War in the
Middle East:

Holding a whole
population
hostage

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War in the Middle East - Milosevic - Scotland

Armed Globalisation

The sinking ship of US imperial ambitions

Gilbert Achcar

"The defeat of Hezbollah would be a huge loss for Iran, both psychologically and strategically. Iran would lose its foothold in Lebanon. It would lose its major means to destabilize and inject itself into the heart of the Middle East. It would be shown to have vastly overreached in trying to establish itself as the regional superpower. The United States has gone far out on a limb to allow Israel to win and for all this to happen. It has counted on Israel's ability to do the job. It has been disappointed. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has provided unsteady and uncertain leadership.... His search for victory on the cheap has jeopardized not just the Lebanon operation but America's confidence in Israel as well." Charles Krauthammer, Washington Post, August 4, 2006

"But the administration now has to admit what anyone - including myself - who believed in the importance of getting Iraq right has to admit: Whether for Bush reasons or Arab reasons, it is not happening, and we can't throw more good lives after good lives.... But second best is leaving Iraq. Because the worst option - the one Iran loves - is for us to stay in Iraq, bleeding, and in easy range to be hit by Iran if we strike its nukes.... We need to deal with Iran and Syria, but from a position of strength - and that requires a broad coalition. The longer we maintain a unilateral failing strategy in Iraq, the harder it will be to build such a coalition, and the stronger the enemies of freedom will become." Thomas Friedman, New York Times, August 4, 2006

Everyday that passes shows more of those who enthusiastically supported the Bush administration's imperial drive in the Middle East leaving its sinking ship. There can be no doubt any longer that what many had forecast long ago is proving absolutely true: the Bush administration will definitely go down in history as the clumsiest crew that ever stood at the helm of the American Empire.

Bush and his cronies have already secured their position in the collective memory as the grave-diggers of U.S. post-Cold War imperial ambitions: they have accomplished the incomparable feat of squandering the exceptionally favorable conditions that U.S. imperialism faced since the other world colossus started crumbling from 1989 on. They have wasted the unique window of opportunity that the same Krauthammer quoted above had called in 1990 the "unipolar moment." But they have wasted it because they were inspired by precisely the same imperial hubris that has distinguished the likes of Krauthammer and Friedman.

The lead-article in a recent issue of Time magazine, published before the start of Israel's new Lebanon war, heralded "the end of cowboy diplomacy" - it took note of the obvious fact that "the Bush Doctrine foundered in the principal place the U.S. tried to apply it":

"Though no one in the White House openly questions Bush's decision to go to war in Iraq, some aides now acknowledge that it has come at a steep cost in military resources, public support and credibility abroad. The Administration is paying the bill every day as it tries to cope with other crises. Pursuing the forward-leaning foreign policy envisioned in the Bush Doctrine is nearly impossible at a time when the U.S. is trying to figure out how to extricate itself from Iraq. Around the world, both the U.S.'s friends and its adversaries are taking note - and in many cases, taking advantage - of the strains on the superpower. If the toppling of Saddam Hussein marked the high-water mark of U.S. hegemony, the past three years have witnessed a steady erosion in Washington's ability to bend the world to its will." [1]

The authors' most serious grievance was stated as follows:

"As it turns out, Iraq may prove to be not only the first but also the last laboratory for preventive war. Instead of deterring the rulers in Tehran and Pyongyang, the travails of the U.S. occupation may have emboldened those regimes in their quest to obtain nuclear weapons while constraining the U.S. military's ability to deter them."

This very bitter assessment was accompanied in the Time article by the same hope that was shared by the large chorus of U.S. allies, protégés and clients: for all of them, with the outstanding exception of the Israeli government, the fact that the most prominent

neocons of the Bush administration have been pushed aside nurtured the hope that a new salutary course of the administration's foreign policy was in gestation. The reshuffle that went along with George W. Bush's second term, despite the exit of realist-in-chief Colin Powell who, anyway, had quite limited influence on the administration, seemed indeed to confirm the "twilight of the neocons" that some Clintonites had announced two years ago. [2]

However, what the Time authors announced as marking the end of "cowboy diplomacy" - "a strategic makeover is evident in the ascendancy of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice" - proved to be no more than wishful thinking almost as soon as it was printed, in light of the events that unfolded subsequently as Israel launched its most brutal aggression. Cowboy diplomacy, it turned out, had just been replaced with cowgirl diplomacy - essentially the same.

True, Condoleezza Rice did her best to put some make-up on the face of the Bush administration's foreign policy, but there was no significant shift in substance. A pillar of this administration since its inception, she shares the same delusions of grandeur and folly of overreaching designs that characterize the rest of the team. Put in charge of the State department for Bush's second term, Rice's mission consisted primarily in sealing off the many leaks in the administration's foreign policy ship: it was indeed a mission impossible. The ship is sinking inexorably in the dark waters of the Iraqi oil slick.

The U.S. "hyperpower" that is able to knock down any other regular army on earth - the hyperpower whose military expenditure exceeds that of the 200+ states that constitute the rest of the world, and whose military budget alone exceeds the GDP of all other

countries but for 14 of them - proved one more time in contemporary history that it is unable to control rebellious populations. For that, all the sophisticated killing gadgetry that the Pentagon possesses is of very limited help. Controlling populations involves troops: it is a kind of industry where labor-force can hardly be replaced with hardware. That is why, incidentally, dictatorships are relatively more at ease in this business, as they can mobilize at will from their populations and don't fear paying a high price in soldiers' lives.

The U.S. proved unable to control Vietnam with a much higher rate of occupation troops to inhabitants than is the case in Iraq. And yet, U.S. military power is today much greater than at the time of Vietnam in all respects except the one that is most crucial for occupation endeavors: troops. The number of U.S. troops has been radically cut since Vietnam and the end of the Cold War. Inspired by a spirit typical of the capitalism of the automation age, the Pentagon believed that it could make up for the unreliability of human resources by depending heavily on sophisticated weaponry - the so-called "revolution in military affairs." It thus entered in the age of "post-heroic" wars as they were aptly called by a maverick analyst of military affairs. [3] And, it did not take much trouble indeed for the U.S. to defeat "post-heroically" the Iraqi army of Saddam Hussein. Controlling the Iraqi population "post-heroically," however, proved an altogether different challenge.

The U.S. has been steadily losing control over Iraq ever since the occupation settled down in 2003. It was confronted, on the one hand, by the unfolding of an armed insurgency in the country's Arab Sunni areas that proved impossible to quench with the limited number of U.S. occupation troops available. For, if an invading army is not capable of exerting control over every single acre of inhabited territory as local armed forces usually do, there is only one secure way to get rid of an armed insurgency moving within its popular constituency "like a fish in water" as Mao Zedong once put it: drain the pool. This means either to commit genocide, as the Russian army has started to do in Chechnya, or to displace the population into concentration camps, or a combination

of the two as the U.S. tentatively practiced in Vietnam, but could not carry to conclusion because the American population wouldn't have tolerated it.

In Iraq, Washington was faced, on the other hand, by a much graver problem, one that became clear by the beginning of 2004: the Bush administration had been induced - by its own foolishness and the sales patter of some of the Pentagon's Iraqi friends or the stupid delusions of others - into believing that it could win the sympathy of a major chunk of Iraq's majority community, the Arab Shiites. This proved a total disaster as the clout of Iran-friendly Shiite fundamentalist organizations completely dwarfed whatever constituency Washington's henchmen could buy among Iraq's Shiites. The Bush administration was left with no alternative for its imperial design but the classical recipe of "divide and rule," trying to foster antagonism between the three main components of the Iraqi population, countering the Shiites with Arab Sunni forces in alliance with the Kurds. It ended up fueling Iraq's slide toward a civil war, thus aggravating the overall spectacle of its failure in controlling the country. [4]

There is no doubt that the way in which the American Gulliver got tied down by the Iraqi Lilliputians has considerably emboldened Iran, the other Middle Eastern pillar of what George W. Bush labeled the "axis of evil" at the onset of his post-9/11 war drive. The utterly defiant, nay provocative, attitude of Iran against the U.S. colossus was made possible only because the latter proved in Iraq to stand on feet of clay. And Tehran countered successfully the attempt by Washington's Arab clients to expand the sectarian feud from Iraq to the rest of the Arab region so as to isolate the Iranian regime as Shiite - a ploy that was used with some measure of success after the Iranian revolution of 1979. Tehran countered it by outbidding all the Arab regimes in hostility to Israel, thus building up its image as a champion of the pan-Islamic cause.

A key to Tehran's success is the alliance that it weaved with Hamas, the most popular embodiment of Sunni Islamic fundamentalism. This alliance was enhanced when the largest section of the Muslim Brotherhood (of which Hamas is the

Palestinian branch), the Egyptian section, came out openly in support of Iranian President Ahmadinejad's provocative anti-Israel statements. Hamas's accession to power through the January 2006 Palestinian election dealt a further blow to Washington's regional strategy. Tehran jubilated, outbidding again all its Arab rivals in supporting the new Palestinian government. It is at this point that Israel stepped in, seen from Washington as the likely savior of what otherwise is looking more and more like an imperial Titanic.

One more time in four decades of strategic alliance between the U.S. sponsor and the Israeli champion, Washington, still believing in the Israelis' old reputation of infallible know-how in dealing with their Arab foes, unleashed its favorite proxy against those that it deemed to be Iran's proxies, namely Hamas and Hezbollah. What the Bush administration has overlooked, however, is that Israel's reputation had already been very much eroded by its blatant failure in controlling the 1967-occupied Palestinian territories, and even more so by its Saigon-like withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, after 18 years of occupation. Israel has already met its own Vietnam in Lebanon.

And like the Pentagon after Vietnam, Israel's war planners have shifted since Lebanon to a "post-heroic military policy," relying much more on their very much superior hardware than on their ground troops' fighting capability. When it invaded Lebanon in 1982, Israel was chiefly fighting the PLO guerillas: in Lebanon, these were anything but "fish in water" as they had managed to alienate the Lebanese population through arrogant and clumsy behavior. The Lebanese resistance that gathered momentum from 1982 onward, and in which Hezbollah came to play the major role, was a completely different story: this was the Israeli army's first encounter with a truly popular armed resistance with lines of supplies on a terrain adequate for guerilla warfare. Israel faced the same dilemma described above with regard to Iraq and, like the U.S. in Vietnam, it was compelled to swallow the bitter cup of a withdrawal that was tantamount to defeat.

Israel's belief in the invincibility of its superior weaponry - with a hubris that was

enhanced by the amateurship in military affairs of Olmert and Peretz, the present captains of its crew - led the Israelis to believe that they could force the Hezbollah into capitulation, or push the Lebanese to the brink of a new civil war, by taking the whole of Lebanon hostage, destroying the country's civilian infrastructure and pouring on its Shiite-populated areas a deluge of bombs. Israel deliberately flattened whole neighborhoods and villages on a pattern that resembles some of the bombings of WW2 - or a Fallujah on a much larger scale, and accordingly much more visible. Israel's new war on Lebanon displayed the murderous fury of an act of revenge against the only population that managed to oblige it to withdraw unconditionally from an occupied territory.

The criminal behavior of the Israeli armed forces in Lebanon, with regard to the international conventions defining what constitute war crimes, went beyond those that the U.S. perpetrated on a mass scale in its post-Vietnam military endeavors, whether in Iraq or in former Yugoslavia. In this, Israel's onslaught on Lebanon amounted to a peculiar instance of the so-called "extraordinary rendition" policy. It is well-known how Washington has handed over individuals it wants "interrogated" well beyond the limitation imposed by U.S. legislative constraints to those among its clients who face no hindrance in the dirty business of torture. Now Washington has entrusted to Israel the task of defeating Hezbollah, seen as a major piece in a regional counter-offensive against Iran, in the hope that Israel could do the dirty work and accomplish the task without incurring much trouble.

Shamelessly exploiting one more time the horrible memory of the Nazi judeocide - an exploitation which reached new peaks in indecency on the occasion of the ongoing war - Israel's leaders believed that they would thus be able to deflect any criticism from the Western powers a.k.a. "the international community." And although the resources for this exploitation are unmistakably depleting with every new threshold in brutality that Israel crosses, it is still effective indeed: any other state in the world that would have attacked a neighboring country, deliberately committing war crimes concentrated in time

in the way Israel is doing in Lebanon would have brought upon itself an outcry of a magnitude that bears no relation to the faint or timid reproaches made to Israel on the theme that it is overdoing it.

But for all that, Israel's brutal aggression was not able to succeed. On the contrary, it has already proved to be what Ze'ev Sternhell described somewhat euphemistically as Israel's "most unsuccessful war" [5] concluding with this bitter statement:

"It is frightening to think that those who decided to embark on the present war did not even dream of its outcome and its destructive consequences in almost every possible realm, of the political and psychological damage, the serious blow to the government's credibility, and yes - the killing of children in vain. The cynicism being demonstrated by government spokesmen, official and otherwise, including several military correspondents, in the face of the disaster suffered by the Lebanese, amazes even someone who has long since lost many of his youthful illusions."

Far from inducing civil war between the Lebanese, Israel's brutal aggression only succeeded so far in uniting them in a common resentment against its murderous brutality. Far from forcing Hezbollah into surrender, it turned the Shiite fundamentalist organization into the most prestigious foe Israel ever had since it defeated Egypt in 1967, transforming Hezbollah's chief Nasrallah into the most popular Arab hero since Nasser. Far from facilitating the efforts by Washington and its Arab clients to drive the wedge further between Sunnis and Shiites, it led many prominent mainstream Sunni preachers to proclaim open support to Hezbollah, including preachers from within the Saudi kingdom - the ultimate humiliation for the Saudi ruling family. The Iraqis unanimously denounced the Israeli aggression, while Washington's most formidable Iraqi foe and Tehran's ally, Moqtada al-Sadr, seized the opportunity to organize another huge demonstration matching the one he organized against the occupation on April 9, 2005.

