD leaders to bring about such a fall in support for their party. It is necessary however to keep in mind that the PiS won not because it emphasized its rightist authoritarianism, but because at the last minute it decided to actively exploit the discourse of the left. The Kaczynski brothers thus succeeded in outflanking the smooth and not very concrete Donald Tusk, stating clearly their will to defend social rights, their opposition to the lowering of the taxes of the richest and the increase of VAT on food, medicine

and other basic necessities, identifying themselves with the ethos of Solidarnosc through the imagery of the capital "S" [7] and the Christian democratic idea of social solidarity.

But the effectiveness of the social phraseology of the PiS and the high score registered by the clearly anti-neoliberal Samoobrona, [8] only represent the tip of the iceberg.

Taking account of the fact that the SLD won less than a quarter of its vote of 2001, the mood in the party would have to be morose. One might have expected that the social-democrats would be at least concerned by the perspective which looms before the great majority of citizens of the Third Republic, governed by the conservative and neoliberal coalition of the PiS and PO. But television showed the delighted faces of the SLD when they learned that their party had won nearly 11% of the votes, instead of the 7% predicted. This reaction bears witness to the fact that this formation: is incapable of learning anything whatsoever from its most stinging defeat. Even putting aside the fact that this supposedly renovated social-democracy had presented on its lists old warhorses thoroughly implicated in the "success" of the Miller team, [9] like Ryszard Kalisz, Jerzy Szmajdzinski or Krzysztof Janik, [10] it should be said that the joy shown by a defeat slightly smaller than had been predicted witnesses to the real centres of interest of the SLD politicians, not to mention their specific mentality. A vote of 11% guarantees the SLD leaders seats in the Diet for the next four years, but removes the left from any real influence on the orientations of the country. Knowing that this will have no practical effect, Olejniczak, Napieralski, [11] Szmajdzinski and Janik can defend the workers, the retired and those that they refer to in their neoliberal Newspeak as the weakest. They have already said so! The prob-

lem is that they also make it clear that in reality this defence has a completely instrumental character, amounting to nothing other than political marketing and that they will abandon this left phraseology when they have a new chance to govern. It's sad, but all the celestial and terrestrial signs indicate that for them of the allegedly renewed SLD what was most important was getting back into the Diet for one more legislature. Their attitude is typical of an alienated political class. They have shown that politics for them is a parlour game and not the real confrontation of interests and aspirations of diverse social groups.

However, the most important thing about these elections was the fact that in practice they were boycotted. The rate of participation is highly revealing of the dominant ambience in Poland 25 years after the foundation of "Solidarnosc" and 15 years after the restoration of capitalism. 60% of those registered to vote didn't bother to do so, or nearly 6% more than during the previous parliamentary elections. This means that the two parties that won in reality only enjoyed the support of 20% of the electorate (six out of 30 million voters voted for them). The voters thus conferred on them a formal rather than a real legitimacy.

Contrary to the claims of some experts, who lament an alleged political immaturity or worse still, detect hidden aspirations on the part of Polish society to a strong state, a high rate of abstention can be the sign of the strengthening of an emancipatory potential. It is very probable that the 20 million people who didn't vote have in no way indicated their lack of interest in politics and democracy. On the contrary!

The abstainers have made a very political choice. However, this choice does not fit into the narrow framework of the political scene. We might dare to say that the majority of those registered have voted in their fashion in not going to the polling stations and in refusing to participate in a spectacle where the main actors, the decorations and the scenario itself are repetitive, rotten and compromised. Even if only half of the abstainers made this choice con-

sciously - and that would be true of a good part of the former voters of the left, unconvinced neither by the pseudo-alternative of Borowski [12] nor by the pseudo-renewal of Olejniczak - that would already be a political fact of great import. A new force has thus manifested itself, which, sooner or later, will begin to seek more sovereign forms of articulation of its interests and its political aspirations.

For we have witnessed an immense rejection. Not only has the political class which appeared after 1989 been sanctioned, but also the form of capitalism that this class restored along the Vistula has been rejected. We can thus say that the electors-abstainers (what a postmodernist term!) have revealed the limits and particularities of formal democracy and, in doing so, have shaken its foundations. That does not mean that they have expressed authoritarian aspirations, as claimed by the frightened partisans of the system. It resembles more a protest against the democratic deficit, against the alienation of the political class and against the neoliberal consensus which unified all the main parliamentary forces in the area of economic strategy.

Employing a somewhat philosophical language, it could be said that in reality we are witnessing a massive rejection of the mirage of formal liberty offered to us by bourgeois democracy. That freedom authorizes us to choose only within a framework determined by the relationship of forces which characterizes capitalist society. The choice that we are allowed is among the neoliberal partisans of capitalism, the conservative partisans of capitalism and the socialist partisans of capitalism. The domination of capital over labour is in this framework the real foundation of pluralism, silently admitted. In the final instance this means that the parties come to resemble each other and the political spectrum is increasingly narrow.

This tendency can be less insupportable when social forces limit seriously the power of capital, as was the case not so long ago in Western Europe. Today this system still survives, even if it is increasingly decadent under the blows of globalization. In

countries like Poland, things are much worse. The neoliberal offensive which has gathered force for 15 years, the pacification of the unions and workers' resistance has led to such an interpenetration of political and economic elites, that the democratic institutions appear increasingly to the citizens as a mere façade which hides the dictatorship of finance capital.

It is in these conditions that the voters have chosen to reject this façade. They have said no to the ritual of formal democracy denuded of real social content and they have made the choice of real freedom. They have demanded a change in the rules of the game, a change in the principles of choice and the articulation of political forces. They have emphasized what everybody in Poland - except perhaps Donald Tusk - knows perfectly: because of the alienation of the political class and its distance from social life, decisions about who will be in the Diet do not depend on the social implantation of the candidates but on their access to resources to finance their electoral campaigns, i.e. their arrangements with capital. And it is not those who represent real social interests who enter the Diet but those who have the resources to get themselves elected; the Polish parliamentary system is founded on a mechanism of negative selection, which means that the whole political scene is not representative (that is, it only represents the interests of the privileged).

For several years independent economists have argued that in Poland we are in the process of restoring the model of peripheral capitalism and that this is accompanied by the reconstruction of unequal relations between the Polish economy and the centres of world capitalism in the EU and USA. The recent elections have indicated that this process of "peripheralization" also characterizes the political scene.

These elections have shown that, as in the classic countries of peripheral capitalism like Brazil or

Venezuela, the entire Polish political class is compromised. The characteristic trait of the political systems of Latin America is that the difference between the conservatives and social liberals in no way challenges the corrupt character of the system. We are talking here, of course, of corruption with a capital "C", that is the dependence of the political class on capital and its subordination through the privatization of the system of finances and not of some individual cases of corruption, like those which have overshadowed the SLD and which constitute the favourite theme of the Kaczynski brothers. If the resemblance of the political scene in Poland to the dominant relations in Latin America constitutes in many ways a fact (and under globalization we should take such facts seriously), perhaps then is also on the other side of the ocean that we should seek inspiration to determine the issues in the current situation. Just as in Latin America, a true alternative to the current relationship of the dominant forces in Poland can only come from outside of the current parliamentary system, from the sphere of social movements and in particular from the mobilization and resistance of the workers.

The Polish left has no need today of games around the leadership of the parliamentary opposition. It needs to meet the challenge which the huge electoral rejection constitutes. Its task should be to furnish a political vector to this rejection. The abyss which separates the perspectives necessary for the realization of this task from the attitude adopted by Wojciech Olejniczak does not give rise to optimism. It means that the construction of the culture of democratic self-organization - which has always been, is and will be the foundation of a genuine left - remains a task to be accomplished. And one of a burning relevance.

We have taken this article from the weekly supplement "Impuls" number 56 of the Polish daily "Trybuna" of September 29, 2005.

BRAZIL

"P-SOL is a historical necessity"

The P-SOL provides a refuge for the socialist and democratic Left, a point of convergence between different political sensibilities and a social militancy which for twenty years has advocated for the Left, alternatives that are different from those put forward by the hegemonic sector of the Workers' Party (PT), the sector that has killed the party to which we devoted the best years of our lives.

What constituted its reason for existence has been buried. The PT still exists today from a judicial and bureaucratic point of view, but that's all. I know that all that did not entirely begin with the Lula government; the process of degeneration and bureaucratization had already begun before. Furthermore, it had already been denounced by the above-mentioned left currents in the party, but perhaps we didn't do what needed to be done with the necessary vehemence, with enough force so that the process didn't continue to deepen.

The Workers' Party, to the great distress of all the militants who helped to build the biggest left party in Latin America, is today a mediocre tool of triumphalist propaganda for neo-liberalism. By its actions as a governing party it has legitimised the whole neo-liberal discourse. All of that has represented for us a kind of apprenticeship which has shown us how to avoid running the same risks as those of which we have just been victims, by encouraging the process of internal democracy, articulation with the social movements and the permanent stimulation of the political life of the party.

This experience has strongly troubled people in their very lives, since some go so far as to say: "I have the greatest admiration for you, but who can guarantee for me that if one day you set foot on the so-called sacred soil of government, you won't

change camp, you won't commit one more betrayal?" That is in fact what a lot of people think, what a lot of them talk about which many people are asking questions.

But I always reply: it's a risk that we are going to take together. Then I joke by saying that if something like that happened again, then we parliamentarians would be expelled again. [1]

I am joking when I say that we will take the risk together. But we are thinking collectively, so that internal democracy and the participation of the rank and file militants will be permanent, solid, so that the militant collective will reduce the risks of degeneration and bureaucratisation of the party. I think that we can never say that we have the magic formula of 100 per cent absence of risk. But we cannot allow fear, the danger that fear represents, to lead us to the point where we face the possibility of degeneration with sad resignation.. and so we do nothing.

All the experience that we went through in the PT, which culminated in the bureaucratisation and the degeneration of the party, which happened in spite of the admirable actions of the militants on the left of the party, is an important apprenticeship so that we will not follow the same paths as those which led to the horrible situation we see now. [2] The P-SOL is a collective project, built by experienced socialist militants, who will neither sell out nor give up.

In what way does the P-SOL rearticulate the struggle for socialism in our country?

The creation of the P-SOL was a historical necessity. Because it is also what the PT accomplished historically, without speaking of the fact that it didn't have the right to betray, to organise a class betrayal. But it cannot now, with this betrayal, bury and cancel out all the programmatic conceptions of the

socialist and democratic Left. It doesn't own them. And nor will they be the property of the P-SOL. But our party, by historical necessity, was also born to honour the memory of millions of militants of the socialist and democratic Left in Brazil, in Latin America and in the world who have not sold out and who have not prostrated themselves before capitalism. And we are doing that with much joy, with discipline and with love for the working class.

The P-SOL can contribute in a decisive and positive way to building a socialist and people's way out of the crisis. The problem is to know what mechanisms we can use, now and in the future, with the means that we have as a party and with the possibilities for social mobilisation. In order to formulate a way out, we will have to, starting from popular indignation, demand early elections.

We cannot in reality only propose a Constituent Assembly, because with the present electoral legislation, if the Constitution was changed now, it would be for the worse! If early elections do take place, it will have to be for the whole Congress [3] and also to elect the President of the Republic. Because the institutionalised promiscuity, the crony-style relations between the government and the National Congress, are very clear.

I think that if the Brazilian people demonstrates generosity towards us all, it is because it witnessed the process of expulsion that we went through, it experienced our suffering, our tears and our struggle. It saw that we were not accepting the betrayal. I once read, I don't know where, that tears leave scars on the soul, but I always say that our scars are the wounds of people who had not become cowards, of people who went out on to the field of battle and fought for what they believed in.

Though we must not be inordinately proud of the marks left by this battle, they nevertheless represent memories of the months of glory of the Lula government, during which we did not sell out. It must be said that during those glorious months, at the time when we were being expelled and no one wanted to speak up, people thought we were crazy,

extremists, who were incapable of understanding the historic moment we were living through.

And we had the courage, the nerve even, to honour the memory of many others had found themselves on the battlefield and who are not remembered, those who washed away the blood of the comrade who was wounded and buried the one who was dead. They were those who wept and then returned to the struggle. That is why the Brazilian people love us.

It is not a question of personality. It is because they identify with us. Even people who, because of the circumstances of their lives, were not able to break with a particular power structure in order to realise their dreams, identify with our struggle.

Luciana, Heloisa and Baba

It is only because it was not an individual project that I was ready to build a party. If it was a question of an individual project, I would go and take care of my personal life. I put at the disposal of the party my heart and soul, my health and my socialist fighting strength, because I know that it is not a personal project, because I know that it is not just the fight of Luciana [4] of Baba [5] but the anonymous struggle of thousands of militants spread across the whole of Brazil, and who are experiencing situations much more difficult than ours.

They have to swallow their fear, as we have to swallow our own fear, overcome our weaknesses, to keep on fighting day after day. Because there are many more people who are fighting every day much more than us, facing difficulties much greater than those that sometimes threaten to exhaust our ability to react day after day. That is why we place ourselves at the service of these people.

Many parliamentarians, both in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate, whom we have opposed throughout our history and whom we will continue to oppose with anger, because they have a project that is contradictory with ours, even they, when we were in the process of being expelled, were visibly embarrassed. Those who were the enemies of the Lula project and who are treated today like the dar-

lings of the government, who are there living off public resources, as in fact they have always done, and many others who are our class enemies and who will certainly never call a truce in the battles that they wage against us, even they can respect us.

We are in this fight because we know that there are millions of generous, courageous and socialist hearts all over the country who are fighting for a new world, rich with bread, peace and happiness.

And we welcome into the P-Sol with open arms the fighters of the PT, since there is almost no space left in the PT for whoever calls him or herself a left socialist. These people will be welcomed by all of us with a great deal of affection and solidarity. They will be welcomed to help us build the present with the help of an instrument of struggle for the working class, an instrument that is not yet ready but is in the process of being elaborated.

Many among us represent different traditions from the point of view of the international left. We have gone through different experiences, we come from different traditions, but we respect each other because we are socialists. If we did not have this attitude towards each other, then we could not be together. I hope that these comrades will be able to come and help us build the P-SOL as an instrument of struggle in the service of the Brazilian working

class. They will not simply be integrated into a project that is already built, we will build the project together.

And we have already won a battle. We were many militants spread all over Brazil, who were suffering and who were filled with anxiety, but we did not allow ourselves to lose hope. We began to build the P-SOL and won its legalisation by collecting 450,000 signatures. Some of us had already had other party experiences and suffered other betrayals, but the bitterness of the past did not make us incapable of fighting. And many other people, who had not gone through the experience of founding a party structure, simple, ordinary people, who had not previously seen themselves as internationalist socialists, came towards us out of generosity, tenderness and respect because of all this process of inquisition through which we had passed. All these people were essential to help us to get through this first stage: the legalisation of the Party of Socialism and Freedom.

** Heloisa Helena is a member of the Brazilian Senate. Expelled from the PT in 2003 for opposing its neo-liberal policies, she was one of the founders of the P-SOL. This interview was given to the Brazilian bulletin Palavra Viva. We have translated it from the web site of the Swiss-based journal A l'Encontre: www.alencontre.org.*

CHINA

Birth of a giant

MICHEL HUSSON ·

China does not fall into the classical categories, since it is a country governed by a Communist Party, that is staking everything on liberal globalisation. We find this unprecedented combination in its economic structure, which "stacks up" several sectors and which is evolving very rapidly in a double movement of internal liberalisation and opening up to foreign capital.

It was first of all the small industrial enterprises in the towns and villages which rapidly developed in the course of the 1980s. They are still called collectives, but what they are in fact are mixed enterprises, some with the status of a co-operative, and in any case increasingly managed according to the norms of private enterprise. The 1990s saw the emergence of a new kind of enterprise, with a first phase of foreign investment coming essentially from the "diaspora": Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, etc. Lastly, after the 1997 financial crisis, it was investment from the major industrial countries that took over, with a massive influx of capital, which in 2003 exceeded 50 billion dollars.

A series of reforms accompanied this double movement of internal liberalisation and opening up to the world market. A first law authorised private individuals to own limited companies. In 2004, the Constitution was amended in order to reinforce the role of the non-state sector and to reaffirm the role of private property. The ban on private enterprises operating in certain sectors (infrastructures, public services, financial services) has just been abolished, in 2005.

Foreign direct investment has been authorised and encouraged by the establishment of free enterprise zones in coastal regions and by the lowering of Customs duties. The state monopoly of foreign

trade has been dismantled, as has the system of multiple currency exchange rates. Following this, China has become a member of the World trade Organisation (WTO).

An export-oriented economy

So the private sector has expanded: today it is responsible for more than half of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and for three quarters of exports. It is this sector that is creating the bulk of new jobs and achieving the highest levels of profitability (15 per cent in 2003, as against 5 to 10 per cent in the state sector).

Within this private sector, foreign companies - often allied in joint ventures to Chinese companies - are responsible for 75 per cent of exports. But the exports of the private sector that is under Chinese control are expanding even more quickly, as new export licences are accorded to it. At the same time the state sector is being subjected to permanent measures of reorganisation, which have led to the suppression of 45 million jobs in the course of the last five years. But 35 per cent of state enterprises are still considered unprofitable, and one in six has negative assets.

All these transformations have taken place in a context of very high growth (see Annex 1) and on the basis of a spectacular accumulation of capital: today, investment represents 42 per cent of GDP, compared to around 20 per cent in France and 15 per cent in Latin America.

Exports have been the driving force of this economic growth, thanks to very low wage costs (ten times lower than in the rich countries) and a favourable exchange rate. China chose to establish a fixed rate of exchange between its currency (the yuan) and the dollar, following in this the precepts of the

International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. So since 2000, the yuan has accompanied the decline of the dollar, which is giving a further boost to its exports and enabling it to attract an enormous inflow of capital.

The relations between China and the United States are therefore complicated: China is responsible for nearly 40 per cent of the American deficit, but it helps to finance this by buying financial products priced in dollars. The United States would like to impose a revaluation of the yuan to make Chinese products less competitive, but it would be seriously destabilised if China stopped investing its surplus dollars.

Last July, the Chinese authorities made a semblance of being reasonable by accepting a ridiculous revaluation of the yuan (scarcely more than 2 per cent!). The undervaluation of the yuan is unquestionable, but it is not only a question of monetary manipulation: it is fundamentally the result of the non-redistribution to Chinese workers of the benefits of growth.

Wages and inequalities

The evolution of wages is obviously fundamental, but we have only imprecise information about it. We know that there are enormous inequalities between regions: the average income in Shanghai is four times higher than the national average. The rate of unemployment is 8 per cent in the urban areas and it has been estimated that in the countryside 200 million people are under-employed. This "industrial reserve army" is leading to a big rural exodus and has a negative impact on wages, whose growth remains on average inferior to the growth of GDP.

High growth is nevertheless producing an increase in overall income, in a chaotic fashion, so that we have at the same time a growth in inequalities and a reduction of absolute poverty. An increase in wages that would be more in line with the increase in production would make it possible to readjust growth towards the internal market, to reduce the

role of exports and of foreign investment, and thus to embark on a process whereby wage costs would converge with international norms.

That is to some extent what happened in South Korea, on a different scale, and through very violent social struggles. Although such an evolution appears to be inevitable, it is likely to take a long time, during which the competitive advantages of China will be considered as intolerable by the major industrialised countries.

It is these inequalities of income which mean that the model is not in the end "sustainable". One of the dimensions of the problem is the aging of the population. In 2030, a quarter of the population will be over 65: that is the paradoxical result of a brutal birth control policy. Now, the public pension system only covers 14 per cent of the active population. Since it was reformed in 1997, it provides for the payment of a basic pension at a uniform rate and for the payment of a supplementary pension that is proportional to the contributions paid, indexed on the rate of bank deposits. The government would like to transform this second component into individual private pension fund accounts. An experimental reform along these lines has been launched in several provinces. This question will weigh heavily on the social situation for a long time.

Where is China going?

Everything depends on the relative speed of several phenomena. In the imperialist camp, the crocodile tears about non-respect for social rights can be transformed into more or less aggressive retaliatory measures. However, the imperialist camp is divided. For some, competition from China represents a deadly threat, which extends to the high technology sectors. But for others, China presents a double advantage: it offers possibilities for exports, with one of the rare big domestic markets domestic that is expanding, and it also provides low-price consumer goods, which makes it possible to lower the value of labour power.

It should be said in passing that this characteristic - already analysed by Marx in *Capital* - annihilates the argument of the advocates of globalisation, according to which low-priced imports coming from China benefit consumers. If present trends continue, it is likely that these advantages will progressively become secondary in relation to the negative aspects of competition. We will see the unleashing of the aggressiveness of several imperialist powers, with a new extension of protectionist measures, similar to the European quota system, and the reaffirming of the demand for a revaluation of the yuan, all this wrapped up in rhetoric about the rights of man and protection of jobs.

But at the end of the day it is the Chinese workers and peasants who hold the key to the way things will evolve in the future. That is not simple a piece of rhetoric. If they manage, in spite of the repressive apparatus of the party and the only trade union (which is, very classically, the transmission belt for the party), in organising and in imposing a new redistribution of income and control over economic priorities, then a great step forward will have been taken. They will then have put an end to the double Chinese paradox: a economy that is growing rapidly and redistributing little, and a kind of "bureaucratic state capitalism" which will not be able for long to succeed in combining the most repugnant traits of wildcat capitalism and of a totally degenerate "communism".

Annex 1

Environmental disasters

The growth of the Chinese economy is often presented as in itself an ecological catastrophe. Thus, six out of the ten most polluted cities in the world are in China, acid rain falls on a third of its territory, contaminated water kills more than 30,000 children every year. There are many other examples of the ills of chaotic economic growth. The level of productivity of energy is very bad: for every dollar produced, China expends 4.7 per cent more energy than the United States, and 11.5 per cent

more than Japan. After the improvement that took over the last two decades, energy consumption has begun to increase more quickly than GDP since 2002. Coal and oil - of which the purchase by China contributes to increasing the price - are the main sources of energy.

The government has invested a lot of money in the environment (85 billion dollars in the course of the last five years), thus opening up an enormous market for foreign enterprises. But it is incapable of controlling the disastrous practices of these enterprises, which are above all preoccupied by their turnover. The key question is to know whether the government will be capable of imposing on enterprises a rate of growth that is more respectful of the environment and of carrying out adequate energy policies. So it is in China, taking into account its scale and its rate of growth, that to a large extent the fate of the environment of the planet will be decided.

Annex 2

The weight of China

With 1.3 billion inhabitants, China has about a fifth of the world's population. This effect of scale makes its economic performance all the more spectacular: in the course of the last two decades, GDP has increased by an annual average of 9 per cent and has thus been multiplied by six. The absolute scale of the economy today surpasses those of some of the main countries of Europe. But per capita GDP is still very low (4,000 dollars a year in comparative buying power, as against 25,000 dollars in France).

The active population comprises 757 million people, of whom 490 million are in the rural zones. 46 per cent are employed in agriculture, 18 per cent in industry and 36 per cent in services.

Chinese exports have increased considerably, going from 10 billion dollars in 1978 to 226 billion in 2002, and they represent about 4 per cent of world exports. At 450 billion dollars, the accumulated stock of foreign investment in China is the fifth big-

gest in the world (in the United States the figure is 1,300 billion).

EUROPE

European Left Party - First Congress in Athens

GEORGES VILLETIN ·

The congress of the European Left Party (ELP) was chaired by Fausto Bertinotti of the Italian PRC. The congress initially aimed at bringing together, in a flexible structure, all the European communist parties, whatever their differences. Since the disappearance of the USSR and the East European bloc, all that had existed between them were bilateral contacts, and sometimes some one-off conferences.

The construction of Europe, with all its political and social repercussions, pushed towards the constitution of this party. Only a small number of communist parties, among those who are most nostalgic for Stalinism, refused to come to Athens, denouncing the "revisionist and reformist" nature of the enterprise. This was the case with some East European parties and with the Portuguese and Greek CPs. Overall, the congress was dominated by a desire for consensus, not touching, either in the debates or in the final resolutions, on the issues that posed problems, in particular questions of strategy.

On the level of generalities, the documents that were adopted correctly denounced the capitalist offensive in Europe and defended social mobilizations. On the other hand, there was not a word on the crucial problems of what means to employ to "change Europe", in particular the problem of alliances and of governmental participation. The decision by the majority of the PRC to be ready to en-

ter a government led by the liberal Romano Prodi was on everyone's mind, but it did appear in any of the interventions, except the one from a representative of the "left" of the PRC. In reality, the theses of the ELP are more akin to those of a united front than of a party.

In this climate, a real spirit of openness towards all progressive forces dominated, in particular in the delegation of the PCF. It is in this context that our comrade Alain Krivine was invited, and that he intervened in the name of the LCR, to remind delegates that there also existed a Conference of the European Anti-capitalist Left and that we were ready to conduct joint campaigns, but also to engage in debates, in particular on the strategic questions of programmatic content and of alliances. In fact several parties, such as the Left Bloc in Portugal, the ODP in Turkey and Respect in Britain, are members of both regroupments.

So there was a big change in the atmosphere, when we recall that during the founding conference of the ELP, held in Rome eighteen months ago, the organizers had refused to invite the LCR. Since then, there has been the 'No' campaign in France and the new unitary dynamic. So the PCF also had invited to Athens, Raoul Marc Jennar, Yves Salesse [1] and representatives of Mars, Alternative citoyenne and PRS. [2] For its part, the PDS in Germany had invited Oskar Lafontaine. So there are two regroupments in Europe and a single enemy: the bosses. There really is room for unity of action and for debates.