At the time of writing, Washington is still striving to buy Israel some more time by imposing unacceptable conditions for a UN

Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire. And Israeli generals, faced with the total failure of their "post-heroic" bombing campaign, are engaged in a race against the clock in order to grasp, through an utterly destructive "post-heroic" ground offensive, as much as possible of southern Lebanese territory at the lowest possible cost in Israeli soldiers' lives.

But the most they can realistically expect now is to hand back this territory to an international force that would be accepted by Hezbollah. French President Jacques Chirac himself, though he's been Washington's close collaborator on the issue of Lebanon since 2004, has emphasized that Hezbollah's concurrence is a condition that must be met. No country on earth, to be sure, is willing to try to accomplish in Lebanon the mission that Israel itself is unable to fulfill. And the Shiite organization has already stated that it won't accept any force with a mandate going substantially beyond that of the already existing UNIFIL that Israel considers as a nuisance.

Whatever the final outcome of the ongoing war on Lebanon, one thing is already clear: instead of helping in raising the sinking ship of the U.S. Empire, the Israeli rescue boat has actually aggravated the shipwreck, and is currently being dragged down with it.

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Gilbert Achcar grew up in Lebanon and teaches political science at the University of Paris-VIII. His best-selling book The Clash of Barbarisms just came out in a second expanded edition and a book of his dialogues with Noam Chomsky on the Middle East, Perilous Power, is forthcoming.

NOTES

[1] Mike Allen and Romesh Ratnesar, "The End of Cowboy Diplomacy," Time, dated July 17, 2006.

[2] Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, 'Twilight of the Neocons," Washington Monthly, March 2004.

[3] Edward Luttwak, "A Post-Heroic Military Policy," Foreign Affairs, vol. 75, n° 4, July/August 1996.

[4] I have described this process in Perilous Power (see bio line below). An excerpt on Iraq 2006 will soon be posted on the Internet.

[5] Ze'ev Sternhell, "The Most Unsuccessful War," Haaretz, August 2, 2006.

Middle East

Israel's Dual Onslaught On Lebanon And Palestine

Gilbert Achcar

Israeli artillery...

This interview was conducted by Paola Mirenda on July 15, 2006, for the Italian daily Liberazione, the newspaper of the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC).

Q. *Since last Wednesday, the Israeli Army has been imposing a siege on Lebanon and bombarding the country as a result of the abduction of two of its soldiers and the killing of seven others by a Lebanese Hezbollah commando unit. Israel's reaction was predictable, even in its disproportion. What are the political and strategic reasons that can be seen behind this action by Hezbollah?*

Achcar: The explanations that Hezbollah has given for its action are many. The first reason invoked is to try to obtain the release of prisoners - there are several Lebanese believed to be held in Israeli custody, although only two are officially detained by Israel (in addition to close to 10,000 Palestinian prisoners) - as well as to act in solidarity with the struggle of Hamas in Palestine, which is animated by a similar inspiration to that of Hezbollah, and to react to the ongoing onslaught on Gaza. Of course, it was logical to expect this violent retaliation on Israel's part, in light of what it did to Palestine in reaction to the abduction of another soldier.

In this crisis, there are many dimensions involved: international observers have discussed the possible role of Syria and, above all, Iran in what is occurring, and what calculations there are regarding the regional balance of forces. Tehran, whose relation to Hezbollah is similar to that of Moscow to the communist parties at the time of the "international communist movement," has been engaged for some time in an anti-Israeli bidding game against rival Arab governments in order to win over Sunni Muslim opinion.

Iranian President Ahmadinejad's provocative statements since his election one year ago were part of this game, which fits in with Tehran's strategy facing USA, at a time when American pressure on the nuclear issue is in full escalation. But, whatever the case, it can be said that what Hezbollah did has prompted a test of strength that risks costing them a great deal, as it is costing the whole of Lebanon very much already.

Q. *A test of strength against Israel or within Lebanon?*

Achcar: The test of strength is primarily against Israel, because Israel tries through its actions, whether in Palestine or in Lebanon, to crush the resistance movements. The recent events have been seized as pretexts to crush both Hezbollah and Hamas, and the violence of the Israeli military onslaught is to be read in that context. Israel takes entire populations hostage; it has done so with the Palestinian population and is doing the same now with the Lebanese. It has bombed Beirut's airport and imposed a blockade on Lebanon: all that for an action claimed by one Lebanese group, not by the Lebanese state. In fact, Israel holds hostage an entire population in a disproportionate reaction that aims at pulling the rug from under the feet of its opponents and at pressuring local forces to act against them. But if this is indeed Israel's calculation, it could backfire, as it is possible that a military action of such a scope could lead to the exact opposite and radicalize the population more against Israel than against Hezbollah. The murderous brutality of Israel's reaction, the closure of the airport, the naval blockade, all are acts that could unite the population in a revolt against Israel.

I don't know for sure what Hezbollah's real political calculation has been, but they certainly expected a large-scale reaction on the part of Israel, which has already invaded Lebanon several times before. For this reason, it seems to me that their action entailed an important element of "adventurism," all the more that the risk they have taken involves the whole population. They have actually taken a very big risk in initiating an attack on Israel, knowing its huge military power and brutality, and the population could hold them responsible for a new war and a new invasion, the cost of which the Lebanese people will have to bear.

But having said that, it is necessary to stress that the principal responsibility for the deterioration of the whole situation falls on Israel. It has lately reached new peaks in its utterly revolting behavior, especially with regard to Gaza. After the abduction of the soldier by a Palestinian group, the Israeli army has killed dozens and dozens of Palestinian civilians. Israel can abduct and detain with impunity Palestinian civilians, but when some Palestinians kidnap one of its soldiers in order to use him for an exchange, it resorts to unrestricted violence, taking a whole population hostage, bombing the densely populated Gaza strip in the midst of general world indifference. This is the main source of destabilization in the region - this violent and arrogant behavior of Israel that is in full harmony with the equally arrogant and violent behavior the United States displayed in Iraq.

Q. *What is the Lebanese government's position facing Hezbollah's action? Israel has decided to consider this action as being the responsibility of the whole government despite the Lebanese Prime Minister's denial.*

Achcar: Israel's policy consists exactly in holding entire populations hostage, as I said. It has done so with the Palestinians; in the Lebanese case, it is even more evident because, while it is true that Hezbollah is part of the government, its participation is minimal and it stands actually in the opposition. The Lebanese government is dominated by a majority that is allied with the United States, and they can now take the full measure of the Bush administration's hypocrisy that claims to be very much concerned by the fate of the Lebanese people only when it is a matter of opposing Syria. To hold the present Lebanese government responsible for Hezbollah's action, even after

this government has officially taken its distance from that action, is a demonstration of Israel's diktat policy on the one hand, and on the other hand the indication of Israel's determination to compel the Lebanese to enter into a state of civil war, as it tries to do with the Palestinians. In each case, Israel wants to compel one part of the local society - Fatah in Palestine and the governmental majority in Lebanon - to crush Israel's main enemies, Hamas and Hezbollah, or else they be crushed themselves.

Q. *What relates the Hezbollah and Hamas movements?*

Achcar: They have similar ideologies and a radical opposition to Israel. Hamas are Sunni Muslims, while Hezbollah are Shiite Muslims, but both of them are allied to Syria and Iran. It is a sort of regional alliance against Israel. Hezbollah was born after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and Hamas at the time of the first Intifada in 1987-88. The fundamental reason for the existence of both is opposition to Israel, the national struggle against the occupier of their territories, the struggle against a common enemy identified as Israel, as well as the United States behind it.

The division between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq is due to domestic factors peculiar to the country, but is not otherwise important in the whole region. This division appeared also in Lebanon this last year, though in a much less virulent fashion, when the majority of the Sunni community, led by Hariri who is allied with the Saudis and the U.S., found itself in opposition to the majority of Shiites led by Hezbollah allied with Syria. But this division could hardly become an important factor in countries where the two communities, Shiites and Sunnis, are not both present, as they are in Iraq and Lebanon. In Palestine, there are hardly any Shiites.

The relation of solidarity that Hezbollah has with Hamas it did not have either with the PLO or

the Palestinian Authority when the latter was led by Arafat. Hezbollah never had any sympathy for Arafat and even less so for Mahmoud Abbas, in whom they don't recognize the same radical opposition to Israel that they see in Hamas, when they don't accuse them of betraying the Palestinian cause. The rise of Hamas's clout in Palestine has been perceived by Hezbollah and by Iran as a victory, and Iran was the first state to offer compensatory funding to the Palestinians when Western funds were cut from them.

Q. *How will the Lebanese population react to what is happening? Will Hezbollah get their solidarity or will it be held responsible for their suffering?*

Achcar: The popular base of Hezbollah is Shiite, of course (Shiites are the largest minority among Lebanon's communities, none of which constitutes a majority). But certainly many among the Sunni minority approve its action as a gesture of solidarity with Hamas and the Palestinians, whereas the brutality of Israel's reaction increases this solidarity. On the other hand, it is probable that the enmity to Hezbollah among major parts of the Lebanese minorities other than the Shiites - the Christian Maronites, the Sunnis, the Druzes, etc. - will be reinforced because they feel to have been put at risk by Hezbollah's unilateral choice and consider that they will be made to pay the cost of this choice. The risk, obviously, is that the sectarian divisions deepen within Lebanon and that this leads eventually to a new civil war. The decisive question is whether the Lebanese governmental majority will yield to the Israeli diktat at the cost of a new civil war, or decide that the priority is to oppose the Israeli aggression and preserve the country's unity. For the time being, this second option seems to be prevailing. One can only hope that it will remain so. The international protest against the dual Israeli onslaught can contribute strongly to the reinforcement of the option of common resistance.

Middle East

"Israel is holding a whole population hostage"

Gilbert Achcar

...Lebanese destruction

July 18, Gilbert Achcar talked to US Socialist Worker's Alan Maass about the causes and background of the Israeli assault on Lebanon.

The US media place the blame for Israel's attack on Hezbollah, for "starting" the violence? Is that how you view the situation?

Whatever one thinks about Hezbollah or the operation mounted by Hezbollah-and I do have my own reservations about its appropriateness with regard to its foreseeable consequences-this cannot by any logic justify what Israel is doing.

The killing of the seven Israeli soldiers and the kidnapping of two soldiers was an act of war, and Lebanon and Israel are two countries that are still at war.

Israel regularly encroaches on Lebanon's sovereignty: it has aggressed the country innumerable times, especially after 1967 (the first Israeli devastating attack on Beirut's airport took place in 1968); it invaded a small piece of Lebanese territory in 1967 (the Shebaa farms), a big chunk of southern Lebanon in 1978, half of Lebanon in 1982; it then occupied a big part of the country until 1985, its southern part until 2000, and it still holds

the stretch of Lebanese territory that it seized in 1967.

Since 2000, there has been an ongoing low-intensity war between Hezbollah and Israel: cross-border skirmishes, covert Israeli action in Lebanon, including assassination of Hezbollah leaders, etc.

But what Israel is carrying out now in Lebanon is massive retaliation against a whole population. It is holding a whole population and country hostage and trying to impose its conditions.

This brutality is most cowardly, because whatever military means Hezbollah-or the whole of the Lebanese state, for that matter-possess are dwarfed by the military power of the state of Israel.

This isn't some kind of an equal fight, despite the fact that Hezbollah is retaliating with some rockets. One of the world's mightiest military powers is committing a naked aggression against one of the weakest states in the Middle East, and murdering scores of people.

They have already killed over 200 people in less than one week, and the number keeps growing day after day. The overwhelming majority, more than 90 percent, of Israel's victims are uninvolved civilians. They are neither fighters, nor even militants; just ordinary civilians, families and a considerable number of children appallingly torn to pieces by Israeli bombs.

Israel is destroying the infrastructure of the country. It is also destroying the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of people. Lebanon is a country where the summer season is very important to thousands and thousands of people-the large proportion of the population that get seasonal jobs in the tourism sector and depend on these earnings for their living for the whole year. And now these people are being fired by the tens of thousands because everybody understands that there won't be any "summer season" in Lebanon.

If you take all this into consideration and compare it to whatever border operation Hezbollah executed, it is absolutely clear that this has become just a pretext-seized on by Israel, backed by the United States and other countries, to try to impose what they have been attempting to force since 2004.

That year, they had the UN Security Council adopt a resolution calling not only for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, but also for the disarmament of armed groups in the country-meaning, above all, Hezbollah, and secondarily, the Palestinians in their refugee camps.

The double standard of Western media presentations of the situation and the hypocrisy of Israel's statements are so glaring that they constitute by themselves a moral aggression-

for example, the capture of one soldier by the Palestinians becomes Israel's justification for a murderous and destructive assault on Gaza, while Israel holds close to 10,000 Palestinian prisoners in its jails, most of whom are civilians abducted by Israel in the territory that it occupies since 1967 in total violation of international law.

We know this double standard well. Noam Chomsky has made it one of his specialties for so many years to denounce the permanent double standards and hypocrisy in the imperial countries and in their media. We are now witnessing an appalling new case of that same double standard.

And the fact is that if this hypocrisy can go unnoticed for an average audience in Western countries, you can be sure that in the overwhelming majority of Third World countries-and, of course, in Muslim countries, and, even more so, in Arab countries-the double standard is conspicuously and outrageously obvious.

That's why people don't give any credit to the utterances of Western leaders-to the Bush administration's talk about democracy and other lies.

Instead, what we are seeing right now is that the hatred toward not only Israel but the United States, and all the other Western countries backing Israel and allying with the United States, is reaching heights which are far beyond what existed before September 11, 2001.

In other words, the United States and the state of Israel are preparing for the rest of the world, including their own populations, nightmarish events, compared to which 9/11, I'm afraid, will be only a foretaste.