PORTUGUESE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Why the Left Bloc is standing

What are the major political themes of your presidential campaign?

The economical crisis, the crisis of the Portuguese governing elite and its failure in recent years have deepened this country's problems. It is now the fifth year that Portugal's economic performance has been worse than the EU average. The poorest are the first ones to suffer the consequences of these disastrous economical policies that governments have imposed for years, and in this campaign the right-wing candidate, Cavaco Silva, is one of the leaders of this bourgeoisie.

My campaign presents clear proposals: to save the social security pension system and prevent retirement pensions from being gambled at the Stock Exchange casino; to swivel economic policy towards developing full employment; to guarantee citizenship rights to every person that works here and the right to nationality to everyone that was born here - in the name of a 'cosmopolitan' policy that respects difference.

We will also campaign to stop the crime against democratic representation - this means fighting to defeat the electoral law proposed by the two main parties, that imposes one-candidate electoral circles to take away the access to parliamentary action from other, especially minority, parties.

Can you explain the significance of the recent debate over the salaries of public sector workers?

Well, the public sector workers' salary is determinant as an indicator for all other wages. We have now some 700,000 workers in the public sector. They've seen their wages devalued for eight consecutive years. And now, the government proposes a wage rise similar to the predicted inflation rate and eventually below its real level.

On the other hand, the government attacks public workers rights as "privileges". In the past we saw this populist argument only from the former right-wing parties' governments, now it's the official Socialist Party's discourse.

But at the same time, the head administrators of public sector enterprises nominated by the government earn wages and benefits in kind that are well above their European partners. This is an absolute scandal! As a result of this shameless policy, Portuguese wages will remain the lowest in the inner 15 countries of the EU and this implies the decrease of the quality of many public services.

You can't win the election, of course. Wouldn't it be better to have a united left voice - in other words to support the Communist Party campaign? How do you answer the accusation of being splitters?

Any candidate must have 50% plus one vote to win the election at the first round. There's only one right-wing candidate, who is leading the polls since a year ago with a large advantage. If he gets that score, he'll win against one, two or ten candidates. This means the left-wing candidates must get as many votes they can to lower the levels of abstentions, forcing a second round.

We also know that there is not a left-wing candidate with sufficient power to polarise the election on the first round and no one that we can be trust to represent our point of view.

The Socialist Party presents two candidates fighting each other (the former president Mário Soares and the MP Manuel Alegre), and both the Communist Party and the Left Bloc support their own candidates. They all bring their ideas to the debate and will confront them in the electoral campaign, and that's natural in democracy.

I strongly believe that a candidate to an election should never quit. If he wants to quit, why did he present himself in the first place? Furthermore, the CP candidate is for the moment, even if that may not happen at the time of the election, in last position in the polls.

To what extent will abortion be an important issue in this election?

It will certainly be an issue. The Socialist Party has agreed to postpone the referendum about the criminalisation of abortion until late 2006 or 2007. We said many times that it's urgent to solve that issue in 2005. The referendum would be the best way to defeat the archaism of the right-wingers politics that are in favour of a law that can send women in jail for 3 years.

Both the President and the Constitutional Court, for technical reasons, have rejected a referendum this year. So, now the Parliament has all the responsibility and also the political majority to do it. The Socialist Party already said that it will stop that process and wait another year or more for thereferendum.

What explains the relative electoral success of the Left Bloc in the past period? What impact does the Bloc's presence in the national parliament have?

That electoral success shows that there was a strong need for a new political voice in the Portuguese left, a voice that breaks the monopoly of that political area by the two historical organisations, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party.

Since the Left Bloc elected eight MP's in 1999, it's determination combined with a clear, sharp and direct political discourse and with concrete proposals to change people's lives, all along with bringing new issues to the political agenda (domestic violence, drugs policy, gay and lesbian rights, media monopolisation, etc.) proved to be an effective way of building a strong change in the way of doing politics.

The electoral results are the consequence of that work. Of course now the Left Bloc has grown and it's a different organisation, more structured nationwide and less directly dependent of the parliamentary action led by our eight MP's.

Is Portugal undergoing the same immigration 'crisis' as the Spanish state?

Unlike the Spanish state, Portugal is not a main gateway for the entrance of immigrants. Having one of the lowest salary average of Europe, there is little attraction for a immigration on a large scale. Nevertheless, the government makes it difficult for an immigrant to acquire the basic rights of citizenship, like health service or social security.

In absence of a work contract, immigrants cannot legalise

their situation, so they are heavily exploited by some bosses paying less and giving no working rights. The Left Bloc has defended the regularisation of immigrants working in Portugal to stop that human right's violations. We also defend the right to be a Portuguese national for people that were born in Portuguese soil.

In the last local elections you had more than 300 people elected to the multiple instances of Portuguese local government. Isn't it a burden to have so many comrades burdened with these responsibilities?

It's surely a big responsibility for all the elected ones and for the local organisations. And it's a big step for the construction of the Left Bloc and it's ability to listen to the people's problems and difficulties on a local basis. We aim to improve democracy in the local administration, fighting corruption and abuse of power, and that's what our voters expect from us.

Except for one municipality, led by a left-wing independent mayor that we've invited to be our representative

for the second consecutive term, each and everyone who is elected by the Left Bloc does not have local

government responsibilities, our task is to be an effective and militant opposition.

How will you judge whether the electoral campaign has been a success?

I will judge it by it's the ability to influence the political debate and to help break this rotten political consensus where Portugal lives. It will be successful if my message can present a mobilising alternative for an important part of the left-wing electorate.

Visit the camapign site franciscopresidente.net

BELGIUM

The red and green October

SAP-LCR ·

The strike and the national demonstration on October 28 by the joint trade union front were a formidable show of force on behalf of the working people of this country.

The strength of the event, more than 100,000 activists, brought together the ABVV and ACV, workers, employees from the private and public sector, young people and the elderly, Flemish, and French-speaking persons, migrants and undocumented workers, all together.

October 28 largely confirmed the combativeness which had already been illustrated by the strike of October 7 carried out only by the ABVV.

Although in a number of sectors and companies the fight was initiated through the union leaders and the trade union framework, the success of this strike was above all due to the trade-union base which ensured the success of this strike and which eventually incited joint union action.

After Verhofstadt imposed the (fake) "Pact of solidarity between generations", floods of strikes and work stoppages arose and did not cease growing, and lead to the great flood of people of October 28.

From 11 and 12 October we saw work stoppages in a broad range of companies: Sabca, FN-Herstal, Caterpillar... On Monday 16 October the night shift workers at VW-Forest spontaneously stopped work. The following day, there were work stoppages on the different sites of Glaverbel as well as at Caterpillar, where a joint trade union front carried out a 24 hour strike. One after another the different power bases of ABVV and ACV rejected the government plan.

On Tuesday 18 October hundreds of ABVV and ACV metal workers demonstrated in Seraing. Since that day there have been strikes and the work stop-

pages at Carmeuse (Aisemont), Dolomies (Marche-les-Dames), Saint-Gobin (Auvélais), again Volkswagen, Alcatel-Etca, TechSpace Aéro (Herstal), MTS benelux (Floreffe), Logisma (Namur), Norma (Malonne), the TEC (Montignies-sur-Sambre). On Monday 24 October there were general or partial strikes in Charleroi (involving 15,000 workers), in Namur and in Le Centre.

The ABVV and ACV leaders had therefore little space for doubt. In addition to the pressure from the tank and file, the trade-union bureaucracy was also worried about a loss of its negotiating choices for two reasons, at two levels. Firstly, on the federal level, the government increasingly imposes its politico-social agenda without wanting to reach an agreement with the union leaders (for example, when imposing the "cross-sectoral" agreement or the government measures to answer the rise of the oil prices, etc). Secondly, since trade-union leaders would rather the negotiate costs of "good redundancy plans" than fight for the maintenance and the extension of employment, the gradual suppression of pensions also reduces their negotiating possibilities when companies plan lay offs. Instead of being able to position itself as an indispensable partners in the social bargaining, the trade-union leadership loses any credible position with employers and their own base.

Provocations

The employers' and politicians' provocations against the right to strike and trade-union freedoms were supported by a sector of the press (Libre Belgique and De Morgen always in the lead). Far from demobilizing the workers, this only reinforced their combativeness and their resolution.

The VBO [3] and Voka [4] threatened to exploit "all possible legal resources" to break strikes. The em-

employers organized to utilize the courts in a unilateral way and to systematically use penalty fines to stop union actions. These provocations reached a grotesque peak on 28 October when Olivier Willocx, director of the Brussels chamber of commerce, circled above the demonstration by helicopter "in order to locate the infringements made within the framework of the strike". Employers thus now take over the role of the police force!

Faithful to its masters, the government, and especially Liberal home affairs minister Patrick Dewael, tried to intimidate the strikers. Liberal members of Parliament filed a bill aiming "defending the right to work" and to guarantee a "minimum service".

The interventions of the courts in social conflicts, the criminalization of the latter and the restrictions of the right to strike are unacceptable! On the contrary, writs should be served on the VBO and the government in order to note that they refuse to offer work to the 600,000 unemployed, and to Verhofstadt to note that it does not respect the promise to create 200,000 jobs!

To continue, unify and amplify the fight!

October 28 also illustrated the generalized and multiform character of social anger. With their declarations, their slogans, banners and signs, the demonstrators clearly expressed their dissatisfaction and their revolt: against increasingly precarious and degrading working conditions; never-ending reorganizations and redundancies; increasing social problems, privatization of public services; permanent mass unemployment; loss of purchasing power; blocking of the wages and the rise in the cost of living. It is anger at the impact of 25 years of neo-liberal policy.

It is also significant that those not directly touched by the "Pact" (at least for the moment) had been also mobilized in an important way: teachers, workers in the not for profit sector, etc. It is also necessary to underline the strong mobilization of young workers, whose presence was already notable in the strike pickets of October 7. A new

trade-union generation is being born in the heat of the battle: a generation which did not experience the defeats of the fights against the Total Plan in 1993 or against the Social Pact in 1995; a generation which will not have known anything other throughout its life than crisis, mass unemployment and the precariousness of 'flexible' employment.

But in spite of the impressive potential and strong motivation, the trade union leaders do not offer any clear perspective for action and restrict the question to pensions. They fear - with reason - that with broader claims the door will open to more radical and stronger dynamics that they cannot check. They hope therefore that the government will step back a little and accept new negotiations which can then lead to a number of amendments on the original plan. Then the union leaders can declare "victory" and ring in the end of the movement.

Compared with the scornful disapproval of Verhofstadt, who still wishes only to discuss the how to implement the plans, the union leaders blow hot and cold at the same time. On the one hand they talk about possible new action, but on the other side they prepare demobilization and ruin. The ABVV tried to find a way out and an agreement with the PS [5] even the day before the mobilization of October 28. The ABVV secretary, Jean-Claude Vandermeeren, seems to be ready to accept the negotiation, even on an ultra-minimalist basis. Luc Cortebeek (of the ACV) even explains that "we cannot incite people to action without chances on success". On the contrary: not acting in a given way only leads with certainty to failure!

The trade-union base must thus again make hear its voice and impose its own choices. The combat must absolutely continue without hesitation and for this reason it is necessary to call:

1. To maintain the pressure with a real action plan: revolving weekly general strikes, towards an unlimited general strike if necessary!
2. Clear objectives: immediate withdrawal of the "Pact of solidarity between generations". From this point of view, it is necessary to translate in a very

concrete way and in each company and sector what the reform imposed by the government represents. The development of a charter of demands going beyond defensive demands - able to unify all the fights and all the questions is also necessary. [...]

3. To renew the tradition of a democratic trade unionism of struggle. In order to influence the fight durably and effectively, class-struggle trade unionists must organize themselves within their unions, create trade-union networks beyond the sectoral and professional borders, discuss and work out their points of view. They must debate their analyses, points of view and perspectives develop to present them afterwards democratically to all members of the trade unions.

Towards a new left party

With a government faithful to the orders of the bosses, the political question arises in an increasingly urgent manner for innumerable working people. Since this government refuses to hear the social majority, it is illegitimate and must leave! But how can we develop a political alternative?

The ABVV and ACV must first of all break with all the parties which apply the neo-liberal policies or which do not call them into question. Today the sp.a [6] and PS clash directly with the social movement. This is shown by: their attitude to social movement; their deafening silence on the serious attacks against trade-union freedoms; and the interminable scandals and abuse of community resources. The social democrats are light-years from the concerns, lives and expectations of working people. The ABVV must therefore sever the bonds with parties such as the PS and sp.a, which no

longer wish to defend the interests of working people. As the BBTK [7] in Brussels already demanded, the representatives of ABVV must not be based in the party offices of the PS and sp.a.