People in the West, especially in the United States, have to become aware of the hypocrisy of their government, and of this total lack of justice and even humanitarian commiseration in dealing with the Arab populations of the Middle East.

They have to become aware of the fact that, for very good reason, the Arab and Muslim peoples are coming to perceive that they are considered as sub-human beings, and that their lives have no value in the eyes of Israel, the United States and their allies.

Therefore, they become receptive to the kind of discourse that comes from the likes of Osama bin Laden-that if our civilian lives have no value to them, then their civilian lives should have no value to us. So we are reaching a completely infernal situation because of the criminal reactionary policies of the U.S. administration and the Israeli government.

What are Israel's goals in carrying out this assault?

Strategically speaking, both Israel and the United States consider their main enemy in the Middle East to be not bin Laden or al-Qaeda-these are only minor nuisances in their eyes, if conveniently useful nuisances-but Iran.

There is what they call the Shiite axis or crescent, which has its source in Iran, and goes through the pro-Iranian Shiite forces in Iraq, through the Syrian government, which is allied to Iran, and reaches Hezbollah in Lebanon.

This is why they consider Hezbollah a very important enemy-because with their kind of conception of the world, they see everything through their obsession with what they consider to be their main enemy state. At the time of the Cold War, they used to see everything worldwide in terms of a confrontation with the former Soviet Union. Now, they see everything in the Middle East in terms of a confrontation with Iran.

Besides that, Israel has its own specific reasons for wanting to get rid of Hezbollah, as the organization that played the major role in forcing Israel to withdraw from Lebanon, in 2000. This is an organization that is permanently defying Israel by its very existence, its very presence.

Ever since Israel left Lebanon, there's been a determination to take revenge on Hezbollah, and we're now witnessing Israel in the midst of carrying this out, using the pretext of the border clashes.

The US government denounces Hezbollah as a band of terrorists. What is the actual role that it plays in Lebanon?

Throughout the years, Lebanese politics have had a communal dynamic, so you have some kind of identification of communities with this or that political organization. Hezbollah managed to become the main force in the Shiite community, which is the largest minority in Lebanon, where no religious community constitutes a majority.

Hezbollah came to play this role for a variety of reasons. The major one is the role that Hezbollah played in liberating southern Lebanon, where the Shiite community is concentrated, from the Israeli invasion.

But there are other factors. Generally speaking, the rise of Hezbollah's influence fits into a framework that we've seen at the regional level for the last 30 years, where the failure of the left and the bankruptcy of

nationalist leaderships create a void in the leadership of the mass movement that has been filled by organizations of an Islamic fundamentalist character.

This was very much propelled by the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The shock wave of the revolution was tremendous in the area-especially, of course, among the Shiites, since Iran is a Shiite country.

The birth of Hezbollah was the result of the conjunction of this shock wave with the conditions created by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. It was born after the invasion, and its rise was associated with its success in the fight against the occupation.

Another factor is the way that Hezbollah managed to build its social base. Hezbollah was very much backed by Iran from its founding. Tehran trains and funds Hezbollah, and the organization has made clever use of the funds that it gets. It organizes several kinds of social services and a social network, which helps huge numbers of Shiite families.

It also managed to translate the clout built through the resistance in political terms, when it entered the elections. Hezbollah has an important fraction in the Lebanese parliament and there are even Hezbollah ministers in the Lebanese government.

So it's not a "terrorist" organization, as Washington's and Israel's terrorist governments call it. It is a mass party fully involved in the legal political life in Lebanon.

No one in Lebanon, except for a tiny minority of ultra reactionaries, considers what Hezbollah does in confronting Israel to be "terrorism." The Lebanese government itself considers it as national resistance.

Can you talk about how Israel's assault on Lebanon is connected to the intensified war on Palestinians since Hamas won control of the Palestinian Authority?

There are several connections. To be sure, there are connections of a kind that fit into Washington's conspiracy theory.

Hamas and Hezbollah are both organizations in the same regional alliance. Part of Hamas's leadership live in exile in Syria, and it has very good relations with Iran. Tehran backs Hamas: when the new Palestinian government was elected, and there was a boycott organized by the Western powers and Israel, Iran was the first country to pledge support for the Palestinians to compensate for that boycott.

The other connection is the result of how Israel's onslaught on Gaza has been so traumatizing for the whole region.

Whatever the original motivation for Hezbollah's operation that captured the Israelis-I'm saying this, because Hezbollah's chief Hassan Nasrallah said that it had been months in the planning-when it took place, it was seen across the whole Middle East as a legitimate and necessary gesture of solidarity with the people of Gaza who are being crushed by Israel. That's why there was a lot of sympathy for it.

Like in Lebanon now, Israel used the pretext of the abduction of one of its soldiers in Gaza to hold the whole population hostage and begin a frenzy of destruction and murder that falls into the canons of state mass terrorism of the worst sort known in history.

How does the war on Lebanon fit with the other wars that the U.S. and Israel are carrying out in the Middle East?

For Israel and the U.S., the main enemy, as I said, is the whole alliance, with Iran as the most central part of the alliance. The main target is the Iranian regime, which they want to get rid of, in one way or another.

The Syrian regime is more of a secondary enemy. I don't believe that there is a real drive toward overthrowing that regime. Israeli officials explain that they don't wish to see a new Iraq unfolding at their border, because they know that if the Syrian regime were to collapse, that's what you would get: a chaotic situation that could very much threaten the security of Israel.

Of course, they would like to get the Syrian government to break with Iran. And they want to compel Tehran, too, to abide by their rules. But because they don't have any confidence in the Iranian regime, they wish that they could overthrow it in one way or another. That's their basic goal: what they call in Washingtonese "regime change."

With the prevailing replica of the Cold War imperialist mentality, Hezbollah is presented as a mere agency of Iran. Now, to be sure, it's no secret to anyone that Hezbollah is closely linked to both Damascus and Tehran. And Hezbollah would have been foolish to undertake its July 12 attack without some degree of coordination with its backers.

So what? Unlike those of the Afghan mujahadeen, when they were fighting against the Soviet occupation of their country, the weapons Hezbollah is using are, of course, not U.S.-made or U.S.-provided!

It is absolutely normal for forces confronted with much more powerful enemies to try to find external sources of support. Hezbollah has to get the means from somewhere to be able to resist.

Or does Washington believe that it is entitled to intervene wherever it wants by the sole right of its "manifest destiny"-for instance, backing today the so-called People's Mujahedin of Iran in its cross-border attacks against Iran from U.S.-occupied Iraq, after having backed yesterday the far more significant contras against Nicaragua's government-while Iran has no right to support its correligionists in Lebanon or Palestine. This chutzpah is only exceeded by U.S. complaints against Iranian interference in Iraq, a country under U.S. occupation!

The fact that Hezbollah has links to Syria and Iran doesn't mean in the least that it is not waging a legitimate national resistance struggle-in the same way that the fact that the Vietnamese were backed by this or that Communist country didn't mean in the least that they were not fighting for the liberation of their country.

Lebanon

Changing the Rules of the Game? Let it Be!

A Statement

Revolutionary Communist Group - Lebanon

By their attempt to kill a large number of unarmed civilians, and to destroy infrastructure that has been previously destroyed many times, the current Zionist government, in response to "The sincere promise" operation that the fighters of Hezbollah lately performed, aims at changing the rules of the game, making the Lebanese people pay a very high and recurring price.

To achieve this, the Zionist government doesn't only count on its sweeping military power, but also on official Arab and international collusion, which is extremely disgraceful and flagrant. This collusion is performed by different governments in Europe and America, particularly, but also the Arab governments, primarily the Saudi, which held the Islamic resistance "fully responsible" for "uncalculated adventures" and that "it should face, alone, the consequences of the conflict it created"!! This disgraceful position was later taken also by the Egyptian president Mubarak and the Jordanian King Abdullah the Second in a joint statement.

The current situation is open to numerous possibilities, and it requires taking into consideration the following visions, conclusions and tendencies:

First: "The sincere promise" did not come like lightning in a clear sky. Israel has been making daily aggressions, by sea and air, against Lebanese sovereignty; there are still many Lebanese detainees in Israeli prisons; tens of martyrs' bodies are not returned to their parents. The Israeli army continues bombing the Gaza strip, killing Palestinian civilians and assassinating activists and militants in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, on the pretext of retrieving the soldier Jelaad Shalit who was previously kidnapped by Palestinian organizations on the borders of the strip, for the purpose of trading him for detainees in the Israeli prisons.

The latest operation, during which the fighters of Hezbollah succeeded in kidnapping two Israeli soldiers, was faced with a disgraceful official Arab position (the same previously faced by the Palestinian operation). It represents, in fact, (almost) the only shining solidarity movement with the struggle of the Palestinian people and for the easing of its pains and miseries. At the same time it expresses loyalty to the cause of the Lebanese detainees and their Palestinian and Arab comrades in the Zionist prisons.

Second: Facing the respect for human dignity with which this operation, which only targeted soldiers, was characterized, we cannot but notice the mean spirit that we hear from the local right wing, tied to world Imperialism, which is very cautious to avoid any form of confrontation with Israel, looking only to its material interests, and to the billions of dollars that were expected within the tourism sector during this summer. It is a mean spirit that was expressed in statements by many of the figures of what is called the 14 March coalition, and specifically by the Prime Minister Fuad Saniora and his government. These statements and speeches not only distanced themselves from any solidarity with the operation, but also seemed to condemn it and its participants, calling for the completion of the Lebanese army's control of all Lebanese areas, with what that implies concerning the disarmament of the resistance, putting an end to its role in confronting the occupation, and implementing the remaining items of Resolution 1559. This at a time when the country needs the utmost solidarity and unity in the face of the destructive war that Israel is launching against the Lebanese people. It is the same story being repeated again and again, the story of the Trojan horse, ready for use at the right moment to complete the reversal of the political, social and economic balances in its favour and the favour of its masters outside the country.

To answer all this, requires continuous work to gather the largest political and popular front - in solidarity with the heroic act that the fighters of the resistance accomplished; not submitting to the local and Arab and international pressures; refusing to hand over the two kidnapped soldiers except under the conditions which the secretary general of Hezbollah announced. It is essential to defeat the current Israel war aims and open the road to what the military analyst in Israeli Haaretz newspaper Zeif Shev expected, "if Israel loses this confrontation"... "its strategic and military stance in the region will change, and its deterrence will be shaken against the guerrilla fighting and the rocket weaponry".

Third: The current and almost absolute capability of Israel to continue its destruction of vital installations and infrastructure, and in committing wide massacres, is specifically due, to the absence of necessary artillery against its military air force. This requires the attempt, starting now, and in any possible ways, to provide this type of weapons, especially through friendly forces in the world.

Fourth: This current battle won't be the only one which our peoples will find themselves obliged to fight against the Israeli aggression, behind which are the allies of Israel in the Imperialist west. This calls, above all, for the surpassing of the current confessional face of the resistance, towards the retrieval of its general national face, and which is accomplished through the entrance of the broadest scope of national and progressive forces once again into the resistance, in an atmosphere of deep collaboration and agreement with the Islamic resistance.

Fifth: Concerning the complaint to the United Nations, whatever the reality of the balance of powers inside the security council is, and the almost absolute American hegemony inside it, Lebanon has to insist on the immediate and unconditional halt of the Israeli aggression, on the one hand, and for full compensation by Israel for the human and material losses that this aggression caused, on the other hand.

Sixth: Furthermore, there is an utmost need to respond to the collaborating and weak stand of the official Arab regimes, and specially to the Saudi stand which is flagrant in its hostility towards the resistance, and in its actual collaboration with the Israeli aggression, by calling for the Arab masses, in all their nations, to hit the streets, and express their condemnation and anger against their governments' positions, and in sincere solidarity with the resistance of the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples against the Zionist occupation and aggression.

Middle East

Israel's new Lebanon war

Statement by Socialist Resistance (England and Wales)

Piers Mostyn

They must develop their activity to force the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Mauritanian governments to withdraw their recognition of Israel and completely cut their relationships with it, and to force the other governments which have various kinds of ties and agreements and normalization acts with Israel, to put a final end to them.

The inaction of the Arab regimes must not excuse the Syrian regime, whose officials only gave verbal meaningless support so far, without giving any direct actual support to the Lebanese people in its current fierce confrontation.

Seventh: The struggle against Israel is an essential part of the struggle against all the forces of oppression and hegemony and exploitation. Starting from this understanding, requires of the free people of the world and forces opposing capitalist globalization and war to build serious and active solidarity with the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples, and against Israel and the current war that the generals of Tel Aviv are launching. It is a fight which can begin to deepen the bloody dilemma that the occupying and aggressive state of Israel faces, and to initiate a start to its ending, in as much as a global and genuinely international front is formed to show solidarity with the two peoples and their struggle for liberation, sovereignty and just peace. In this context, the rules of the game might really change, but this time not for the interest of Israel!

15-07-2006

The Revolutionary Communist Group are sympathisers with the Fourth International in Lebanon.

The present war in Lebanon began with the kidnapping of two and killing of three Israeli soldiers by Hizbollah. The Israeli Defence Force responded with a massive campaign of air strikes across Lebanon. Hizbollah in turn responded by firing missiles into Israel. On the simple basis of this chronology, IDF actions cannot be explained as "self defence" against the Hizbollah missile attacks. In any event they were grossly disproportionate, deliberately targeting densely populated civilian areas and basic infrastructure. Of the hundreds of civilians to have died over three weeks, 20 are Lebanese for every one Israeli.

In the first instance therefore, this is a war of criminal aggression by the Israeli state - designed to destabilise Lebanon and the region and assert the Zionist state's power by bullying weak and compliant states into submission. The real Israeli agenda was set out early on by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, to wage war against the "axis of evil that stretches from Teheran to Damascus."

Blame for the war cannot be ascribed to Hizbollah's initial action - however risky any military engagement with the IDF may be. To state otherwise is to accept that the people of Lebanon, Palestine and elsewhere should just sit on their hands.

It was a very limited response to a long history of IDF kidnapping of Lebanese citizens, an illegal occupation of the Shab'aa Farms area of the country and repeated bombings and other aggressive cross border incursions. And as even staunch supporters of the Israeli state have pointed out the IDF onslaught made no sense militarily if the primary aim was releasing prisoners or stopping Hizbollah missiles. It is therefore logical to assume that the origins of this onslaught are independent. Experienced observers, like veteran Israeli oppositionist Uri Avnery believe it was years in the planning and only awaited a pretext. In any event, once Hizbollah called for an immediate unconditional ceasefire, the Israeli state (in refusing to agree) was entirely responsible for any continued violence.

The Hizbollah kidnapping came after two weeks of an Israeli onslaught on Gaza - that still continues at full strength - slaughtering civilians, kidnapping politicians and others and destroying basic infrastructure. This in turn followed months of sanctions against the democratically elected Hamas-led Palestinian Administration designed to smash it. The European Union and the USA both supported the blockade. Pro-western regimes across the Arab world were silent. UN relief organisations and other NGOs all declared a major humanitarian crisis. Non-EU Switzerland was the sole western state voicing protest. Hizbollah's action was undoubtedly a legitimate act of solidarity against this general trend - interpreted and welcome as such on the street in Gaza and across the Middle East.

Hizbollah is not a "terrorist" organisation, whatever that is. It is a mass movement with dozens of MPs and ministers in the national government. This government is a coalition that straddles all sections of Lebanese society - meaning that the party is accepted as a legitimate democratic entity by nearly all strands of that society, whatever the disagreements over politics or religion. It is a resistance movement that owes it's origins to the 1982 Israeli invasion of the country (which involved the notorious Sabra and Shatilla refugee camp massacres organised by Olmert's predecessor as PM and political mentor, Ariel Sharon) and 18 years of occupation. Its legitimacy stems from its role in resisting this occupation and finally driving Israel out - in the context of the unwillingness or inability of other forces in Lebanon or the Arab world to take action.

As socialists in favour of secularism in politics, we cannot give political support to Hizbollah given its religious character. Nonetheless, like Hamas it is strongly rooted in and serves a community that is religious. Like Hamas it is often wrongly characterised as "fundamentalist" when it has nothing in common with Taliban-style politics. It has, by its actions, shown willing to work with other forces for the unity of a multi-confessional Lebanon.

Whilst reserving the right to criticise its politics and tactics, we nonetheless call for

socialists, anti-imperialists and anti-war activists to show unconditional solidarity with its resistance to Israel's murderous attack and other attempts to interfere with the right of the Lebanese people to free self-determination.

Given the Israeli state's stance in claiming to "root out Hizbollah terrorism", it is ironic that the Prime Minister of Lebanon, which Israel sees as an ally, himself described Hizbollah as a "resistance movement" as the bombs rained down on Beirut. And in back door diplomatic negotiations by the USA and European powers, Hizbollah has entrusted the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, a member of the Shia-based Amal party to speak on their behalf. Therefore attempts "root out" Hizbollah threaten to pull down with it the political as well as economic and social infrastructure.

It seems that Israeli strategists may have been fooled by Western propaganda about last year's "Cedar Revolution" (in which mass mobilisations following the murder of Rafik Harriri and the fingering of the Syrian government for being involved led to Syria being driven out) and the Lebanese elections that followed. It may be that Olmert sought to drive a sectarian wedge into Lebanese society to get other communities to turn on Hizbollah - similar to Israel's utilisation of the Falange and Christian right forces during the 1970s civil war and the 18 year occupation.

If so, this seems to have been a massive miscalculation. There

have been no mass rallies denouncing Hizbollah despite the tremendous devastation and loss of life across the country. Israel has failed to shift the question of "Hizbollah disarmament" from its previous position within the politics of Lebanon - one to be resolved internally, by agreement of all parties, if at all.

Another interpretation is that this was no Israeli miscalculation and it was a frustration at Hizbollah's integration into the country's body politic that fed a desire to smash it - this was an exercise in attempted regime change. This would explain the targeting of the Lebanese army and even one or two Christian communities - almost as though to teach them a lesson. Certainly once it was apparent that air strikes were not sufficient, the military invasion was underway the IDF took on the job for itself.

In this context the deliberate targeting of an unarmed UN outpost and Red Cross ambulances - despite the risk of increasing international isolation - may have been calculated as necessary to remove any independent observers from the scene before the real slaughter. A not dissimilar tactic to the deliberate targeting of hospitals and doctors during ferocious US assaults on Fallujah and other cities in Iraq - in order to minimise independent reports of atrocities.

These considerations may also explain the reluctance of Israel and it's backers to embrace the idea of a new international force

in southern Lebanon - fearing that it may be an inadequate tool for the desired forcible destruction of Hizbollah.

Which is not to say that any international intervention into Lebanon - whether under the guise or the UN, NATO or other umbrella - should be supported. On the contrary it should be opposed. History, in Lebanon and elsewhere, has shown that such an intervention, whatever it's terms would inevitably be for the purpose of imposing an agenda dominated by the major imperialist powers - the same forces that control the security council and have set the pace in the so-called "peace process" in Israel/Palestine.

Whatever the Israeli state's calculation, the apparent political and military failure was underlined by a sudden U-turn in announcing a temporary ceasefire, only 48 hours after dismissing the possibility, in response to global outrage at the murderous attack on the village of Qana leaving over 60 civilians dead. This despite Hizbollah having, that day, launched it's highest daily number of missiles, almost three weeks after the start of war.

If clarity were needed, Lebanon's Prime Minister Fouad Siniora told Condoleeza Rice she was not welcome to return to Beirut until the US changed its stance - an unheard of statement from the leader of a small, impoverished pro-western government. As though to rub in the apparent collapse of Israeli/US/British military objectives, Siniora went on to

thank Hizbollah for its "sacrifices" in defence of Lebanon's sovereignty. The subsequent climbdown over a ceasefire is a humiliation for the mammoth Washington-financed and organised war machine - made worse by a context of five years of failed war aims in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The USA and Britain have been steadfast in providing unconditional and uncritical support for Israel. This support for the deliberate mass murder of civilians has been transparently obvious to the whole world despite the paper-thin attempt to hide it behind the diplomatic nicety of "opposing an immediate ceasefire" or "the necessity of laying out the basis for a lasting peace".

US/British perspectives have been so indistinguishable to Olmert's that they have used almost exactly the same words. On the 18th July Blair explained the war aims in terms of "an arc of extremism right across that region, that wants to disrupt the process towards democracy and freedom, whether it's in Iraq or in Lebanon or down in the Palestinian territory, that arc of extremism is being supported by countries like Iran and Syria".

The next day he said, "We need to recognise the fundamental nature of the struggle in the region which has far reaching consequences far beyond our own region and even in countries like our own. All over the Middle East there are those who want to modernise their nations who believe as we do in democracy and liberty and

tolerance. But ranged against them are extremists who believe the opposite who believe in fundamentalist states and war not against Israeli actions, but against its existence. In virtually every country of the region including on the streets of Baghdad such a struggle is being played out". Who can doubt that the Israeli state, as it always has done, is acting as regional proxy for imperialism?

Imperialist war aims are to continue by other means what has been so disastrously impossible in other parts of the Middle East. The debacle in Iraq and Afghanistan and anxiety over the risks of any military attack on Iran have destabilised the Bush/Blair goal of re-organising the region around an imperialist military-economic game plan. The new "domino theory" of "democratic revolutions" installing a series of compliant pro-western governments on the model of Jordan and Egypt, across the region has been thrown off course in Iraq. Elections in Palestine, Egypt and even Lebanon have given democratic legitimacy to precisely those forces the war was designed to eradicate.

The increasing focus for this imperialist anxiety is Iranian influence in Iraq, Lebanon and elsewhere. The Lebanon onslaught thus appears to be conceived as a new route to fulfilling these aims - hitting what had been perceived as a soft spot - a "small" guerrilla organisation in a mixed country historically aligned to the West.

But things haven't gone to plan. There have been protests across the middle East. Pro-Western dictatorial regimes like Saudi Arabia, that have sat on their hands or given a tacit nod to this aggression, are openly concerned about destabilisation.

Israeli public support for the war has largely remained rock solid. There have been no mass protests. But the small protests have a capacity to grow, as the lies about the purpose and conduct of the war become obvious and the military, human, financial and diplomatic costs become apparent. Support for those small forces of opposition within Israeli society is a crucial element to solidarity within the imperialist states.

Another key task in Britain is to target British complicity. Public opinion has quickly understood the true picture, opposing the government's craven stance by a clear majority. Unlike the Iraq war there is no fig leaf of overthrowing a brutal dictator or removing WMDs. Here emperor Blair, from the start, had no clothes. His usual moral claim of "humanitarian interventionism" was immediately revealed as it's opposite - moral bankruptcy and collusion with war crimes. Already he is paying a price with deep splits at the highest level of his government among the most senior and loyal cabinet ministers - one of whom, Straw, has broken the basic principle of British parliamentary politics - collective cabinet responsibility.

Of course Straw and others deserve absolutely no credit for this stance, having

enthusiastically fought for and implemented five years worth of war mongering across the Middle East and a "war on terror" against the muslim community at home. Similarly when supine Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett woke from her slumbers long enough to protest at US planes sending bombs to Israel stopping over in Prestwich, Glasgow. These splits and vacilliations simply go to show quite how weak Blair is and how much pressure the government is under. He should go now.

During the furore over the recent raid in Forest Gate, East London and the anniversary of the murder of Jean Charles de Menezes, Blair's line was consistently that these steps will continue to be necessary to "protect" British citizens against terrorism. Not only will the current British state stance outrage the Muslim community, but it once again demonstrates that the imperialist state is the cause and driving force behind instability and danger.

We face a highly volatile situation. If Israel and the imperialists succeed in their aims of smashing Hizbollah and re-organising Lebanon this would be a strategic victory in the strategy across the region following which there will be further aggression against Iran and any other less than compliant state.

However if this war does not succeed and, as current events possibly indicate - it radicalises opposition to Zionism and imperialism across Lebanese society and a host of other Arab states against Israel and its backers - it could become a small but significant step towards shifting the balance of political forces against imperialism.

Solidarity action continues to be urgently and visibly needed.

Piers Mostyn is a supporter of Socialist Resistance, a socialist newspaper produced by British supporters of the Fourth International in conjuction with other marxists.

Middle East

The future of Israel is at stake

Michel Warschawski

"We must reduce to dust the villages of the south [. . .] I don't understand why there is still electricity there."

With these words, Israeli Minister of Justice and former Labor Party leader, Haim Ramon, summarized his suggestions for the continuation of the military offensive in Lebanon, following the failure of the invasion of Bint Jbail. As for the Israeli military high command, supported in the cabinet by Labor minister Benjamin Ben Eliezer, the solution is to occupy a portion of South Lebanon after destroying all the villages. According to this plan, Israel will "ask" the local population to leave prior to the destruction of the villages by way of several dozens of SMS messages. Those who would decide to stay, or, more simply, don't receive the "humanitarian" SMS call, would be considered terrorists.

Horrible? Indeed, but not unexpected. The Israeli war in Lebanon is the paradigm of war in the 21st century - wars of world re-colonization and the subjugation of the peoples of the earth to Empire.

In these wars, the lives of civilians are not only of very limited value - as in all wars - but considered as a legitimate target, actively or passively guilty of supporting terrorism: a terrorism which is, in fact, part of their very culture. In ten years, we witnessed a gradual evolution of the dominant discourse: from terrorist groups, to terrorist states, to terrorist peoples. The ultimate logic of the global war is full ethnicization of the conflicts, in which one is not fighting a policy, a government, or specific targets, but a "threat" identified with a community. Fear is the starting point of the new era, hatred is its finality. This is the reason why the neo-cons of the US administration are speaking of a non-ending war.

Using the pretext of the capturing of two Israeli soldiers, the Israeli government has decided to open a new front in the global, non-ending, preemptive war of re-colonization. They are ready to send their soldiers to open the way for the "new democracy in the Middle East" and to sacrifice its own population as collateral victims of this new kind of ethnic war. This is clearly expressed in an expensive advertisement published by the Israeli neo-cons on the front page of Ha'aretz:

Israel is at the forefront of the war against world Jihad. We have two options: either to strengthen the fanatics, through withdrawal and separation, through unilateral retreat, which will make of Israel the scene of the main struggle between fanatical Islam and the enlightened world, or to strengthen the moderates [. . .] and to transform Israel into the world center of justice and interfaith [sic] understanding. In the Middle East there are no short-cuts.

At the end of the advertisement, a short end note: "Remember: distorted philosophical sensitivity [sic] to human lives will make us pay the real price of the lives of many, and the blood of our sons." [1]

While more and more voices among the Israeli public are challenging, if not the legitimacy, at least the scope of the present military operation, the US administration is demanding that Israel not surrender to the pressures of those who are working for a cease-fire:

US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice is the leading figure of the strategy aimed at changing the situation in Lebanon, and not PM Olmert or Defense Minister Peretz. She is the one who has succeeded, until now, in standing against international pressures in favor of a cease fire. [. . .] In order to be successful, she needs military cards, which, unfortunately, Israel has not yet been able to deliver. Except the punishment by fire of Hezbollah and Lebanon [sic], the military Israeli cards have been limited, until today, to the conquest of two Lebanese villages near the border. If Israel doesn't improve its military cards in the fighting, we will feel the results in the political solution." [2]

In these words, senior political and military analyst Ze'ev Schiff summarizes the nature of the US secretary of state's visit to Jerusalem this weekend.