Since their participation in the government, the Greens definitively lost their soul: they neither challenge neo-liberal policies, nor represent any real alternative. Rather than making a serious assessment of their governmental participation, they only want to be able to touch power, possibly even with the Liberals. Although they ask that the government launch negotiations concerning the "pact", they regret the strike action which "damages the economy and the companies" and they say nothing on the challenge to the right to strike.

We must do everything to prevent the ultra-right-wing reaping the electoral benefits of the current discomfort and social dissatisfaction: of course its aspirations are the opposite of the generosity and solidarity which were expressed on October 28.

There is no alternative: radical trade unionists must put the idea of a new workers' party on the agenda. The social majority that showed its force on October 28 must absolutely find its political expression in a new party: 100% on the left; proposing a programme of rupture with neo-liberalism; a party which gives primacy to social needs, to the quality of living, to challenges on environmental questions; a party which dares to put forward an anti-capitalist perspective.

The SAP/POS wants to contribute with all its forces to the advancement of such a new party. To strengthen the SAP/POS is to reinforce that fight.

To read the full statement, in Dutch or French, visit www.sap-pos.org

Power to the Left - For a new era

Power to the Left - For a new era

What are our problems?

We are discussing the political economic and social problems faced by our society. People are suffering from poverty, unemployment and war. This crisis is based on the inability of our society to enter the path of development. Though they do talk about these problems, both Mahinda and Ranil are responsible for this situation. They sling mud at each other without giving solutions. It is left to the NLF to come out with a clear way out. What are the obstructions faced by our society?

– Firstly, we are under the pressure of Global capital. We are tied down in a debt trap. If the projects given to us were successful then we should have paid back the loans. This has not happened. Are we responsible for these endless repayments? Pressure exerted by the MNC system has crippled the internal market, suppressed local production and imprisoned our economy. We must press to cancel debts for which we are not responsible. We must use imports & exports, foreign exchange regulations, and customs to protect our market and the local forces of production. We have to renationalize, at least those enterprises which were run efficiently or which played a very useful role in our economy. We must abandon the so-called open economy of Global capitalism. We must join the Global Populist movement expressed by the World Social Forum. It is not necessary to pray to the MNCs for science and technology. We have to link up with the International Labour movement, in particular with that of Indian sub continent.

– Secondly, the war has pushed the society to barbarism. The economy and the market are divided between the State and the Tiger regime. There is anarchy in a no man's land. Prime land and coast in

the North are occupied by the security forces. Army deserters, numbering over 30,000, have created an underworld power that affects all aspects of economy. War has become an industry with over 300,000 personnel in government forces and over 20,000 in Tamil Liberation Army. Supplies to these forces also employ thousands of people. Expenditure on arms and ammunition, equipment, transport etc. run into billions of rupees. Country has lost large number of Professionals to the developed world. Therefore, peace on the basis of a solution to the Tamil national question is a must. We always proposed, since 1974, a solution based on equality, autonomy and right of self-determination. Now it is clear that there is no other way out. A ferocious movement such as the LTTE is the result of repression made instead of giving a solution to the Tamil National problem.

– Thirdly, the absolutist nature of the State and undemocratic nature of the Constitution is a serious obstruction to any development programme. State still exists as an instrument above the villagers and the urban poor. It is there to safeguard public property and State revenue. Even the social services are done with a condescending attitude. Development is reserved for political leaders. State officials are unable to place themselves as facilitators for development. Kachcheri and courthouses operate without regard to time and money of those who seek relief. Often it is women who are neglected. Even the large number of elected representatives has not reduced this alienated nature of the State. Executive Presidency and the present Constitution on the basis of proportional representation have only aggravated the problem. It is necessary to change this to create a participatory democracy based on workplace profession and worksite representation that strengthens all aspects of human rights. In particu-

lar environment laws, Trade Union rights and women rights should be defended.

– Fourthly, the stagnation of the village structure is a clear obstruction to development. Market has not really penetrated the village economy. Hence development based on market does not filter into village areas. Divisions of land holdings, absentee landlordism and other kind of absentee ownership of production instruments, lack of security to the produce, lack of preservation, rural usury, reactionary traditions, all these keep the village production at a minimum level. Agrarian reforms, extensive in nature are necessary to overcome this. A village development authority, which integrates the power of Divisional Secretarial, Pradesiya Sabha, Agrarian Services, Engineering Services, etc., is a must. While changing dictatorial constitution and bureaucracy with a democratic State structure, it is necessary to get the people out of reactionary conservative rural system to direct them into the path of development.

Ranil's solutions

Both capitalist camps have totally failed to address these issues in a rational manner. From time to time slogans are put forward in the name of national democracy. But nothing happened. Things have gone from bad to worse. Ranil has insisted on the validity of "Regaining Sri Lanka" and the open economy that started in 1977. Clearly, he is a conservative broker speaking on behalf of global capitalists powers. On Tamil national question he is prepared to go forward to the extent Global capitalist leaders agree. Already LTTE is forced to enter the camp of Open Economy. Tamil youth are expected to hand over the hard won resources of their motherland to the MNC system. There is no programme to change the State or the Constitution. If at all, he wants to stabilize the Presidential system. Except the rhetoric about the new golden era of Parakramabahu, there is nothing said about the changes necessary in the village power structure.

Mahinda - JVP economic plans

In spite of the shouting of "Marxist" JVP and claims to protect State enterprises, Mahinda led the Cabinet to the agreements signed in Kandy on May 16/17 with the WB and the donor countries. This is an agreement to privatize CEB, Bank, Water Management, Health, Airports, Harbours and major State Enterprises under the pretext of restructuring. Already phosphate deposit at Eppawala has been sold to a Chinese company. JVP and JHU too participated in this event but failed to make any protest, except on concessions to Tamil and other minorities. JVP's letter dated 25.4.05 to US Under Secretary of State, Christina Rocca, shows that they are prepared to make any sacrifice in order to get help to suppress Tamil people. To cover their betrayal of free education on 16/17 May 2005, they talk about an agreement made by Tara De Mel.

Mahinda for repression

By this agreement Mahinda accepted the way forward given in Ranil's "Regaining Sri Lanka". Mahinda has not rejected this agreement though he openly renounced Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) and devolution. It is not clear how he is going to have discussions with Prabakaran sans federalism, sans devolution and sans Tamil identity. His shouts about discipline and law and order, with the above programme to bring him close to extremism that attacked the working class and the minority groups. He plans to deal with both urban and national unrests, not by discussions and concessions, but by military and police actions.

Left is rising world over

These two leaders give us two options. Either to become vassals of Global capital with poverty and displacement or to drift in to barbarism of a chauvinist dictatorship with the division of the country. World over people are challenging both these ends. In all continents new movements have developed that reject dictates of the global capital and dissociate from chauvinism and religions fundamentalism. People have come out of the setback felt at the time of the collapse of Berlin wall. There is a new inter-

est in Marxism. There are victories in Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, etc. It is possible to put forward a third way out. Walden Bello says "what we are all about is demystifying economics, what we are all about is people grasping production and consumption and putting that into comprehensive national non alienated development". This takes us back to discussions on development that took place in 70/75. We see that the left leaders then made two mistakes. On the one hand, they thought that with a coalition under chauvinist capitalists they could carry out national democratic tasks. On the other hand they attempted to implement isolated socialist projects in this backward surrounding. Hence while corrupt and bureaucratic elements thrived, people lost their democratic power to intervene. Chauvinist discrimination raised its ugly head. At the same time local industrialist and producers were harassed and intimidated. Finally, capitalists threw out left leaders and pushed the government towards open economy even before JR came to power. We must correct these mistakes and move forward with the Global populist movement. We can start at this point and move on until serious victories are made by the working masses in the developed world. Hence, we have to struggle on the basis of this programme to build a mass movement. Such a movement will be able to resist the regime, irrespective of who wins. There will be fights of working masses combined with national liberation struggles. We must use this election to make people aware and to bring them together into a left movement to fight back and give leadership to struggles of all oppressed.

Please cast your vote and give your support to build the left that is committed to a new era of people's struggles.

New Left Front

STATEMENT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CEYLON MERCANTILE, INDUSTRIAL AND GENERAL WORKERS' UNION (CMU)

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2005

The first Presidential Election in Sri Lanka was held on 20th October 1982, under the Constitution adopted by the UNP-dominated Parliament of Sri Lanka on 31st August 1978.

President J. R. Jayawardene utilized the huge majority he had gained in the Parliamentary General Election of 1977 to frame the 1978 Constitution. It contained special provisions for the election of an Executive President, who would be the Head of State, Head of the Executive and of the Government, and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. The President could appoint and dismiss the Cabinet of Ministers and dissolve Parliament itself. The President could also "declare war and peace", or proclaim a State of Emergency under the Public Security Act, enabling the President to make Emergency Regulations thereunder, amending or suspending the operation of any written law, subject to parliamentary approval within a specified period.

The CMU denounced the provisions for the Executive Presidency in the 1978 Constitution as being completely undemocratic, and accordingly called for a boycott of the 1982 Presidential Election. We declared that no candidate, if elected President, should be vested with the powers of the Executive Presidency, irrespective of who the candidate might be, and whatever a candidate might promise to do or not do, if elected.

Presidential elections were held in 1988, 1994 and 1999. The CMU did not call for the support of any of the presidential candidates in those elections, as they were also held under the same 1978 Constitution. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga promised, prior to her first election as President in November 1994, to abolish the Executive Presidency. She did not do so, however, even after she was re-elected as President in 1999, under the same Constitution.

Now, Mahinda Rajapakse, the Prime Minister appointed by President Kumaratunga, has stated in his election Manifesto that he expects, if elected, "to present a Constitution that will propose the

abolition of the Executive Presidency and to provide solutions to other issues confronting the country." He says that this will be done "with the consensus of all". That is impossible, since it would require the consent of the UNP and its political allies, including the Ceylon Workers' Congress and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, which are all opposed to the removal of the Executive Presidency.

Even Mahinda Rajapakse's most vocal allies, the JVP, have laid it down in their written agreement with him, that it is agreed "to terminate the Executive Presidential system before the end of the tenure of office of the 6th Executive President which is commenced from the year 2005." This really means that they want Mahinda Rajapakse to be the Executive President for the next six years. They obviously expect him to give them Ministerial portfolios and other positions, with their perks and privileges, in that event. Mahinda Rajapakse's manifesto also envisages a 6-year period for his Action Plans to be implemented under him as President.

There is, therefore, really only one issue that will be decided by the people who may vote for Mahinda Rajapakse or Ranil Wickremasinghe on 17th November 2005. That is which of the two of them is to be vested with the powers of the Executive Presidency for six years, under the 1978 Constitution. Whether or to what extent the one or the other of them can fulfil the expectations of the political parties and other organizations and groups that support them, and the people who may vote for them, will depend mainly on the economic, political and military realities of the situation in which they could exercise those powers, if elected; and not on their individual beliefs, intentions, or capabilities.

The differences between the political parties of the two principal candidates are not on fundamental social or economic issues. Both the UNP and the SLFP, and the JVP as well, are committed to the maintenance of the present capitalist economic system in this country, which is subject to the global market economy. The governments that are headed by either of them are, therefore, subject to the con-

ditions that are imposed by global institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for the grant of foreign loans and for foreign investment, on which they depend for their development projects, as well as for the servicing of existing loans and public expenditure. They are also subject to strict limitations in relation to foreign trade by the World Trade Organisation. They differ on such questions as whether or to what extent there is to be further privatization of public enterprises or sale of national assets, beyond what has already taken place under successive regimes headed by the UNP and the SLFP.

The two candidates differ on the important question of whether they should deal with the LTTE directly, or not; and, if so, on what basis. That is, whether to negotiate with the LTTE or not, in regard to the question of the administration of the Northern and Eastern provinces, large parts of which continue to be under the military and partially administrative control of the LTTE, and in relation to which the sovereignty of the Sri Lankan State cannot be exercised.

The constitutional basis on which Mahinda Rajapakse has given written undertakings to the JVP and the JHU, in compliance with their Sinhala Nationalist demands, precludes his even having discussions with the LTTE, on a basis that will be acceptable to the LTTE, if he is elected. On the other hand, even Ranil Wickremasinghe's more realistic position on the question of negotiations with the LTTE, in regard to the administration of the Northern and Eastern provinces, may not lead to meaningful negotiations with them, without the support of the SLFP, if he is elected.

The continuance of the existing Ceasefire Agreement entered into with the LTTE by the previous UNP Government, and continued so far, with reservations, by President Chandrika Kumaratunga's Government, is thus uncertain. On the other hand, the present State of Emergency might well be extended, with further heavy increases in Defense expenditure, if Mahinda Rajapakse be-

comes President. This is likely even if it is Ranil Wickremasinghe who becomes President.

Apart from the above-mentioned matters, a matter of special concern to our Union, as an independent mass organisation of workers, is that there is only one reference to workers in the entirety of Mahinda Rajapakse's Agreement with the JVP. All that is stated therein is that "in resolving the problems faced by workers, farmers, factory owners, entrepreneurs, the business community and consumers... the proposals of the JVP shall be accepted and (he) shall agree to act in conformity with those proposals." There is no indication at all as to what those proposals would be, in relation to workers, or farmers, or factory owners or entrepreneurs, or the business community, or consumers.