Sooner or later, however, the US administration will have to accept a political solution, based more or less on what was recently outlined in Rome. That is, until the next round in this non-ending preemptive war, in which Israel will continue playing its role as the armed vanguard of the so-called civilized world.

What the Israeli public fails to understand is the dramatic implications that their government's policy has on the state's very existence in the heart of the Arab and Muslim worlds. By its unlimited brutality and its civilizational rhetoric and strategy, the State of Israel is demonstrating to the peoples of the region that it is, and wants to remain, a foreign and hostile body in the Middle East: no more than an armed extension of the United States of America and its anti-Muslim crusade of the 21st century.

Everyone knows the fate of the Crusaders, ten centuries ago.

The hatred generated by the bombardment of Beirut - the destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure, the hundreds of civilian deaths, the hundreds of thousands of refugees, the scorched earth policy in the south - is immense throughout the Muslim world. It may even rapidly contaminate the Muslim communities in the northern countries. Moreover, unlike in previous, apparently similar crises such as the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, this hatred is developing on the fertile ground of the global war of civilizational discourse and an ethnicization of the conflict. Consequently, it will be extremely difficult to eradicate this anger after the clouds of battle dissipate and the dead are buried.

Olmert, Peretz, and Halutz are the most dangerous and irresponsible leaders Israel has ever had, playing with a fire which may burn away our very national existence in the Middle East.

On the weak shoulders of the small Israeli anti-war movement stand not only the fate of the present Israeli citizenry and the moral decency of our society, but the very future of our children in this part of the world.

"We refuse to be enemies!" is one of the slogans of our demonstrations. Never before has such a slogan been so important, so urgent, and so existential.

Michel Warschawski is a journalist and writer and a founder of the Alternative Information Center (AIC) in Israel. His books include On the Border (South End Press) and Towards an Open Tomb - the Crisis of Israeli Society (Monthly Review Press).

NOTES

[1] Ha'aretz, 30 July 2006

[2] Ha'aretz, 30 July 2006

Middle East

Twin Battles

Interview by Andrew Kennedy

Gilbert Achcar

AK. *It seems clear that Israel was just waiting for a pretext to launch its action, and Hizbollah provided it. Is that your view?*

GA. Israel's goal is indeed clearer than Hizbollah's was when they mounted the July 12 operation. It seems that the operation had been prepared by Hizbollah for several months, as Hassan Nasrallah said, and they regarded it chiefly as a way of obtaining the release of Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails through an exchange. It was not meant originally as a reaction to the events in Gaza-though it was perceived by the Arab public opinion as a gesture of solidarity with the Palestinian population. At any rate, Hizbollah was certainly not expecting an Israeli reaction on this scale.

Israel's goal is very clear and was stated from the beginning. The July 12 operation was seized upon as a pretext to launch an offensive that had also very obviously been in preparation for a long time. The goal, of course, was to obtain Hizbollah's destruction: what the Israeli army was not able to achieve during its occupation of Lebanon, it now wanted to obtain by forcing the Lebanese to do it and pushing the country to the brink of civil war.

The Israeli government rejected the idea of an international contingent at first, insisting that only the Lebanese Army should go south, thus indicating that it wanted the Lebanese to disarm Hizbollah. The Israeli strategy was on the one hand to deal Hizbollah direct blows and on the other hand to take the whole Lebanese population hostage in order to obtain what it wanted from the Lebanese government. In light of Israel's military failure to deal Hizbollah a major blow and its political failure so far to split the Lebanese population, they have settled for a revised objective whereby European Nato forces would be deployed in south Lebanon-with or without a UN fig leaf.

Who are the main actors here? Is this a proxy war by the US? How far does this tie in with Israel's own interests and aims?

The coincidence of the objectives of the governments of Israel and the US has never historically been so transparent as it has been since 2001, when George W. Bush came to power in the US followed by Sharon in Israel. The degree of openness of their collusion is unprecedented. Never has the US so blatantly and openly endorsed an Israeli aggression. The Israeli army is doing the military work while the US is doing the diplomatic work, blocking ceasefire resolutions and buying Israel the time needed to fulfil its military objectives, while supplying it with the needed weaponry.

The US conditions for a ceasefire are identical to those defined by the Israelis and concerted with them. As Washington puts it, this is part of the Bush administration's 'war on terror': Israel's aggression fits with the US-led imperialist war drive launched since 9/11 in this part of the world where two-thirds of world oil resources lie beneath the ground.

On the other side of the fence, what the US-Israel alliance is fighting through Hizbollah is Iran or the Iran-led alliance in the area, including Shiite forces in Iraq, the Syrian regime and the appeal of this alliance to Sunni fundamentalists like Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which supported Hizbollah in the recent crisis.

So there are two conflicts intertwined in the present war-the direct one consisting of Israel's aggression against Hizbollah and Lebanon, and the indirect one consisting of the US campaign against Iran. The UN Security Council has just adopted a US-sponsored resolution on the issue of Iran's nuclear program-quite impudently, given that the same Council has not yet called for the cessation of Israel's mass slaughter in Lebanon.

What role does France play in all this?

The French position has evolved. In 2004 Jacques Chirac offered the US a common front at the UN against Syrian forces in Lebanon. Their basic interests converged, contrary to what was the case with regard to Iraq. In this case, the French are mainly interested in Saudi money. Just a few days ago, they signed a deal for a big sale of weapons to the Saudi kingdom. Chirac's friendship with Hariri, father and son, fits very well within this framework-as everyone knows, the Hariri clan is closely linked to the Saudis.

So when Hariri, and the Saudis behind him, went into dispute with Syria, France offered Washington its help in sponsoring UN resolution 1559, which called for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon as well as the disarming of non-government armed groups in the country, meaning Hizbollah and the Palestinian refugee camps. Since 2004 France has thus worked in close alliance with the US on the issue of Lebanon.

But the latest offensive has caused cracks in the alliance. The Saudis denounced Hizbollah at first, but as the Israeli aggression became more obviously brutal and murderous and impacted on Arab public opinion, the Saudis, the Egyptians, the Jordanians, all Washington's Arab clients have had to shift their stance and tell Washington: Your Israeli friends are going to spoil the whole thing, we are reaching a boiling point which is quite dangerous, it is time to stop. The crisis is getting increasingly perilous for the whole stability of pro-US regimes-for example in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood is capitalising on the situation.

Chirac has taken the middle ground since then-pleasing the Saudis more than Bush in calling for an immediate ceasefire and an international troop presence based on a political agreement.

In your July 15 interview with Liberazione you said that Israeli military action could radicalise the Lebanese population more against Israel than against Hizbollah. Is that happening?

It is happening indeed and beyond my expectations. The very brutality of the Israeli aggression is actually counterproductive for Israeli goals-and is unifying Lebanon in resisting the Israeli offensive. Israel's onslaught has been so murderous, so indiscriminate, that the great majority of the Lebanese have drawn the same conclusions: firstly, that the Israeli offensive was prepared long ago so that the whole discussion of the July 12 operation is somewhat irrelevant, as it was clearly used as a pretext; secondly, that Israel is not targeting Hizbollah alone and not even the Shiites only, but the whole population.

The whole country is being held hostage. The whole economy is destroyed. True, the offensive has mostly killed Lebanese Shiites-

probably over 1000 already if one includes those still under the rubble-but in terms of lives affected, impoverished, and ruined, a huge number of Lebanese are affected, and Israel is clearly perceived as the enemy of the Lebanese people as a whole.

At a more general regional level, the hatred for Israel and the US is reaching new peaks. All this will undoubtedly fuel the growth of terrorist organisations of the Al Qaeda type. I'm afraid that what we have seen up to now-9/11, 7/7 and Madrid-is but a foretaste of horrors to come that will affect the civilian populations in the West.

Has the Lebanese Left been able to play much of a role in giving political shape to this national wave of anger and defiance? Or are they marginalized?

The Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) is a shadow of its former self, of what it used to be in the 70s and 80s. It was one of the most important Communist Parties in the Arab world, relative to the size of the country, and one of the major actors in the civil war of 1975-1990. The LCP was the first to launch attacks against the Israeli occupation in 1982, after the invasion settled down, in the name of the 'national resistance'.

Only later were the 'Islamic resistance' and Hizbollah launched. Hizbollah dealt with the LCP as a rival since the latter's main social base was among Shiites and in southern Lebanon, that is among Hisbollah's target constituency. Hizbollah built itself partially through fighting the LCP over this constituency and managed to prevail. In that, it was greatly helped by Iranian backing and by the fact that it played on the dominant ideological trend in the region that was in favour of Islamic fundamentalism since the 1970s, whereas the LCP lacked political boldness and was deeply affected by the unfolding crisis of the Soviet Union.

In the 1990s the LCP itself went into deep crisis, splitting and fragmenting. What remains is not completely invisible, but it is no longer in a position to play an important role-unfortunately, as it is the major left-wing grouping in the country. Hence, Lebanon is no exception to the general rule in the area: the historical failure of nationalist forces and the failure of the Left have created a vacuum that has been filled by Islamic fundamentalists.

Some on the British Left would probably like to entertain the idea that Hizbollah is

capable of evolving leftwards. Is that a fantasy?

Basically, yes. Even a plebeian group like Muqtada al Sadr's organisation in Iraq is more socially threatening to the bourgeoisie than Hizbollah. The latter, of course, is radical in its opposition to Israel, as is usual with Islamic fundamentalist forces linked to Iran, but in Lebanese politics Hizbollah is integrated fully into the system. It has two ministers in the government that is dominated by Hariri-led US clients and it allies itself with quite reactionary figures.

True, it organises social services, but only as churches or charities do-they represent no social threat whatsoever to the bourgeois social order. There is not even a potential for that, given Hizbollah's ideology, its structure, its close links to Iran and to Syria. Iran, Hizbollah's model of society and state, is utterly bourgeois in its social structure. Whatever populist ranting Ahmadinejad (the Iranian president) may have given vent to, last year, in his electoral battle for the presidency against the capitalist Rafsanjani, these do not translate into any kind of concrete social measures.

In that respect, Chavez's Venezuela is a far more progressive state: Iran is not a Muslim equivalent of Venezuela. Such equivalents existed in the Middle East in the 60s, but it is out of their defeat that Islamic fundamentalism was able to grow.

Ben Gurion had the idea that Israel's frontiers should be natural- the Litani river in the North and the river Jordan in the East. Is this what links the attacks on Lebanon and the Palestinians?

The Greater Israel schemes are obsolete and have been so for a very long time. Hizbollah's rockets are a further proof of the fact that 'natural boundaries' do not mean much. Even after it invaded Lebanon in 1982, Israel could not keep the newly occupied territory under its direct control for long.

These are mountainous areas suitable for guerrilla struggle, and the Lebanese population has undergone military training through several years of civil war. Hence the huge caution of Israeli troops in penetrating south Lebanon after July 12. The Israeli Defence Force took just three villages in the first two weeks and at relatively high cost; it met fierce resistance. It decided to resort to flattening the little town of Bint Jubail after proving unable to control it. The Israelis keep

More than 100,000 people marched against the war in London, August 5

saying they do not want to occupy south Lebanon again-for good reason.

In Palestine, when the cost of keeping direct control over the Palestinian-populated territories became too high after the first Intifada of 1987-88, Israel ended up relinquishing that direct control. But it plans to maintain the bulk of its colonial settlements in the West Bank as well as its direct control over the borders between the Palestinian-populated areas and neighbouring countries, whether Gaza's border with Egypt or the stretch of land along the Jordan river isolating the West Bank from Jordan.

Is Israel more vulnerable now?

This question relates to a point long made by Jewish critics of Zionism. Far from becoming the sanctuary for the Jews of the world that the Zionists promised, Israel is more and more turning into a deadly trap for its Jewish inhabitants. The old warning by anti-Zionist Jews is getting more and more relevant because of the evolution in destructive techniques and weaponry. Israel is exposing its own population to huge risks.

Israel's ruthless, barbaric way of dealing with the Palestinians and the Lebanese feeds hatred against it in the whole area. This will certainly result in many people wanting to inflict on the Israelis the most painful damage possible, compared to which Hizbollah's Katyusha rockets might look quite benign. It takes some 50 Hizbollah rockets to kill one Israeli on average in the ongoing confrontation. But what if devices could be made to inflict mass destruction on Israel? That is what Israel is inciting against itself.

Zawahiri, Bin Laden's second-in-command, made a statement calling for strikes against Israel as if he wanted to outbid Hizbollah. Israel is presently inflicting a terrible nightmare on the Lebanese, it has been

inflicting a permanent nightmare on the Palestinians, but it is also preparing an appalling nightmare for its own people.

What are the prospects for building a new Arab socialist Left? What can socialists and anti-imperialists do?

In the Arab world nowadays the space for building a socialist Left is quite marginal, the Left is ideologically isolated. Nonetheless there should be a permanent effort at rebuilding a socialist Left and that cannot be done by tail-ending Islamic fundamentalism. Left-wing activists should not let the fundamentalists occupy alone the terrain of the fight against imperialism and the Zionist state, as some sections of them tend to do, but it is clear that the Left won't become a match for the religious forces in this respect anytime soon.

In many other fields, however, the fundamentalists are no competitors-when they are not foes: in the fight for workers' and peasants' rights and interests, the rights of the unemployed, women's rights, the fight against sexual oppression, for secularism, liberty of conscience and freedom from the rule of religion in social life, etc. These are issues around which the Left in the Arab world should intensely campaign-but it should do so without expecting to achieve a breakthrough in the near future, lest it get rapidly demoralized.

The building of a new Socialist Left in the Arab region can be helped by the international Left. Even though Latin America is quite far away, the Left turn there is inspiring. But the main influence on the development of a socialist force in the Middle East will come from Europe, where there is a significant socialist Left.

The antiwar movement in Western countries has been very important in educating the Arab public that this is not a clash of civilisations or of religions, but an imperialist war drive serving capitalist interests and opposed as such by social movements in the West. The progress of the social movement in Europe can only have beneficial effects in the Middle East. For that, it is also crucial for the European socialist Left to stand at the forefront of the struggle against Islamophobia, thus undermining the Islamic fundamentalist propaganda that is nurtured by this very same Islamophobia.

This interview will appear in the September edition of Socialist Outlook.

Lebanon

The 33-Day War and UNSC Resolution 1701

Gilbert Achcar

The resolution adopted by the UN Security Council on August 11, 2006 fully satisfies neither Israel nor Washington nor Hezbollah. This does not mean that it is "fair and balanced": it only means that it is a temporary expression of a military stalemate. Hezbollah could not inflict a major military defeat on Israel, a possibility that was always excluded by the utterly disproportionate balance of forces in the same way that it was impossible for the Vietnamese resistance to inflict a major military defeat on the U.S.; but neither could Israel inflict a major military defeat - or actually any defeat whatsoever - on Hezbollah.

In this sense, Hezbollah is undoubtedly the real political victor and Israel the real loser in the 33-day war that erupted on July 12, and no speech by Ehud Olmert or George W. Bush can alter this obvious truth. [1]

In order to understand what is at stake, it is necessary to summarize the U.S.-backed goals that Israel was pursuing in its offensive. The central goal of the Israeli onslaught was, of course, to destroy Hezbollah. Israel sought to achieve this goal through the combination of three major means.

The first one consisted in dealing Hezbollah a fatal blow through an intensive "post-heroic," i.e. cowardly, bombing campaign exploiting Israel's "overwhelming and asymmetric advantage" in firepower. The campaign aimed at cutting Hezbollah's road of supplies, destroying much of its military infrastructure (stocks of rockets, rocket launchers, etc.), eliminating a major number of its fighters and decapitating it by assassinating Hassan Nasrallah and other key party leaders.

The second means pursued consisted in turning Hezbollah's mass base among Lebanese Shiites against the party, which Israel would designate as responsible for their tragedy through a frenzied PSYOP campaign. This required, of course, that Israel inflict a massive disaster on Lebanese Shiites by an extensive criminal bombing campaign that deliberately flattened whole villages and neighborhoods and killed hundreds and hundreds of civilians.

This was not the first time that Israel had resorted to this kind of stratagem - a standard war crime. When the PLO was active in southern Lebanon, in what was called "Fatahland" before the first Israeli invasion in 1978, Israel used to heavily pound the inhabited area all around the point from which a rocket was launched at its territory, even though rockets were fired from wastelands.

The stratagem succeeded at that time in alienating from the PLO a significant part of the population of southern Lebanon, aided by the fact that reactionary leaders were still a major force down there and that the Palestinian guerillas could easily be repudiated as alien since their behavior was generally disastrous. This time, given the incomparably better status of Hezbollah among Lebanese Shiites, Israel thought that it could achieve the same effect simply by dramatically increasing the scope and brutality of the collective punishment.

The third means consisted in massively and gravely disrupting the life of the Lebanese population as a whole and holding it hostage through an air, sea and land blockade so as to incite this population, especially the communities other than Shiite, against Hezbollah, and thus create a political climate conducive to military action by the Lebanese army against the Shiite organization. This is why, at the onset of the offensive, Israeli officials stated that they did not want any force but the Lebanese army to deploy in southern Lebanon, rejecting specifically an international force and spitting on the existing UNIFIL.

This project has actually been the goal of Washington and Paris ever since they worked together on producing UN Security Council resolution 1559 in September 2004 that called for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and "the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias," i.e. Hezbollah and the organizations of the Palestinians in their refugee camps.

Washington had believed that, once Syrian forces were removed from Lebanon, the Lebanese army, which has been equipped and trained chiefly by the Pentagon, would be able to "disband and disarm" Hezbollah. The Syrian army effectively withdrew from Lebanon in April 2005, not because of the pressure from Washington and Paris, but due to the political turmoil and mass mobilization that resulted from the assassination, in February of that year, of Lebanese former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, a very close friend of the Saudi ruling class.

The balance of forces in the country, in light of the mass demonstrations and counter-demonstrations that occurred, did not make it possible for the U.S.-allied coalition to envisage a settlement of the Hezbollah issue by force. They were even obliged to wage the ensuing parliamentary elections in May in a broad coalition with Hezbollah, and rule the country thereafter through a coalition government including two Hezbollah ministers. This disappointing outcome prompted Washington to give Israel a green light for its military intervention. It needed only a suitable pretext, which the Hezbollah's cross-border operation on July 12 provided.

Measured against the central goal and the three means described above, the Israeli offensive was a total and blatant failure. Most obviously, Hezbollah was not destroyed - far from it. It has retained the bulk of both its political structure and its military force, indulging in the luxury of shelling northern Israel up to the very last moment before the ceasefire on the morning of August 14.

It has not been cut off from its mass base; if anything, this mass base has been considerably extended, not only among Lebanese Shiites, but among all other Lebanese religious communities as well, not to mention the huge prestige that this war brought to Hezbollah, especially in the Arab region and the rest of the Muslim world. Last but not least, all this has led to a shift in the overall balance of forces in Lebanon in a direction that is the exact opposite of what Washington and Israel expected: Hezbollah emerged much stronger and more feared by its declared or undeclared opponents, the friends of the U.S. and the Saudi kingdom.

The Lebanese government essentially sided with Hezbollah, making the protest against the Israeli aggression its priority. [2]

There is no need to dwell any further on Israel's most blatant failure: reading the avalanche of critical comments from Israeli sources is more than sufficient and most revealing. One of the sharpest comments was the one expressed by three-time "Defense" minister Moshe Arens, indisputably an expert. He wrote a short article in Haaretz that speaks volumes:

"They [Ehud Olmert, Amir Peretz and Tzipi Livni] had a few days of glory when they still believed that the IAF's [Israeli Air Force's] bombing of Lebanon would make short shrift of Hezbollah and bring us victory without pain. But as the war they so grossly mismanaged wore on... gradually the air went out of them. Here and there, they still let off some bellicose declarations, but they started looking for an exit - how to extricate themselves from the turn of events they were obviously incapable of managing.

They grasped for straws, and what better straw than the United Nations Security Council. No need to score a military victory over Hezbollah. Let the UN declare a cease-fire, and Olmert, Peretz, and Livni can simply declare victory, whether you believe it or not.... The war, which according to our leaders was supposed to restore Israel's deterrent posture, has within one month succeeded in destroying it." [3]

Arens speaks the truth: as Israel proved increasingly unable to score any of the goals that it had set for itself at the onset of its new war, it started looking for an exit. While it compensated for its failure by an escalation in the destructive and revengeful fury that it unleashed over Lebanon, its U.S. sponsors switched their attitude at the UN. After having bought time for Israel for more than three weeks by blocking any attempt at discussing a Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire - one of the most dramatic cases of paralysis in the history of the 61-year old intergovernmental institution - Washington decided to take over and continue Israel's war by diplomatic means.

By switching its attitude, Washington converged again with Paris on the issue of Lebanon. Sharing with the U.S. a common, albeit rival, dedication to taking the most out of Saudi riches, especially by selling the Saudi rulers military hardware [4], Paris regularly and opportunistically stays on the right side of the Saudis every time some

strains arise between Washington's agenda and the concerns of its oldest Middle Eastern clients and protégés. Israel's new Lebanon war was such an opportunity: as soon as Israel's murderous aggression proved counterproductive from the standpoint of the Saudi ruling family, who are terrified by an increasing destabilization of the Middle East that could prove fatal for their interests, they requested a cessation of the war and a switch to alternative means.

Paris immediately came out in favor of this attitude, and Washington ended up following suit, but only after giving the Israeli aggression a few more days to try to score some face-saving military achievement. The first draft resolution crafted by the two capitals circulated at the UN on August 5. It was a blatant attempt at achieving diplomatically what Israel had not been able to achieve militarily. The draft, while stating "strong support" for Lebanon's sovereignty, nevertheless called for the reopening of its airports and harbors only "for verifiably and purely civilian purposes" and provided for the establishment of an "international embargo on the sale or supply of arms and related material to Lebanon except as authorized by its government," in other words an embargo on Hezbollah.

It reasserted resolution 1559, calling for a further resolution that would authorize "under Chapter VII of the Charter the deployment of a UN-mandated international force to support the Lebanese armed forces and government in providing a secure environment and contribute to the implementation of a permanent cease-fire and a long-term solution." This formulation is so vague that it could only mean, actually, an international force authorized to wage military operations (Chapter VII of the UN Charter) in order to implement resolution 1559 by force, in alliance with the Lebanese army.

Moreover, no provision restricted this force to the area south of the Litani River, the area which under the draft resolution was to be free of Hezbollah's armament, and the limit of the zone that Israel has requested to be secured after having failed to get rid of Hezbollah in the rest of Lebanon. This meant that the UN force could have been called upon to act against Hezbollah in the rest of Lebanon.

This project was totally unwarranted by what Israel had achieved on the ground, however, and the draft was therefore defeated. Hezbollah came out strongly against it, making it clear that it would not accept any international force but the existing UNIFIL, the UN force deployed along Lebanon's border with Israel (the "Blue Line") since 1978. The Lebanese government conveyed Hezbollah's opposition and request for changes, backed by the chorus of Arab states including all U.S. clients. Washington had no choice then, but to revise the draft as it would not have passed a vote at the Security Council anyway.

Moreover, Washington's ally, French President Jacques Chirac - whose country is expected to provide the major component of the international force and lead it - had himself declared publicly two weeks into the fighting that no deployment was possible without prior agreement with Hezbollah. [5]

The draft was therefore revised and renegotiated, while Washington asked Israel to brandish the threat of a major ground offensive and to actually start implementing it as a means of pressure in order to enable Washington to get the best possible deal from its standpoint. In order to facilitate an agreement leading to a ceasefire that became more and more urgent for humanitarian reasons, Hezbollah accepted the deployment of 15,000 Lebanese troops south of the Litani River and softened its general position. Resolution 1701 could thus be pushed through at the Security Council on August 11.

Washington and Paris's main concession was to abandon the project of creating an ad-hoc multinational force under Chapter VII. Instead, the resolution authorizes "an increase in the force strength of UNIFIL to a maximum of 15,000 troops," thus revamping and considerably swelling the existing UN force. The main trick, however, was to redefine the mandate of this force so that it could now "assist the Lebanese armed forces in taking steps" towards "the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani river of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL." UNIFIL can now as well "take all necessary action in areas of deployment of its forces and as it deems within its capabilities, to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind."

Combined, the two precedent formulations come quite close to a Chapter VII mandate, or could easily be interpreted in this way, at any rate. Moreover, the mandate of UNIFIL is actually extended by Resolution 1701 beyond its "areas of deployement," as it can now "assist the government of Lebanon at its request" in its effort to "secure its borders and other entry points to prevent the entry in Lebanon without its consent of arms or related materiel" - a sentence that definitely does not refer to Lebanon's border with Israel but to its border with Syria, which runs the length of the country, from north to south. These are the major traps in Resolution 1701, and not the wording about the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation army that many comments have focused on, as Israel's withdrawal is actually propelled by the deterrent force of Hezbollah, not by any UN resolution.

Hezbollah decided to give its green light for the approval by the Lebanese government of Resolution 1701. Hassan Nasrallah gave a speech on August 12, explaining the decision of the party to agree to the UN-mandated deployment. It included a much more sober assessment of the situation than in some of his previous speeches and a good deal of political wisdom. "Today, Nasrallah said, we face the reasonable and possible natural results of the great steadfastness that the Lebanese expressed from their various positions." This soberness was necessary, as any boastful claim of victory - like those that where cheaply expressed by Hezbollah's backers in Tehran and Damascus - would have required Nasrallah to add, like king Pyrrhus of Ancient Greece, "One more such victory and I shall be lost!" Hezbollah's leader wisely and explicitly rejected entering into a polemic about the assessment of the war's results, stressing that "our real priority" is to stop the aggression, recover the occupied territory and "achieve security and stability in our country and the return of the refugees and displaced persons."

Nasrallah defined the practical position of his movement as such: to abide by the ceasefire; to fully cooperate with "all that can facilitate the return of our displaced and refugee people to their homes, to their houses, and all that can facilitate humanitarian and rescue operations." He did so while expressing the readiness of his movement to continue the legitimate fight against the Israeli army as long as it remains in Lebanese territory,

Hezbollah fighter

though he offered to respect the 1996 agreement whereby operations of both sides would be restricted to military targets and spare civilians. In this regard, Nasrallah stressed that his movement started shelling northern Israel only as a reaction to Israel's bombing of Lebanon after the July 12 operation, and that Israel was to be blamed for extending the war to the civilians in the first place.

Nasrallah then stated a position toward Resolution 1701 that could best be described as approval with many reservations, pending verification in practical implementation. He expressed his protest against the unfairness of the resolution, which refrained in its preambles from any condemnation of Israel's aggression and war crimes, adding however that it could have been much worse and expressing his appreciation for the diplomatic efforts that prevented that from happening. His key point was to stress the fact that Hezbollah considers some of the issues that the resolution dealt with to be Lebanese internal affairs that ought to be discussed and settled by the Lebanese themselves - to which he added an emphasis on preserving Lebanese national unity and solidarity.