Mahinda Rajapakse's Manifesto contains promises and assurances to various sections of the population, such as students, farmers, women and public servants. The only reference in it, that could apply to the millions of wage earners in the private sector, however, is to a low interest housing loan scheme that is to be offered to them, with the participation of the Employees' Trust Fund, and State and private banks, whatever that may mean. That is all that the Manifesto has to say with regard to the vast majority of the workers of our country, on whom its economy depends. There is no mention of any of the major problems facing workers today, such as employment on a casual basis or through labour contractors, even by big capitalist companies, on extremely low wages and without any security of employment whatsoever. Retrenchment of permanent workers without adequate compensation, and the establishment of a National Minimum Wage by law, which all the trade unions represented in the National Labour Advisory Council have requested, have also received no mention.

A particularly significant omission in the Manifesto is that it contains no reference to the Workers' Charter, that was intended to incorporate basic human rights for workers, such as Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise and Bargain Collectively, together with basic guarantees in relation to Wages and Terms and Conditions of Employment of workers. Mahinda Rajapakse was removed and replaced as Minister of Labour by President Chandrika Kumaranatunga in 1997, when he was seeking to have the Workers' Charter implemented in law. Though it was abandoned by the People's Alliance Government thereafter, he could not have forgotten it.

According to the Manifesto, its contents are to be "translated into Action Plans to be implemented over a 6-year period, and such implementation will be entrusted to the relevant ministries".

The implementation of Mahinda Rajapakse's plans, whatever they may be, would thus depend largely on the Prime Minister and the other Cabinet Ministers whom he may appoint, if elected. He would have to choose them from amongst the Members of the present Parliament, elected at the General Election of 2nd April 2004. Whoever he may trust amongst them, to help him build "A New Sri Lanka", as envisaged in his Manifesto, our Union cannot, in relation to Sri Lanka as it is today.

Having regard to the policies of the UNP under the leadership of Ranil Wickremasinghe, both as Prime Minister and as Leader of the Opposition, our Union cannot, in any case, expect anything beneficial to the working people from a government headed by him, but rather, the contrary.

In the circumstances, our Union does not expect any of the major problems facing our people today to be resolved by whoever may be elected to be the President of Sri Lanka on 17th November 2005.

Bala Tampoe - General Secretary

LETTER TO READERS

€1600 will double the readership of International Viewpoint

DUNCAN CHAPEL ·

However, we urgently need our readers' help in order to meet rising demand for the website. With the funding we hoped for, we can double the readership. Without the donations we need, the website will get overloaded and our ability to add new material will slow down. One of our readers has offered to double any donation this year. That means we need €1600 by the end of December to get on course to double the site's readership.

The need is there. Something like five-sixths of International Viewpoint's budget pays translators. The magazine fills a unique need to bring into English the viewpoints of socialist worldwide. We translate material written by socialists in French, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Italian, Dutch and other languages, so that you can read, in activists' own words, about the struggle in over 80 countries reported on by the magazine.

Because of the unique articles we publish, readership is now rising month on month. On average, we are now getting fifty percent more visitors each day than we were two months ago. In less than a year, the online International Viewpoint already has more readers than those of longer established websites, including those of our sister magazines, Inprecor and Inprekorr, those of the SWP and ISG in Britain, of the SP and SWP in the United States and that of the DSP in Australia.

However, the opportunity exists for International Viewpoint to do much more. The most widely read websites are those with the greatest financial and human resources. Many of the most widely read socialist websites are produced by small sects that,

having little activity in the physical world, are able to focus their effort onto the virtual one.

The rapid rise in the readership of International Viewpoint, and of other Fourth International websites such as that of the LCR and Rouge, suggests to us that readers are looking for a non-sectarian revolutionary viewpoint. Some simple enhancements to our site would help us meet that need: more bandwidth, greater resources for faster translation; improved search facilities, a larger archive and a greater effort to encourage progressive websites to link to InternationalViewpoint.org.

With the right backing, we can double the readership. A realistic goal for next year is that will be an average of 20,000 visits each monthly. Last month there were 17,500 visits to the site. While that strained our resources, it showed what is possible.

Naturally, this success brings new challenges. Our current financial resources fall far short of those required to take advantage of the opportunity. Donations to the magazine are one-third of the modest amount we planned and hoped for. But those donations to the magazine are essential to fund the team that edit, translate and manage the site and also pay for the technology that powers the website.

Furthermore, our growing success deepens our challenges. For example, as time goes on, so the number of new articles and archived resources on the web site also increases. That means that the number of pages views by each individual visitor also increases over time, further testing the capacity of the computer and internet connection used to serve visitors.

To meet the needs of our growing readership, we need to turn around the fall in donations to the magazine. This year we have had larger donations from comrades in Detroit and Dublin, and from the Dutch and Turkish sections of the Fourth International. Many readers have also given smaller gifts using a donation button on the website. Indeed, most donors are now using the button, which uses paypal.com, including two monthly donors in Britain: one in south Wales and another in north London.

We need much more. We need €5,000 in donations each year to run the site. So far, we have had around one-third of that, just over €1,800. One of

our supporters had made us an generous offer: he will double any donation made toward this target in November and December. If our readers can collectively donate €1,600, our supporter's doubling will allow us to meet our target for the year.

This is an exceptional opportunity: there are few areas where there sort of money would make such a sustained difference to the reach of the Fourth International. Please help us to double our readership.

To donate online, click on the 'Make a Donation' button on the left hand side. By post, send cheques payable to International Viewpoint, PO Box 112, Manchester M12 5DW, Britain.

ITALY

No to the University-Firm

FEDERICO TOMMASELLO AND GIULIO CALELLA ·

25 October, taking parliament by storm, was a baptism for the first student movement against the University-Firm. There had not been so much participation since the Panther movement in the early 1990s attempted to block the incipient "reform" movement, the beginnings of the process of treating learning as a commodity, a process sped up definitively by the Berlinguer and Zecchino measures.

The student condition, a complex and ambiguous one in the Universities of old, has changed profoundly. Eight hours of classes daily, spread over the day as determined by the professors, without appeal, examinations every month, play a part in the development of a generation of students defined as service consumers, required to spend many hours at the university premises. These material conditions are an excellent training ground for casualised work, by getting students used to a loss of control over their own living hours, exposed to lowest-common-denominator learning, thereby eliminating any residue of intellectual endeavour. Cuts in funding for studies mean students have to do odd jobs or give up on specialised graduate studies. This all adds up to training for precarious work. Students are not contingent workers as such, but social subjects viewing themselves firstly as students and secondly, are aware that they are heading for a precarious future. Thus, this movement comes out of an overall sense of unease; the reforms and the Government's arrogance (perfectly summed up in the so called Santaché measures) were an outcome of this. The reforms are an expression of the growing precariousness of an entire generation's experience. This generation is demanding one thing above all others: its own future. It is not by chance that the banner at the opening of the meeting on

the 25th, "Our time is here and starts now" summed up the aspirations and the practices of the Genoa movement.

A professorial block on pedagogy and a "united front" on the reforms played a part in this explosion. It saw all the components of the university and all opposition forces join in the 25 October movement. Now, the approval of the Ddl is taking away the unifying aim. Within the centre-left, there is a sort of lack of preparedness to push forward clearly the idea of the total abrogation of the Moratti measures. There are also proposals that would actually strengthen the University-Firm by demanding the 3+2 and calling for foundations under private law in the place of the Universities. Only support to the movements in schools and Universities can produce concrete progress. For this reason the centre of the Young Communists initiative over the coming months must be creating collectives in the Faculties, student self-organisation experiences (and a say in research) in all the universities as well as promoting and supporting the autonomy of mobilisations and the process of developing unity among different subjects. Indeed, the objective explosive conditions have not come into play everywhere with the requisite subjective conditions. This is also due to the lack of emphasis on meticulous, long-term intervention in the universities, common to all political youth movements in recent years.

The upcoming World Education Day event on 17 November, called in Porto Alegre, will be an important date for the struggle, to demand the abrogation of all the Moratti measures but also to provide backing to the summit meetings opened up in the Faculties to delink the 3+2, starting out from a radical change in students' living conditions to build subsequent mobilisations that will be capable, in

the heat of the struggle, to carry out an actual self-reform of the university and of learning.

It is also essential to seek social alliances that will make it possible to pose more general objectives, starting by booting out a Government that remains utterly unresponsive to mobilisations, knowing that only if it is swept away by the movements can lay the groundwork for a real alternative to Berlusconi's rule. The 25 November general strike can be an opportunity to raise this necessity.

Finally, it seems to us that the National Assembly is a decisive step. This movement still remains limited in scope, it would be an enormous step forward to succeed in forming an Italy-wide student network on the basis of the current struggles. Such a network would be in a better position to get a handle on the cycle of struggles that has opened up, and which we predict will not be a brief one.

This article was taken from the PRC journal Liberazione

FRANCE

Faced with widespread revolt, government declares state of emergency

MURRAY SMITH ·

The utilisation of the 1955 law is highly symbolic. It was originally adopted during the Algerian War of Independence to combat the independence fighters and the population that supported them. Fifty years later it is being used against young people, many of whom are the grandchildren of those same Algerians. Because the areas where the riots have taken place are not just poor and neglected. They are also home to large concentrations of North and Black Africans. The vast majority of these young people were born in France and therefore have French citizenship. But they are very conscious of not being French citizens like anyone else. Young people of Arab and African origin are second-class citizens. Even when they succeed in leaving school with qualifications, or even go to university, their chances of finding a job are much less than their white counterparts. And they are subjected to constant racist harassment - police controls, de facto colour bars at the entrance to night clubs, etc.

The use of the 1955 law amounts to a recognition that the only thing the government has to offer these young people is repression. Periodic attempts to 'rehabilitate' their neighbourhoods have had little effect. A generation of young people has grown up in grim, increasingly ghetto-like housing estates, with little hope of escape, and feeling rejected by a society whose loudly-proclaimed commitment equality does not seem to apply to them. The significance of the state of emergency has not been lost on those concerned. Recalling the aim of the origi-

nal law fifty years ago, Djamel a 30-year old inhabitant of the Paris suburb of Aubervilliers, put its succinctly to a journalist from the daily Le Monde: "In this country a bougnoule (a racist term for North Africans) remains a bougnoule. It's serious. You see, its proof that they don't consider us to be really French". His friend Omar added: "People are going to go crazy. We're already confined to our estates, now they're passing laws to lock us up in our own homes".

People - young people - have already "gone crazy". In many ways, what is surprising is not that the suburbs have exploded but that they did not explode before. The riots were sparked off by the deaths of two teenagers in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois, who were accidentally electrocuted as they took refuge from police. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. But it was far from an isolated incident. Young people - mostly of Arab and African origin - regularly die from the brutal methods of the police. Usually the result is a local riot or protest march, and then things die down again - till the next time. This time the pent-up anger exploded and the revolt spread to other Parisian suburbs and then across France. The scale of the revolt is indicated by the more than 30 zones where the state of emergency has been invoked. They cover areas in and around France's main towns and cities, from the English Channel to the Mediterranean.

The term "riot" which has come to be applied to the revolt is in fact misleading. The revolt is the work of gangs of youth who know each other and who consciously turn their anger into acts of destruction of property - burning cars, schools, shops, buses - and attacks on the hated police. As one young man put

it to the Madrid daily *El Pais*: "We don't have words to explain what we feel. We only know how to speak with fire". Beyond their immediate targets, their anger is directed against Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, the hard right hopeful for the 2007 presidential election, who has described them as "rabble" and "gangrene" and threatened to "hose down" their neighbourhoods. The only political demand that the rioters put forward is for Sarkozy's resignation.

Of course, there is a negative side to this revolt. It is easy enough to see that wreaking havoc in their own neighbourhoods causes damage to their neighbours and families. This can and is being exploited by the government to divide their communities between generations and between French and immigrants. But when the despair of those to whom society offers no future explodes in revolt, it rarely does so in a neat, tidy and "politically correct" way. What is happening in France today recalls the explosions in the ghettos of North America in the 1960s and the 1981 riots in England.

The riots have been the at the centre of French political life for two weeks. The right-wing government has alternated between Sarkozy's provocative statements and mealy-mouthed assurances of the government's concern and understanding. But the bottom line was to send in more and more police, thus acerbating the situation, and finally to resort to the 1955 law. Well over a thousand young people have already been arrested. In this climate the far Right has been having a field day. National Front leader Jean Marie Le Pen has called on rioters to be stripped of their French citizenship. Philippe de Villiers, leader of the rival Movement for France has said that the government "has not taken the measure of the anti-French insurrection which is

threatening the unity of the republic". Both the far Right and the right wing of the ruling UMP party have called for the army to be sent in to the suburbs.