Nasrallah's position was the most correct possible given the circumstances. Hezbollah had to make concessions to facilitate the ending of the war. As the whole population of Lebanon was held hostage by Israel, any intransigent attitude would have had terrible humanitarian consequences over and above the already appalling results of Israel's destructive and murderous fury. Hezbollah knows perfectly well that the real issue is less the wording of a UN Security Council resolution than its actual interpretation and implementation, and in that respect what is determinant is the situation and balance of forces on the ground. To George W. Bush's and Ehud Olmert's vain boasting about their

victory as embodied supposedly in Resolution 1701, one needs only to quote Moshe Arens pre-emptive reply in the already quoted article:

"The appropriate rhetoric has already started flying. So what if the whole world sees this diplomatic arrangement - which Israel agreed to while it was still receiving a daily dose of Hezbollah rockets - as a defeat suffered by Israel at the hands of a few thousand Hezbollah fighters? So what if nobody believes that an 'emboldened' UNIFIL force will disarm Hezbollah, and that Hezbollah with thousands of rockets still in its arsenal and truly emboldened by this month's success against the mighty Israel Defense Forces, will now become a partner for peace?"

The real "continuation of the war by other means" has already started in full in Lebanon. At stake are four main issues, here reviewed in reverse order of priority. The first issue, on the domestic Lebanese level, is the fate of the cabinet. The existing parliamentary majority in Lebanon resulted from elections flawed by a defective and distorting electoral law that the Syrian-dominated regime had enforced.

One of its major consequences was the distortion of the representation of the Christian constituencies, with great under-representation of the movement led by former General Michel Aoun who entered into an alliance with Hezbollah after the election. Moreover, the recent war affected deeply the political mood of the Lebanese population, and the legitimacy of the present parliamentary majority is thus highly disputable. Of course, any change in the government in favor of Hezbollah and its allies would radically alter the meaning of resolution 1701 as its interpretation depends very much on the Lebanese government's attitude. One major concern in this regard, however, is to avoid any slide toward a renewed civil war in Lebanon: That's what Hassan Nasrallah had in mind when he emphasized the importance of "national unity."

The second issue, also on the domestic Lebanese level, is the reconstruction effort. Hariri and his Saudi backers had built up their political influence in Lebanon by dominating the reconstruction efforts after Lebanon's 15-year war ended in 1990. This time they will be faced by an intensive competition from Hezbollah, with Iran

standing behind it and with the advantage of its intimate link with the Lebanese Shiite population that was the principal target of the Israeli war of revenge. As senior Israeli military analyst Ze'ev Schiff put it in Haaretz: "A lot also depends on who will aid in the reconstruction of southern Lebanon; if it is done by Hezbollah, the Shiite population of the south will be indebted to Tehran. This should be prevented." [6] This message has been received loud and clear in Washington, Riyadh and Beirut. Prominent articles in today's mainstream press in the U.S. are sounding the alarm on this score.

The third issue, naturally, is the "disarmament" of Hezbollah in the zone delimited in southern Lebanon for the joint deployment of the Lebanese army and the revamped UNIFIL. The most that Hezbollah is ready to concede in this respect is to "hide" its weapons south of the Litani River, i.e. to refrain from displaying them and to keep them in covert storage. Any step beyond that, not to mention a Lebanon-wide disarmament of Hezbollah, is linked by the organization to a set of conditions that start from Lebanon's recovery of the 1967-occupied Shebaa farms and end with the emergence of a government and army able and determined to defend the country's sovereignty against Israel.

This issue is the first major problem against which the implementation of Resolution 1701 could stumble, as no country on earth is readily in a position to try to disarm Hezbollah by force, a task that the most formidable modern army in the whole Middle East and one of the world's major military powers has blatantly failed to achieve. This means that any deployment south of the Litani River, whether Lebanese or UN-mandated, will have to accept Hezbollah's offer, with or without camouflage.

The fourth issue, of course, is the composition and intent of the new UNIFIL contingents. The original plan of Washington and Paris was to repeat in Lebanon what is taking place in Afghanistan where a NATO auxiliary force with a UN fig leaf is waging Washington's war. Hezbollah's resilience on the military as well as on the political level thwarted this plan. Washington and Paris believed they could implement it nevertheless under a disguised form and gradually, until political conditions were met in Lebanon for a showdown pitting NATO and its local allies against Hezbollah. Indeed,

the countries expected to send the principal contingents are all NATO members: along with France, Italy and Turkey are on standby, while Germany and Spain are being urged to follow suit. Hezbollah is no fool however. It is already engaged in dissuading France from executing its plan of sending elite combat troops backed by the stationing of the single French air-carrier close to Lebanon's shores in the Mediterranean.

On the last issue, the antiwar movement in NATO countries could greatly help the struggle of the Lebanese national resistance and the cause of peace in Lebanon by mobilizing against the dispatch of any NATO troops to Lebanon, thus contributing to deterring their governments from trying to do Washington's and Israel's dirty work. What Lebanon needs is the presence of truly neutral peacekeeping forces at its southern borders and, above all, that its people be permitted to settle Lebanon's internal problems through peaceful political means.

All other roads lead to a renewal of Lebanon's civil war, at a time when the Middle East, and the whole world for that matter, is already having a hard time coping with the consequences of the civil war that Washington has ignited and is fueling in Iraq.

August 16, 2006

NOTES

[1] On the global and regional implications of these events, see my article "The Sinking Ship of U.S. Imperial Designs," posted on ZNet, August 7, 2006.

[2] As an Israeli observer put it in an article with a quite revealing title: "It was a mistake to believe that military pressure could generate a process whereby the Lebanese government would disarm Hizbullah." Efraim Inbar, "Prepare for the next round," Jerusalem Post, August 15, 2006.

[3] Moshe Arens, "Let the devil take tomorrow," Haaretz, August 13, 2006.

[4] Both the U.S. and France concluded major arms deals with the Saudis in July.

[5] Interview with Le Monde, July 27, 2006.

[6] Ze'ev Schiff, "Delayed ground offensive clashes with diplomatic timetable," Haaretz, August 13, 2006.

Lebanon

Hezbollah's Victory (2000)

Gilbert Achcar

Written at the time of the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, in May 2000, News from Within, a publication of the Alternative Information Center in Jerusalem, published an interview with Gilbert Achcar which provides useful background.

Q: *Hezbollah's victory gives a broad blueprint of a comprehensive strategy (military, political) in defeating Israeli occupation. Can you evaluate the possibility of its reproduction elsewhere?*

Achcar: In order to do so, one has to separate the various elements of this "broad blueprint" as you call it. Let us start with the military aspect, since you mention it: I would say that the peculiarities of the Lebanese terrain should be as obvious to anyone in the Arab world as the peculiarities of the Iraqi terrain are now to anyone in Washington who took the 1991 Gulf War as a "broad blueprint" for further US interventions. I mean that, just as the desert is the ideal terrain for taking full advantage of the superiority in air power (as proven by the great contrast between the six weeks of carpet-bombing of the Iraqi troops in 1991 and the poor results of NATO's air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999), the mountainous and populous character of southern Lebanon should be taken into consideration before generalizing its experience into a "broad blueprint".

This being said, what should be emphasized in the first place is that the victory in southern Lebanon was not a "military" victory. The Israeli army has not been defeated militarily: it was much less exhausted than the US forces in Vietnam, and even in the latter case it would be quite improper to talk of a "military defeat." In both cases, the defeat is primarily a political defeat of the governments, against a background of an increasingly reluctant population in the invader country. In that regard, the military action finds its value in its political impact, and not primarily in its direct military impact. The guerrilla actions of the Lebanese Resistance against the occupation - which was very far, even proportionally, from matching the scale of the Vietnamese Resistance - were mainly effective through their impact on the Israeli population, just as

the coffins of GI's landing back in the US were during the Vietnam War. In both cases, the population of the invader country became more and more opposed to a war effort that was clearly devoid of any moral justification.

This had already been experienced by Israel since the beginning of its full-scale invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The withdrawal from Beirut in 1982, and later on from most of the occupied Lebanese territory in 1985, were mainly motivated by the fact that the Israeli population could not endorse a situation in which Israeli soldiers were facing death every day for the sake of an occupation which could hardly be justified, even from a mainstream Zionist view. So the key issue is that of the balance between the cost and benefits of an occupation: whereas in the Golan the benefits for Israel exceed the present costs, in southern Lebanon the reverse was very obviously true.

Let us now extrapolate to the Palestinian occupied territories: during twenty years the benefits clearly exceeded the costs from the viewpoint of Israeli "security." The desperate "guerrilla" operations of the Palestinian Resistance could not counterbalance the feeling of enhanced security stemming from the extension of the border to the Jordan River. The situation began to change dramatically with the mass mobilization of the Intifada. This made the cost nearly intolerable for the morale of the Israeli army and for the reputation of Israel in its backer countries. The pressure mounted within the Israeli army, up to its highest ranks, in favor of a withdrawal of the troops from the populated areas, and their redeployment in those strategic parts of the West Bank where no Palestinians are concentrated.

It is precisely to this pressure from the military that Rabin was responding when he entered the Oslo negotiations. He tried to get the highest possible price for the implementation of this withdrawal from a

PLO leadership that had been accumulating concessions and capitulations for many years. And he got what he wanted, to a degree that he could not have even imagined when he started the talks with the Arafat leadership! Instead of building on the impetus of the Intifada, and doing everything possible to sustain it until they got the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the entire populated areas - without betraying anything of what they stood for previously and with very minimal accommodations, negotiated not by the PLO but by the leadership of the Intifada within the territories - the Arafat leadership went into what even some Zionist commentators described as an ignominious surrender, leading to the execrable situation prevailing now.

Hezbollah acted differently: they kept up the pressure uncompromisingly. And they forced the unconditional and total withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Lebanese territories occupied since 1978 (the remnant goes back to the 1967 War). A tremendous victory, indeed! And surely a feat that the Palestinian population will ponder and from which they will draw some inspiration.

Q: *To what extent is the Hezbollah victory a slap in the face for the imperialist agenda in the region? What might we expect from it in the future?*

Achcar: The Lebanese victory is certainly a defeat for the US agenda which, like that of its Israeli ally, foresaw the insertion of this withdrawal into an overall peace agreement with Syria including all sorts of conditions, concessions and guarantees obtained for Israel. Besides, Israel is the "most brilliant" proxy of the US armed forces, the one always quoted as an example to follow. And here is a withdrawal, taking the shape of a debacle, evoking irresistibly the images of the US debacle in Vietnam, in1975 - incidentally just at the time of the 25th anniversary of the latter! This is a new vindication of the

famous "dare to struggle, dare to win" that inspired so bravely the Vietnamese Resistance. And it can be expected that it will contribute to reversing the winds of defeatism that have swept through such a big part of those who once used to fight imperialist domination.

However with regard to the US agenda in the Middle East, I think that the main change in the Israeli agenda - which will certainly be integrated in the agenda of the next US administration - is that the prospect of a peace treaty with Syria is pushed back indefinitely. The Zionist establishment is definitely not eager to relinquish the Golan for the sake of just establishing relations with Syria, relations that will never be "normal" anyhow. And they are all the less eager to do so in that the Syrian dictator Hafiz Al-Assad is on the verge of death [he died in June 2000] and the political future of the country is highly uncertain.

Q: *Why has the Lebanese victory been claimed by Hezbollah alone? Were not other forces - Palestinians, Lebanese Left - involved in the resistance movement? If not, why not?*

Achcar: The reason Hezbollah appeared as the only father of victory (as the saying goes, victory usually has several fathers, whereas defeat is an orphan) is that they did everything they could to monopolize the prestige of the resistance movement. After the 1982 Israeli invasion, you had an uneasy coexistence and competition between two tendencies in the fight against the occupier: the Lebanese National Resistance, dominated by the Lebanese Communist Party, and the Islamic Resistance, dominated by Hezbollah. The Palestinian forces had been wiped out from southern Lebanon by the invaders; those remaining in the refugee camps were not really a match for Hezbollah, especially since some Lebanese forces like the Shiite communalist militias of Amal were keen on preventing them from spreading again out of the camps. Amal are still there - they are among those who recuperated the stretch of land abandoned by Israel and its local proxy.

But they were never a key force in the Resistance movement: they lost their impetus long ago to the benefit of Hezbollah, and turned into a purely conservative and patronage-based party.

Hezbollah conducted all sorts of operations to establish their monopoly over the resistance movement, up to repeated onslaughts against the Communists, murdering some of their key Shiite cadres in particular. The CP behaved in a most servile manner, not daring to retaliate and instead calling on the "brothers" in the Islamic Resistance to behave in a brotherly manner - a call which has no real chance of being heard if it is not backed by decisive action to show the damage that could result, precisely, from the alternative behavior! Such an attitude contributed greatly to the progressive shift in the balance of forces to the advantage of Hezbollah. Many of the most militant members of the Lebanese left among the Shiites were attracted to Hezbollah.

We should recall that at the beginning of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 there was no Hezbollah and the CP was the major militant force among the Shiite population in southern Lebanon. The party started losing ground to the advantage of Amal first, and Hezbollah later after 1982. In both cases the lesson was the same: all these movements were appealing to the same constituency, i.e. the traditionally very militant Shiite population of southern Lebanon. In such a competition, the shyest is doomed to lose inevitably, all the more so when you don't even dare to put forward your own radical program and you end up tail-ending the dominant communalist forces. Here again you need to dare to struggle and dare to win!

Hezbollah have been very effective on that score. They were definitely very "daring" in their actions, inspired by their quasi-mystical views of martyrdom. And they knew also how to win the souls and minds of the population, by making a very clever use of the significant funding they got from Iran, thus organizing all kinds of social services to the benefit of the impoverished population.

To be sure, they also took advantage of the ideological winds, which blew much more in their direction than in the direction of a left that became utterly demoralized by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Q: *What are the implications of the Hezbollah victory on the relation of the political forces in Lebanon? For the Palestinian refugees there? And for the entire region?*

Achcar: One thing is sure. This victory will greatly enhance the appeal of Hezbollah in Lebanon, and of the Islamic fundamentalists in the whole region. In Lebanon, Hezbollah faces an objective limitation due to the religiously very composite character of the population. Hezbollah are inherently unable to win over Christians, Druzes, or even Sunni Muslims, in any significant numbers. They are no threat to the Palestinian refugees, since their Islamic universalism make them champions of the Palestinian cause. In that sense, they are actually competitors to the Palestinian forces in Lebanon, whether Arafat loyalists or left dissidents; at best they can contribute to strengthen the Palestinian Islamic fundamentalist tendencies.