The main opposition party, the Socialist Party, has not rejected the use of the 1955 law, confining itself to saying that it was necessary to be "vigilant" in applying it but that "above all, it is imperative to re-establish order and security". Forces to the left of the SP have reacted differently, placing the blame for the riots on decades of neglect, institutionalised racism and police brutality. The LCR, French section of the Fourth International, has called from the beginning for the resignation of Sarkozy. This demand has also been taken up by the Communist Party leadership, which has however had to contend with pressure from within the party, mainly from the municipalities it controls in the suburbs, to put equal blame on the police and the rioters.

A joint statement opposing the state of emergency was issued on November 8th, signed by political parties (the LCR, the CP, the Greens and the Citizens' Alternative), trade unions and civil rights organisations. Discussions are taking place with a view to organising unitary initiatives, including demonstrations in defiance of the curfew in the areas where it has been imposed. A first rally took place on November 9th in Bobigny, administrative centre of the Seine Saint-Denis department, north-east of Paris, the area where the revolt began. It was supported by the LCR, the CP and the main trade unions of the department. But over and above such initiatives, when the dust has settled, the French Left will have to develop an ongoing presence in the neighbourhoods where the revolt exploded, and from which it has been all too absent in recent years.

FRANCE

No to the state of emergency - Defy the curfew

We will be carrying articles analysing the riots and the governments's reaction. For the moment we are reproducing three documents issued on 8 November; a national leaflet of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International); a joint statement by left and democratic organisations; and a press statement by LCR spokesperson Olivier Besancenot. The joint statement is the result of discussions held over the last few days on the initiative of the LCR. Over the next few days joint initiatives against the State of Emergency are planned.

National LCR leaflet

The state of emergency is a crime against democracy!

Angry young people and the local populations, in solidarity against the government!

Chirac and the government are sticking to the path they have chosen. Far from defusing the crisis, by responding to urgent social needs, the government has decided to increase the level of repression. Now it has reactivated the 1955 law on the state of emergency, a law which led to the worst attacks on civil liberties during the Algerian War. At the same time it is sending dozens of young people to face courts that are virtually emergency tribunals.

Revolted by the tragedy of Clichy, where two teenagers died, young people from dozens of housing estates all over the country have been confronting the police night after night, for several days now. Although the anger of these young people, who are unemployed and unqualified, (the Citroen car factory in Aulnay has just laid off 700 temporary workers), and who are victims of racism,

is understandable, they have got the wrong target when they burn the cars of local people, schools, gymnasiums or nurseries. The enemy is the government's policies and it is all together, angry young people and the local population, that we have to fight Sarkozy and all the policies that have wrecked these neighbourhoods for more than twenty years.

The government is responsible for the situation that has been created

The policies of Villepin and Sarkozy lead to mass unemployment and job insecurity, aggravating the growing poverty. Around the big cities the development of real ghettos goes hand in hand with increasingly intolerable forms of discrimination. They are dismantling the state education system, which leads to steadily rising failure rates. As a result of the logic of deregulation policies, neighbourhood public services are in ruins. They are continually cutting credits for preventive action. Social housing is everywhere being sacrificed. There you have the daily lot of a large part of the population of this country. Meanwhile, in the National Assembly, the governing majority is cutting wealth tax and exonerating shareholders from paying tax on their dividends.

Sarkozy, the fire-raising firefighter, must go!

The logical corollary of this class policy that is being so shamelessly conducted, is that police checks are becoming each day more odious and violent. The poison of racism is spreading, encouraged by the provocative declarations of Sarkozy. Carried away by his desire to criminalise a whole layer of young people, the Minister of the Interior went so far as to insult them by describing them as "rabble" and "gangrene".

Engaged in a permanent pre-electoral campaign, seeking to win favour with Le Pen's electorate, he

has announced that he will go each week to a different suburban housing estate. The only effect of that will be to accentuate the police pressure on the areas concerned and make the situation even more explosive. This climate of violence is intolerable for the people who live there and will only make their daily lives even more difficult.

There's no doubt about it, Sarkozy, the fire-raiser of the suburbs, has got to go!

And this government, systematically disavowed by the voters, has no legitimacy to carry out these policies. Yesterday, it was sending the GIGN [elite police unit] against the seafarers of the SNCM. Today, it has the Marseilles tram workers' strike declared illegal, it is criminalising the suburbs and wants to impose curfews. As sole response to the despair of young people, it goes so far as to propose making them leave school at 14 and handing them over to be exploited by the bosses.

Anti-racist demonstration in Toulouse

A popular mobilisation is needed!

All together against the government!

It is not the uncontrolled intervention of the police that will settle the problems that exist, but the intervention of the local populations. It is the mobilisation of progressive forces that is decisive. We have to stop the police provocations and take action in favour of immediate measures to develop solidarity and cooperation in our neighbourhoods and our estates. Faced with the social disasters that are the result of years of liberalism, we have to demand that priority is given to the creation of stable jobs, to public services, to schools, housing and preventive action.

The action of this government is spreading poverty and producing despair. Nothing is more urgent than to stop it in its tracks. That is what the LCR is calling for.

Joint declaration

No to the state of emergency

Confronted with a revolt born of the accumulation of inequalities and discriminations in the suburbs and the poor neighbourhoods, the government has just entered on a new stage, an extremely serious one, of its escalating law and order policy. Even in May 1968, where the situation was much more dramatic, no emergency law was used by the government. The proclamation of the state of emergency is a response, one based only on repression, to a revolt whose causes are profound and well-known.

Over and above the disastrous symbolic message that will be sent out by the reference to the Algerian War, what is involved is not only a "curfew" - which is already entering into a logic of war. The law of April 3rd, 1955 authorises banning orders for "any person seeking to impede, in any way at all, the action of the organs of the state", the placing under house arrest of "any person whose activity appears dangerous for security and public order", the closing of "meeting places of any kind" and the banning of "meetings whose nature can provoke or perpetuate disorder". The government has even envisaged searching premises at night. It can, furthermore, have "adopted all necessary measures to ensure the control of the press and of every kind of publication", and authorise military jurisdictions alongside ordinary judges.

It is necessary to stop the violence and re-establish solidarity in the suburbs. Does that mean subjecting them to an emergency legislation inherited from the colonial period? We know where the well-known cycle of provocations and repression leads, and what results it can produce. The suburbs don't need a state of emergency; they are in desperate need of justice, respect and equality.

Signed by:

Citizens' Alternative, Association of Moroccan Workers in France (ATMF), CEDETIM, Homeless Committee, CRLDHT, FSU [main teachers' union], LCR (French section of the Fourth International), League for the Rights of Man (LDH), MRAP [anti-

racist movement], French Communist Party (PCF), Union of Lawyers of France, Magistrates' Union, Union syndicale Solidaires [a trade union confederation, regrouping among others the SUD unions], the Greens.

Press statement by LCR spokesperson Olivier Besancenot

Defy the curfew

Statement by Olivier Besancenot: The decisions announced by M.de Villepin, yesterday evening on TF1 [main television channel], are intolerable. Instead of responding to the social emergency, he has resuscitated a law dating from the colonial epoch, from the Algerian War, which gives prefects the power to decree a curfew on all or part of the territory of a borough and to suspend a certain number of civil liberties. Already, E.Raoult, mayor of Raincy - the town that spends 2,6% of its budget on house-building - in the vanguard of the repression, had jumped the gun by decreeing such a measure in his town. In this situation the LCR calls on people to defy the curfew by demonstrating in the towns or the neighbourhoods, if necessary at night, where a curfew is decreed by the prefect. The LCR calls on all left-wing and democratic organisations to organise these demonstrations together.

BRITAIN

Racial and Religious Hatred Bill - a serious threat to free speech

ALAN THORNETT ·

The House of Lords has voted by a majority 260 votes to 111 to reject the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill which is currently before Parliament. The Government will now have to decide whether to carry out its threat to use the Parliament Act to force it through or compromise with amendments proposed by the Lords.

The Bill - which covers England and Wales - is a serious threat to free speech and civil liberties and is an integral part of the wider attack on civil rights launched by new Labour as part of its "war on terrorism". Effectively it expands the arcane blasphemy laws, which already exist in Britain, and will promote intolerance and bigotry, further divide religious communities, and raise the spectre of censorship.

This is a serious problem for Respect, since George Galloway voted for the Bill at its third reading in the Commons as a Respect MP. Moreover, though Respect itself has not taken a position on the Bill the bulk of those who spoke in a debate on the Bill at the Respect National Council in September supported it.

The Bill extends part 30f of the Public Order Act 1986 to create a new offence of incitement to religious hatred. If it goes through anyone who publishes or says anything "likely to be heard or seen by any person in whom it is likely to stir up racial or religious hatred" will be committing a criminal offence liable to seven years in prison. Language used only has to be considered as "insulting" to be actionable.

Already a protestant evangelical pressure group, Christian Voice, has warned that it will seek to use it to prosecute bookshops selling the Qur'an for in-

citing religious hatred. Its director Stephen Green told the Guardian: "if the Qur'an is not a hate speech, I don't know what is".

New Labour claims that the Bill will defend the Muslim community from islamophobic attacks - most of which are generated by its own demonisation of the Muslim community in the wake of its invasion of Iraq of course. Yet similar legislation in Australia promoted in the same way, has been used against Muslims by Christian fundamentalists.

Shami Chakrabarty, director of Liberty, which strongly opposes the Bill, said, following its publication: "There may be good intentions behind this Bill, but the road to censorship is paved that way".

In fact the Bill is a cynical ploy by new Labour to redress the damage done to its Muslim vote by its war in Iraq. During the general election Home Secretary Charles Clarke wrote to every mosque in the country pointing to the proposed Bill and highlighting Tory and Liberal Democrat opposition to it.

Liberty, in a well argued briefing paper on the Bill, quotes Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui of the Muslim Parliament on this. He says "The Muslim concern for protection, equality, and social inclusion is real and genuine. However, this piece of legislation is driven by political motives to stem the haemorrhaging of Labour support amongst the Muslim community."

Moreover the Bill adds nothing to current law since incitement to religious hatred - in its various forms - is actionable under existing legislation. In particular under an amendment to the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, which extends the offence of causing

alarm or distress to include cases that are racially or religiously aggravated.

Liberty cites BNP members who are currently facing prosecution for comments about Muslims filmed and shown on TV on the BBC programme *Secret Agent*. Islamophobia is racial hatred under a religious guise.

Liberty's briefing paper goes on:

"Criminalising even the most unpalatable, illiberal and offensive speech should be approached with grave caution in a democracy. Free speech is far more precious than protection from being offended. The criminalisation of expressed opinions is often turned on the vulnerable communities it was designed to protect. Our criminal statute book is bursting with public order, violent, and property offences directed at those who strive to turn hate into real intimidation or action against people".

The Bill turns the focus from the necessary protection of the individual to the protection of belief systems themselves, i.e. a blasphemy law. It would allow people to claim that is it they, and not their ideas, which are under attack - thus generating arguments as to whether strongly expressed views on other people's religious beliefs are actionable.

In the Lords Liberal Democrat Peer (and respected civil rights lawyer) Lord Lester puts it this way:

"In seeking to criminalise the stirring up of religious hatred the Bill links vulnerable groups to religion or belief. It is that link, between protecting groups of people and protecting their beliefs and practices which gives the impression to those seeking to protect their religion against insult that the offences are akin to a blasphemy laws writ large".

He points out, as an example, that Sir Iqbal Sacranic, the leader of the Muslim Council of Britain is convinced that the new offence would enable Salman Rushdie to be prosecuted for publishing *The Satanic Verses*.

Soli Sorabjee, former Indian Attorney General, who gave evidence at the Lords committee stage

drew the same point from the Indian example:

"Experience shows that criminal laws prohibiting hate speech and expression will encourage intolerance, divisiveness and unreasonable interference with freedom of expression. Fundamentalists Christians, religious Muslims and devout Hindus would then seek to invoke criminal machinery against each other's religion, tenets or practices. That is increasingly what is happening in India today".

Christian groups campaigning against the Bill put it this way in a full-page Times advert on October 11th:

"Christian, civil rights groups and other organisations are concerned that if the Bill is passed in its current form it will create a barrier to open communication on religious issues and endanger an individual's right of free speech. There is further concern that due to the broad and confusing wording used in the Bill, it could potentially be misused. If applied with the wrong motives, the Bill could undermine civil liberties and a democratic society".

Lord Lester pointed to the wide scope for this:

"The new speech crimes are sweepingly broad. They apply to threatening abusive or insulting words, behaviour, written material, recordings or programmes intended or likely to stir up religious hatred. Unlike most other serious offences they require no criminal intent. They apply not only to words spoken in public but in private. They cover the electronic media, plays, films, works of fiction, political argument, preaching by priests and clerics, comedians and politicians".

This is why comedians and entertainers such as Rowan Atkinson and Stephen Fry are quite rightly campaigning against the Bill.

The Government argues that the new law is necessary because Jews and Sikhs are protected by existing law. It is spurious argument. Jews and Sikhs are protected as ethnic groups, i.e. because of their ethnicity not because of their religious belief. Stirring up hatred against Muslims because of their

ethnicity - as Asian or Pakistani for example - would equally be protected.

The Government also argues that there is an important safeguard against the illegitimate use of the Act. This is that the Attorney General will have a veto over prosecutions before they take place. Exactly why we should trust present or future Attorney Generals on this is not explained. Liberal democrat MP Evan Harris, a prominent opponent of the Bill, also challenged this point:

"The Attorney General is no consolation for those who have been arrested or questioned by the police? Let me give an example for arguments sake. If a group of fundamentalist Christians are spreading vilification and humiliation against gay people - I notice that they do not have the protection which the Home Secretary is extending to those who follow a religion - and I were to say outside the House that those Christian bigots should be despised and indeed hated for their views, can he guarantee that I would not be visited by the police?"

Lester goes on:

"Freedom of speech, like equality and freedom of religion, is a fundamental civil and political right. Its protection is at the heart of our liberal democratic society. The right of freedom of speech means the right of everyone to communicate information and opinions without unnecessary state control or interference. That includes evil ideas expressed intemperately or in ways that shock. It includes offensive criticism of religious beliefs and practices".

Muslim opinion is divided on the Bill. The Muslim Council of Britain campaigns in favour of it, whilst

MAB has taken no position. At least one of its leading figures, Anas Altikriti - who stood as a Respect candidate in last years Euro elections is opposed to it.

In the Commons the Bill has been opposed at various stages by the Labour left (and not so left) including: Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, Alan Simpson, Paul Flynn, Kate Hoey, Bob Marshall-Andrews and Dennis Skinner. The Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru opposed it as did the Tories - with their own agenda of course.

The Lords amendment is designed to tighten up the definition of language needed to bring a prosecution which would then be restricted to "threatening" rather than "insulting" or "abusive" language. They argue that this would make prosecutions more difficult in some cases - we would not know until it was tested in the courts.

What we do know is that the principle of the Bill would be the same. It would still threaten free speech and would be just as divisive as the original wording. It would still be a blasphemy law even if it were more difficult to use. The Muslim Council of Britain reject the amendment and argue in support of the original wording.

The Bill is therefore unsupportable whichever wording on offer is finally accepted. We don't need more repressive laws but more free speech to combat bigotry and promote tolerance.

Respect needs to think again about this important issue.

"Welcome" ... Trotsky

CELIA HART ·

"There is a dimension that is lacking in the German film *Goodbye Lenin*. I know, because I lived in the GDR not long before the Wall came down. This wall was brought down before it was even built. The immense tragedy of the transition to capitalism in Eastern Europe cannot be measured by the few years that elapsed between the vulgar and decadent peregroika and the festive tearing down of statues of Lenin. You cannot say goodbye to Lenin if he was never welcomed. They did nothing but import his image, marginalize him, turn him into a clown subordinated to the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The Lenin to whom they said goodbye in this film had nothing to do with the person who initiated socialism in the world. Their statues were empty of content, and I think, also of form.

So there. We will not understand it as long as the life and ideas of Leon Trotsky remain hidden in many places. It may seem ironic, but the only way to bring Lenin back is to understand the reasons for the banishment of his best contemporary. We will not succeed in understanding what happened if we do not render understandable the obscure mechanism by which the Soviet bureaucratic caste monopolised socialism, betraying the International and demolishing the revolutionary spirit in the world.

Of course there remains an alternative for us: take the mask away entirely, from the beginning, something that will take us time, a thing that is increasingly rare, besides the fact that we lack first-hand information. It is as if, while a ship was sinking, the engineer sent an on-the-spot report on the how and the why of the shipwreck, and that people were

nevertheless intending to weigh anchor and head for the same seas with the same intentions, without seeking to know the causes of the catastrophe, burying in the sand, ostrich-like, the message in the bottle.

The 20th century has not finished speaking to us. The vicissitudes that revolutionary practice experienced remain hidden from view. And if there is someone who can be a witness to the 20th century, it is certainly Leon Trotsky.

Ernest Mandel put it much better: *"Of all the most important socialists of the 20th century, Trotsky was the one who most clearly recognised the fundamental tendencies of development of the principal contradictions of the epoch, and it is also Trotsky who most clearly formulated an adequate strategy of emancipation for the international workers' movement"*. [1]

Yes, we need Lenin, who will only come back on condition that we listen to what Trotsky has to say to us. They defended the same thing, except that Trotsky survived him and was able to interpret in his life and in his death the forces that were exterminating socialism. I challenge, at this point in time, any thinker who is sincerely trying to understand what happened, to ignore the experiences of Trotskyism, even if only to refute them. Those who avoid them, those who leave them to one side, are not real Leninists.

They say that without Lenin, Karl Marx is of no use. I would add that without Trotsky there is no Lenin. All the Marxist thinkers, especially genuinely revolutionary Marxists, are indispensable for understanding Karl Marx, who did not have a crystal ball. He only pointed the direction for revolutionary ideas, the philosophy, so that for the first time in

history people could dig the tunnel towards their - globalised - happiness.

Let us use this simile. Socialism is supposed to be a tunnel, a path that we can take, in this world where we have only things to win and nothing to lose but our chains. Well, it was the October Revolution that was the first attempt to dig this tunnel that Marx told us about.

But Stalinism dynamited it from within. When it was being built, dynamite had been left to destroy it. Trotsky was the engineer who showed where the explosives were. They didn't want to listen to him. We know what happened then... the planet Earth was ravaged.

Today we declare very poetically that the tunnel we are going to build will be the socialism of the 21st century. Whether it is of the 21st or the 31st century, the tunnel can be dynamited because of exactly the same insufficiencies and we will continue, full of tears, waiting for the socialism of the future century...this time turned into cockroaches.

The possibility of a transition to socialism is a scientific discovery. It is not a poem or a way of speaking. The only way to get there is through the class struggle. It's as simple as that.

The discovery of the origin of capitalist exploitation is a scientific truth of the same value and the same objectivity as the rotating movement of the earth around the sun. We don't need Einstein, the Laws of General Relativity and of Geodesy to explain to us why we go from summer to autumn. Newton is more than sufficient. The results are identical and the mathematics are infinitely more simple.

We don't need to understand black holes or Hawking's theories to put a satellite into orbit. It may be that communications, computers and so on have somewhat complicated the reality of modern capitalism, but it nonetheless remains true that the essence ("the chicken from rice to the chicken") is still the same as several centuries ago. There is no need for "quantum economists" or "tensorial mathematics" to explain to us the origin of the exploita-

tion of the capitalist system and its present weakening.

What we call "socialism of the 21st century" amounts to saying that we have to build "the aeroplane of the 21st century". But this plane will have to overcome gravity, just as the plane of the 20th century did. In this 21st century, as for millions of years, the constant G of Universal Gravitation is still the one that Newton calculated ($G = 6.7 \times 10^{-11} \text{m}^3/\text{kg} \cdot \text{s}^2$).

I admit that we have to make more comfortable, faster and more secure aeroplanes, because the demands of the 21st century are different from those of the 20th century, but the ultimate reason for a machine that has to conquer gravity is the same.

By way of comparison, we could say that our plane, which tried to conquer gravity in 1917, took off and crashed on the earth's surface. It would be better to look for the causes before engaging in nay futuristic discourses, because whatever the 21st century is, G remains invariable. From the 19th to the 21st century, the primary causes of capitalist exploitation are identical: the expropriation of labour. So there is only one way to go "from the reign of necessity to the reign of liberty". Enough of cutting capers, when each instant that passes counts against us.

The plane fell, and now we believe that with our computers, our cellphones or the internet we are going to be able to defy gravity without taking G into account. Of course not! Gravity will continue in the same way until the planet disintegrates. We had better get a move on, drop the rhetoric and realise once and for all that the enemy has not changed. He is perhaps more aggressive and dangerous, but still the same. Let us hurry, at last, to find out who we really are.

But why then Leon Trotsky? I don't have a fixation with a historical figure, as many people reproach me with having. It's just that this man knew a lot of things about the black box of this plane that wanted to make history take off.

Leon Trotsky was assassinated 65 years ago, in the most grotesque manner. After 65 years, we are still spattered by his blood. This assassination ought to have put an end to the Kremlin's right to try and monopolise and transmit socialist thought, but they continued and it became transformed into a salt statue.

With the Red Star medal awarded to Ramon Mercader, they celebrated, with secret and cowardly hurrahs, the death of socialism. This assassination was one of the most perverse terrorist acts in history. It was the glorious October 1917 that committed suicide on August 20th.

Mercader, having served his sentence in Mexico, went to Cuba (in 1960). I still don't understand who he met and how, nor if he could look in the face Marti's crown of martyrdom and Mella's ashes. The man who had in his hands, without realising it, the mission of wiping out the left wing of socialist ideas, died in Cuba, something I have difficulty in coming to terms with. He was there in those luminous years of Che Guevara. That seems to me so impossible ...

Of course the road of the ideological survival of the Cuban Revolution had nothing to do with Mercader, the GPU and Stalinism. Quite to the contrary, what enabled my revolution to survive was the spirit of Leon Trotsky, although we didn't know it, because it had been hidden in the folds of historical memory. The truth is stubborn and it makes its way like slow but constant water that nothing can stop.

There is a mysterious circuit in the Cuban Revolution, which was born with the Cuban Revolutionary Party, continued with Mella, then with the most radical wing of the July 26th Movement, culminating in a sublime way with Che Guevara. This is the circuit of resolute class commitment and internationalism.

Leon Trotsky walks here, silent, unknown and slandered, with a malicious smile. Why was it forbidden for so many years to put Leon Trotsky in relation with the Cuban Revolution? I haven't managed to

find out, but I know that if there is a revolution that has been radical, it is certainly ours. And if there was someone who called for revolutions that were radical and never-ending, it was certainly Leon Trotsky. Perhaps Marti was not mistaken when he declared that "in politics the real is what is not seen".

We should speak at length of Julio Antonio Mella and analyse in depth his activity in Mexico. Fortunately we have the excellent works of Olivia Gall [2] and Alejandro Galvez Cancino, [3] which analyse in an absolutely clear and precise fashion, with considerable documentation, the communist activity of Mella in this period.

Mella referred to Trotsky after returning from the USSR and knew the objectives of the Left Opposition through Andreu Nin (assassinated, just for a change, by the GPU during the Spanish Civil War). He wrote to a comrade in the book *The Platform of the Left Opposition: "For Alberto Martinez, with the aim of rearming communism. Julio Antonio Mella"*. [4] His declared Trotskyism is not what should be most important for us. Much more transcendent were his radical positions in Mexico. In fact, and in his political consequences, "*Mella is considered by the Trotskyists as the initiator of the current that later constituted the Left Opposition in the Mexican Communist Party*", says the historian Olivia Gall. [5]

It was also Julio Antonio Mella who introduced us to the road to socialism in Cuba. It was he who established the superb bridge between Marti and Bolshevism, which represents the best of our recent past and the near future of the world. Whatever might be said, and even if some people would like to wrap him up in a pathetic patriotic flag and attribute a narrow discourse to him, this valiant, vigorous and polemical Mella - and no other - was the first Cuban communist.

The Stalinism which subsequently contaminated us, and which in a certain fashion had its importance during the course of the socialist revolution, is nothing other than a contagious virus, in spite of

which, and not without battles, the ideal of socialism was able to survive, because it was the very essence of the revolutionary process. The Stalinist parties did not contribute ideologically to our process, neither when they expelled Mella from the party, nor when they collaborated with Machado, or any many other occasions, thank God!

There are still some comrades here who have a lot to tell us, faithful to the socialist revolution...and grateful to have been helped and listened to by another Marxist who figures alongside Mella on the emblem of the Union of Communist Youth of Cuba: Che.

And it is precisely Che that I want to invite, in his totality and with the star on his forehead, to extend a welcome to Trotsky on this 65th anniversary of his assassination. Che Guevara, symbol of the most radical communism, managed to fashion an instrument out of a Trotskyism that he didn't know. And that was only because the theoretical truths of Trotsky have the same constancy as the value of G, the constant of Universal Gravitation. Che found his own way to many of Trotsky's theses, without ever knowing it...without being allowed to know it.

I am going to give two examples which enabled me to begin to discover a secret communion between the two of them.

Che Guevara was the revolutionary who best understood the principles of the permanent revolution, to such an extent that he died for having tried to defend these principles. But he not only died for having wanted to implement these theses, he also died for having sought, intellectually, to reach its essence.

For this 65th anniversary I am going to take up again here the three fundamental aspects of the permanent revolution.

First aspect: *"The theory of the permanent revolution, which originated in 1905, declared war upon these ideas and moods. It pointed out that the democratic tasks of the backward bourgeois nations lead directly, in our epoch, to the dictator-*

ship of the proletariat and that the dictatorship of the proletariat puts socialist tasks on the order of the day." [6].

Che was categorical on this subject. Here is what Nestor Kohan has to say about it: *"He (Che) at no time accepted that in Latin America (I would add: and in the world) the tasks consist of building a "national revolution", "democratic", "progressive", or a capitalism with a human face, which leaves socialism till later. He expounds in a trenchant fashion, very polemical, that if we do not propose to make the socialist revolution, then what results is a caricature of revolution, or ends in failure or tragedy, as has happened so many times."* [7]

These two exposés are identical. The underdeveloped countries don't have to wait till an English or German person decides to organise the revolution in their countries. Trotsky said that in the *Manifesto of the Conference known as the "emergency" conference of the Fourth International* in May 1940: *"...the perspective of the permanent revolution in no way signifies that the backward countries must wait for the signal from the advanced countries, or that the colonial peoples must patiently wait for the proletariat of the metropolitan centres to free them. Help comes to those who help themselves!"*

In its second aspect, *"The second aspect of the 'permanent' theory has to do with the socialist revolution as such. For an indefinitely long time and in constant internal struggle, all social relations undergo transformation. Society keeps on changing its skin. ... Revolutions in economy, technique, science, the family, morals and everyday life develop in complex reciprocal action and do not allow society to achieve equilibrium. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolution as such."* [8]

For his part, Che wrote in *Socialism and Man* in Cuba: *"In this period of the building of socialism we can see the birth of the new man. His image is not yet quite fixed. It will never be able to be, given that the process is parallel to the development of*

new economic structures." [9] For Che, *"the only rest for revolutionaries is the tomb"*.

Third aspect: international. For Trotsky, *"The international character of the socialist revolution, which constitutes the third aspect of the theory of the permanent revolution, flows from the present state of economy and the social structure of humanity. Internationalism is no abstract principle but a theoretical and political reflection of the character of world economy, of the world development of productive forces and the world scale of the class struggle. The socialist revolution begins on national foundations-but it cannot be completed within these foundations. The maintenance of the proletarian revolution within a national framework can only be a provisional state of affairs, even though, as the experience of the Soviet Union shows, one of long duration. In an isolated proletarian dictatorship, the internal and external contradictions grow inevitably along with the successes achieved. If it remains isolated, the proletarian state must finally fall victim to these contradictions."* [10]

Che said on the subject of revolutionaries: *"If their revolutionary ardour dulls when the most pressing tasks have to be carried out at the local level and proletarian internationalism is forgotten, then the revolution ceases to be a driving force and falls into a gentle somnolence, of which our irreconcilable enemy, imperialism, takes advantage to gain ground. Internationalism is a duty, but also a revolutionary necessity."* [11]

I will not waste time. If there is someone who always fought to make the Cuban Revolution ever more socialist, it was Che. He threw himself into the building of socialism in a backward land, deepening day after day its socialist character...only to completely abandon it in the name of the world revolution. I do not know anyone else who did the same. I don't think there is any greater fidelity to the theses of the permanent revolution. That the conditions in Bolivia were not favourable...that is another subject than the permanent revolution. We

can certainly criticise him for having been too permanent or too consistent a revolutionary.

The other element of convergence, in different circumstances, between Trotsky's thought and Che's, resides in their firm commitment to planned economy. It is certain that Trotsky initially opted for the NEP, given the terrible economic circumstances in which the young Soviet state found itself with what was known as War Communism.

But Trotsky very quickly criticised the new state of affairs. He considered, as Isaac Deutscher describes to us, that *"with the move to the NEP, the necessity of planning became more urgent (...) Precisely because the country was reviving under a market economy, it was necessary to see that the market was controlled, and to have the means of exercising this control. He went on to raise the question of the Single Plan, without which it was impossible to rationalise production, to concentrate industrial resources and to establish equilibrium between the different sectors of the economy."* [12]

Che's positions in favour of the plan and his proverbial aversion to the NEP are well known. Che considered that Lenin, if he had had the time, would have revised his opinion of the NEP. And there was not only the plan. Che also took a position, at the end of his life, in favour of socialist democracy. Michael Lowy writes in *Rebellion*: *"We know that in the last years of his life Ernesto Che Guevara had made considerable progress in distancing himself from the Soviet paradigm (...) But a large part of his later writings still remains unpublished, for inexplicable reasons. Among these documents there is a radical critique of the Manual of Political Economy of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, written in Prague in 1966 (...) One of its passages is very interesting, because it demonstrates that in his later political thinking, Guevara was coming round to the idea of socialist democracy."* [13]

That was what Che was like. Although he had insufficiently studied Leon Trotsky, he was going in the direction of the most consistent Trotskyist theses. Perhaps he wasn't conscious of it, but that is of lit-

the importance. It indicates in any case that these theses are correct and in return gives even more force to Trotsky's thought. In 1965, Che wrote to Armando Hart from Tanzania about his choices concerning Marxist philosophy, and in paragraph VII he told him: "*And we should find there your friend Trotsky, who it seems existed and wrote.*" [14]

That may make us think that he didn't know a lot about the founder of the Red Army. It appears nevertheless that during the last year of his life he drew closer to his works. Juan Leon Ferrer, a Trotskyist comrade who worked in the Ministry of Industry, assured me of this. Furthermore, Che received the periodical of his organisation, and it was Che who had the imprisoned Trotskyists freed on his return from Africa. Comrade Roberto Acosta, who has since died, shared a close comradeship with Guevara. According to Jose Leon Ferrer, during the sugar harvests (zafra), they spoke of these subjects. This comrade says that Che had read Permanent Revolution, and we know that in Bolivia he was carrying in his backpack the History of the Russian Revolution.

We could add many examples which show that these two exemplary revolutionaries lit up the same path.

Both of them brilliantly and successfully led an army and a nascent socialist state, fully applying the teachings of Karl Marx; both of them were revolutionary ideologues who took power and sought to deepen the revolutionary process while remaining, respectively, loyal to Lenin and Fidel, leaning to their left. For representing the most developed ideal of internationalism and revolutionary consistency, both were assassinated.

Ernesto Guevara made me a Trotskyist. When I had access to Trotsky's writings, very belatedly for my

liking, I realised that many things had already been told to me from my childhood onwards, by Che. From the first pages, I had the confirmation of what I had so many times felt in reading Che: that the revolution has nothing to do with national idiosyncrasy; that there is no room in socialism for the pronouns "our" or "your"; that revolutionary theory, like the laws of physics, is a universal language. As Armando Hart stated in another epoch: "*Our struggle is not only for Cuba, but for all the workers and the exploited of the world. Our frontiers are moral. Our limits are those of class.*" [15]

What I most appreciate in Trotsky is his way of speaking, the passion that his discourses always awakened in me. It is the same thing that subjugated me with Che Guevara. That is why I am fighting in his army, as in Che's, without betraying anyone. Both of them express with the same truth the word, the gun and the heart.

Comrades: let us finally come of age. There is too much injustice, too much exploitation, the evidence of the unique solution is only too great; too many of ours are dead. Leon Trotsky is calling us back to the struggle. Let us bid him unconditionally welcome!

Che Guevara is his amphytron, and the peoples of Latin America are demanding socialism. Trotsky has won the theoretical match in a dramatic way. Let us without delay and with confidence arm our revolutionary movements. Trotsky and Che are in our party. Let us once and for all give the tree a good shake, so as to unmask the new reformists who are preventing the Bolivarian revolution from advancing - this revolution which is the spearhead, the first rung on the ladder of an unprecedented continental revolution.

Let us remember once again that the sun, the stars and gravity are our allies. Workers of all lands, unite!"

PAKISTAN EARTHQUAKE

Solidarity after the earthquake

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

As this article is being written, the Pakistani Prime Minister's official estimate of victims runs to more than 53,000 dead (40,000 in Kashmir and 13,000 in the frontier province), 67,000 wounded and 3.3 million made homeless. What are the real figures and will they ever be known?

The information on the situation in the affected zones remains piecemeal. The big international media rarely leave Islamabad (Pakistan's capital) and Muzaffargarh (the capital of Pakistani-controlled Kashmir). Coverage of the event is much less than that of the tsunami of December 2004. The latter certainly concerned a much wider area and access to the affected areas of Kashmir is difficult, but it's hard to avoid thinking that the absence of tourist complexes in a region on a war footing the Indo-Pakistani face-off along the "line of control" accounts for something in this difference in media treatment.

People abandoned

Ten days after the earthquake, the situation of the surviving villagers in the affected zones remains dramatic. They have to reach the urban centres on foot (sometimes involving journeys of 24 or 48 hours) as winter looms, with rain, snow and night frost nocturne. Severely wounded people have often spent a week without care before being transported to medical units. A number have died while awaiting help.

The UN administration has said that the country "desperately" needed helicopters. Indeed, there is a plethora in this ultra-militarized region (Afghanistan is an hour's flight away) but they have been apportioned with an eyedropper.

The inhabitants of New Orleans have already paid a high price for the imperial priorities of their government, with the public funds destined for the upkeep of the levees being spent on the Iraqi occupation. Now it is Kashmir's turn. Its territory is only considered as a strategic cul-de-sac which does not merit the broad mobilization of resources that mountain rescue requires.

Another parallel. As had been the case on the coasts of the Indian Ocean, solidarity between poor and ordinary people began to operate well before government aid slowly arrived.

Responding to the criticisms, the president of Pakistan, general Pervez Musharraf, said that he could not be expected to respond better than George Bush during hurricane Katrina, given that the latter was the head of the richest country in the world.

But behind the self-absolution of heads of state, we can sense the same indifference towards the poor; whether in New Orleans or Kashmir, they are literally "invisible" in the eyes of the powerful.

In an article intended to absolve the Pakistani government, the Lahore "Daily Times" expressed this social blindness in striking fashion. The big cities were only marginally affected, so the newspaper claims that "Pakistan has suffered relatively light damage" compared to other earthquakes.

Entire villages have been swept from the map, the death count will perhaps exceed 100,000. The percentage of victims in relation to the total population is often particularly high in Muzaffargarh - a capital! - 70% of housing has been destroyed. Around 90% of the town of Balakot has been destroyed. But it's in Kashmir...

It is obviously difficult to protect oneself against a powerful earthquake, but it would be interesting to know what resources have been devoted to protecting housing and infrastructure (roads and so on) against quakes (because everyone knows that the drama will happen again one day, as the Indian and Eurasian continental shelves clash with the Himalayan foothills). One fears that the answer is none, in rural Kashmir at least.

As for the army, it controls the state and a significant part of the economy. Yet in this high-risk country, "it has no training in crisis management, and as it has absolute control over everything and directs the civil administration, you have the worst scenario" notes a functionary of the International Crisis Group quoted in "Le Monde" on October 15, 2005.

Cancel the debt!

Some small western medical and military teams have been sent to the north of the country. The Pakistani president has called for international financial aid. The World Bank has offered 20 million dollars and the Asian Development Bank 10 million.

But as the French Committee for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt (CADTM) has pointed out, "these figures should not hide the fact that at the same time, rich countries and multilateral institutions continue cynically to receive much higher sums from the Pakistani state in repayment of a debt which has become illegitimate.

In 2003, Pakistan paid its rich creditors around 2.5 billion dollars, of which more than 500 million dollars went to the World Bank and 600 million dollars to the IMF". "Moreover" CADTM says, "the structural adjustment policies imposed by these institutions piloted by the leaders of the rich countries, with the complicity of general Musharraf, deprives the state of the resources to face up to this terrible catastrophe, eroding the health services, in prevention and emergency services notably.

Indeed, the debt has already been repaid several times: Pakistan has repaid more than 5 times what it owed in 1980 but it is 3.5 times more indebted".

One of the most urgent solidarity measures, concludes CADTM, should be the "total and immediate cancellation of Pakistan's public foreign debt and the abandonment of the structural adjustment policies which favour international investors and big companies to the detriment of the people in distress. We should prevent this earthquake from multiplying the tragic effects of debt and poverty"

Pakistani movements

Given the incompetence of the administration, numerous initiatives have been taken by Pakistani or international NGOs, trade union associations, parties and diverse organizations. The Islamic fundamentalist currents are also mobilising their networks and hope to strengthen their implantation on this occasion; some see the earthquake as a punishment from God.

Our association, Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), has decided to support the Labour Education Foundation which is establishing aid camps in the regions affected, in collaboration with the Women Workers Help Line network, the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) and the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP). We think that it is important for the social movement in the west to prioritise support for the efforts of Pakistani organisations rather than international ones (to strengthen the local associative tissue) and notably those which develop solidarity in a secular and progressive direction, genuinely independent of the state powers.

The LEF has collected more than 5,000 dollars in cash and goods, which has allowed it to send three lorry loads of aid to the emergency camps with food, tents, blankets and so on. It should be able to count on international solidarity.

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

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

To Pakistan, but which might be very costly:

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