In that sense too, their victory is a bad omen to Arafat, obviously, as I have already explained. Among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, Hamas members are the only ones likely to be boosted by Hezbollah triumphalism. More generally, we can say that this victory will be precious for the whole Islamic fundamentalist movement in countering the negative impact of the recent events in Iran. Those who thought they could already bury Islamic fundamentalism (a French "Orientalist" recently produced a book heralding the terminal decline of this phenomenon) are blatantly refuted. As long as they have no real competitor for the embodiment of the aspirations of the downtrodden masses, and as long as the social effects of "globalization" are with us, the fundamentalists will also be part of the picture, with ups and downs naturally.

Italy

Chomsky, Tariq Ali criticise Rifondazione on Afghanistan, back antiwar MPs

Tariq Ali, Noam Chomsky
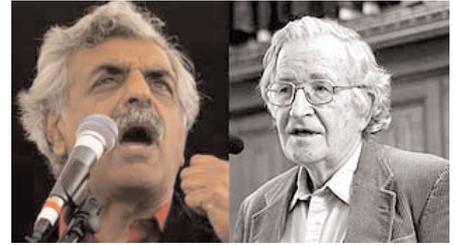
Noam Chomsky (right) and Tariq Ali

World-famous academic and peace campaigner Noam Chomsky, and well known writer and socialist campainer Tariq Ali have added their voices to those calling for Rifondazione to change its position on Italian troops in Afghanistan and backing antiwar MPs. Here we publish Tariq's open letter to Fausto Bertinotti and Chomsky's statement, with an introduction by Gilbert Achcar.

Introduction by Gilbert Achcar

Eight members of the Italian Senate and two members of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, all belonging to the left-wing of the ruling coalition (l'Unione, led by Prime Minister Romano Prodi) have announced their intention to vote against the government on the issue of Afghanistan.

Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's previous Premier and George W. Bush's buddy, had sent 1,300 Italian troops to Afghanistan as a component of the Nato force operating there, as well as 2,600 troops to Iraq as part of Bush's "coalition of the willing."

The new "center-left" government, betraying the expectations of the majority of its electors, has announced a phased withdrawal of troops from Iraq that doesn't differ much from the one Berlusconi had already negotiated with the US government. At the same time, l'Unione has proclaimed its intention to extend the mission of Italian troops in Afghanistan, despite the fact that Nato forces in that country, recently redeployed toward the South, are increasingly engaged in war activities, acting as US auxiliary forces.

Even if Italian troops were not sent to the South, they would nevertheless be part of Nato's war-machine. The Afghan people are of course entitled to security, but neither US troops, nor the troops of the US-dominated Nato, can provide this.

Since l'Unione holds no majority in the Senate without the eight Senators, there is tremendous pressure being exerted on the latter to get them to change their stance, in the name of coalition solidarity and interest, including a threat to move the decree by means of a vote of confidence that would face them with the choice between reneging on their stance or letting the government fall.

However, the latter threat is defused by the announcement by some members of the "center-right" that they will vote for the decree extending the mission of Italian troops in Afghanistan, as they don't want to abstain on an issue that they support wholeheartedly, particularly since the Afghan deployment was initiated by the Berlusconi government to which they belonged.

To counter the pressures exerted on them, the antiwar MPs have launched a petition and called for expressions of support. These will be reported at an important antiwar assembly, organized by the Peace movement and the antiwar MPs, to be held in Rome on July 15. The debate and vote in the Senate will take place in the last week of July.

The build-up of support, including international support, for the antiwar Italian MPs is thus very important for their fight and their ability to resist the pressure. To support the anti-war MPs, sign the petition.

Tariq Ali - An Open Letter to Fausto Bertinotti

Dear Fausto,

I was surprised to hear that Rifondazione was preparing to vote in favour of keeping Italian troops in Afghanistan, for 'humanitarian reasons'. I want to try and convince you that this would be a serious error, just as I argued in the last century with those on the left, who supported the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

Big powers or surrogate states acting on their behalf have no right to occupy countries. The two big projects of the global neo-liberal order have been (1) to insist that the new capitalism is the 'sole' way of organising humankinf from now till the planet implodes and (2) to disregard national sovereignty as a key to international relations in the name of 'human rights'.

A few weeks after 9/11, I debated a leading Bush ideologue, Charles Krauthammer for one hour on Canadian television. He admitted that the war in Afghanistan was as I had put it 'a crude war of revenge.'

Three days ago the CIA disbanded its special unit created to track and exterminate Osama Bin Laden, a tacit acknowledgement that the situation had changed drastically since 9/11. So what is the function of NATO armies in Afghanistan. 'Human Rights'? Even conservative journalists in Britain (whose soldiers are being killed regularly) would laugh at any such assumption. One of them, Simon Jenkins, recently returned from a trip to Kabul and wrote a public warning to Blair:

"The debacle of Britain-in-Afghanistan cannot be ignored, because British troops are at risk. They were never meant to be at risk and their presence in that country has nothing to do with British security.

"They are sweltering and dying in Helmand not to prop up an embattled regime in Kabul, for which they are hopelessly undermanned, but to keep NATO alive in Europe, an unworthy mission... How did the Americans induce Nato in 2004 to become Hamid Karzai's mercenary army? What intelligence did the cabinet receive from Washington, where officials openly spoke of dumping Afghanistan on uppity NATO to teach it a lesson after the Balkan shambles? ...Every assessment I have heard suggests that the sort of campaign envisaged by the government in southern Afghanistan would require not 3,000 or even 10,000 troops, but over 100,000. Even the latter total has failed in Iraq, and Iraqis cannot hold a candle to Afghans for insurgent fanaticism." (The Guardian, 5 July, 2006)

There is simply no excuse for the NATO presence in Afghanistan except that of pleasing Washington. In recent weeks the killing of Afghan civilians has increased tenfold. Headlines which speak of '500 Taliban killed' are deliberate disinformation. As was predicted by some of us at the time, the Afghans do not like being occupied and would begin to resist sooner or later. Fausto, ask yourself why there should be any foreign troops there at all.

That the centre-left supports NATO and backs most US wars

is well-known. Let them do it with the support of Fini, Bossi and Berlusconi (they are, after all, of the same opinion).

Why should the occupation of a foreign country be treated as a vote of confidence? And if it is the honest answer has to be: we do not have any confidence in the NATO presence in Afghanistan. For Rifondazione to vote in favour would be a tragedy for the European Left and I fear can only lead to disasters both in Afghanistan and in terms of creating an alternative in Italy.

If you get into arguments such as the character of the regime that might follow a Western withdrawal you will be swimming in a dangerous sea. Don't forget the pathetic imperial past of your own state. The invasions of Albania and Abbyssinia by Mussolini were explained by the same logic: we are taking European civilization to these backward feudal monarchic states. Regime change was not acceptable them and it should not be now.

I write as an old friend of Rifondazione. I hope I can remain one after the vote next Tuesday.

Yours fraternally,

Tariq Ali

Noam Chomsky - Letter to the Antiwar MPs

Dear friends,

I have learned of your courageous stand against Italy's participation in military operations of NATO, as it is being converted into an international intervention force subordinate to the United States.

Expansion of NATO to the East, in violation of firm guarantees to Gorbachev when he agreed to a unified Germany within NATO, was already a very serious threat to international peace and security, even apart from the deceit.

The new and still more expansive role NATO is assuming poses serious threats to international order. I would like to express my personal appreciation for your insistence on upholding the principles of Article 11 of the Italian Constitution, that "Italy repudiates war as an instrument of offence against the liberty of other peoples and as a means of resolving international disputes; accepts, on the condition of equality with the other States, the limitations on sovereignty required for an order which ensures peace and justice between nations; promotes and encourages the international organisations established with that end."

Sincerely yours,

Noam Chomsky

Tariq Ali is a socialist writer and broadcaster who has been particularly active in anti-imperialist campaigns, from Vietnam to Iraq. Born and brought up in Pakistan, he now lives in London.

Noam Chomsky is the most prestigious theorist of linguistics in the English-speaking world. He has been a courageous and tireless critique of American imperialism and the Zionist state since the 1960s.

Italian Leftists Appeal

Withdraw Italian troops from Afghanistan!

Support needed from international Left

Sinistra Critica (Critical Left)

The new centre-left italian government of Romano Prodi is going to ask parliament to vote for continuing the Italian military presence in Afghanistan. This is a clear break with the anti-war feelings of the Italian left that were expressed in the enomous anti-war mobilizations which took place under the reactionary Berlusconi government.

Left senators and members of parliament are under pressure from the goverment to vote against their own convictions. For the moment, eight senators have stated that they will refuse to vote for the Prodi government on this question. As the centre left only has a two vote majority in the Senate their decision could force Prodi to withdraw the Italian armed forces or to count on the support of the right wing to approve his decision.

To help the left representatives to resist, sign this appeal. To sign it send a mail to: noafghanistan@libero.it

You can also sign it through the website: www.sinistracritica.org, where you will find the Italian text and you can sign by sending your full name and e-mail address.

Don't vote for this mission!

In Afghanistan there is a war in which Italy is participating fully through the UN mission. The Prodi government, following the line of the previous government has decided to keep Italian troops in Afghanistan, without chaning its military presence in any way. For years we have demonstrated against all wars, including the one in Afghanistan, with no ifs nor buts. Italy cannot and must not participate in this mission and the pacifist left, first of which is the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC), must not approve it. We call on the parliamentary representatives to vote in coherence with their own convictions and on the Unione for it to note this clear position by changing direction and going towards an "exit strategy" in Afghanistan and respect of Article 11 of the Constitution included in the governmental programme.

Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) is a current in Rifondazione, which includes the comrades of Bandiera Rossa, Italian section of the Fourth International.

Italy

Against the Italian intervention in Afghanistan

Senate speech by Franco Turigliatto

Franco Turigliatto

At the end of July, the Italian government led by Romano Prodi asked the Italian parliament to vote the continuation of the Italian military mission in Afghanistan. As readers of International Viewpoint know (see appeal) dissenting parliamentarians led by the Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) representatives waged a campaign against the decision of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) to support this governmental move.

As the Unione government has a big majority in the Chamber of Deputies, the votes against by SC deputy Salvatore Cannavó and three others were not a problem for the government. However, in the Senate the government has a majority of only two, and SC has two senators. The government therefore decided to make the vote a question of confidence. After a broad discussion, Sinistra Critica decided its senators should on this occasion vote for (the right wing did not vote and left the chamber). This vote was linked however to a statement, now signed by 16 senators, that they would not vote for this military mission when it next comes up in 6 months' time.

We publish here the speech by SC senator Franco Turigliatto to the Senate during the debate.

"I am speaking in this assembly with concern, if not to say distress. The measure under discussion euphemistically refers to international missions, but as everyone knows, we are talking about war, the very war that as we speak, once again in the Middle East, is destroying the lives of hundreds of women, children and men. Yesterday's conference in Rome was unable to impose a ceasefire or even to have attempted to request it.

The government has made this measure a vote of confidence. I have noted the political balance with which minister Chiti has approached the problem under discussion with the so-called dissenting opinions in terms of the respective positions and disagreements.

1) I will vote in favour of the vote of confidence for a single reason, out of a sense of loyalty and commitment towards the electorate that has voted out the rightwing parties and allowed for this government to take form,

towards the workers who these weeks have told me they appreciate our battle, but at the same time have asked me not to bring the government down, to allow them to continue to evaluate its actions over the coming months. However, this decision does not take away from my underlying irreducible and unchangeable dissent with regard to a measure (even taking into account the massive demand for withdrawal from Iraq), which simultaneously contemplates the continuation of the war mission in Afghanistan.

2) The fact that this mission is indeed a war is affirmed by all military analysts and NATO itself. It is no coincidence that NATO is calling upon its member nations to redouble their efforts in terms of men and resources, and that in February of the current year, it already changed the rules of engagement to prepare for the Taliban offensive. This is a war mission that is part of the new NATO's strategic project that emerged

from 1999 Washington Pact and foresees an unnatural and illegitimate role for the Atlantic Alliance as "world policeman".

3) It is precisely this nature of the conflict and of the matters we are currently discussing that have led me to view the compromise made by the majority of the government as completely insufficient, as it was unable to insert any element of countertendency into a foreign military intervention project that remains permeated by the multilateralist philosophy and the concept of "humanitarian war", the same that characterised the Kosovo conflict.

Not only does the government not intend to carry out any exit strategy but also it is going so far as to reinforce the overall military purview to be implemented in Afghanistan and in the Enduring Freedom mission linked to that conflict.

4) Furthermore, this fundamental disagreement is in line with the standpoint that the forces of the radical and pacifist left have stood for and practised over the past five years, that is, from the time the vote on the Afghanistan mission brought a commitment from this parliament. This line of conduct is perfectly coherent with the positions of the peace movement, taking a stand from October 2001 on the struggle against the US war in Afghanistan and subsequently, against sending Italian soldiers into that theatre of war.

A coherence that we fully support and which can certainly not be confined within the game of parliamentary tactics or governmental geometrics. Moreover, because no governmental programme has ever decided to confront a

question on which nobody can claim an electoral commitment.

During these weeks, I've never felt anachronistic, a rebel, or a dissident. On the contrary, never as in these days have I felt so in tune with the 62% who want the troops withdrawn from Afghanistan, rising to 73% among Unione voters. Think about it: how can we fail to understand that the presence of foreign troops cannot be seen by local people as interference, domination and manipulation. How can we fail to understand that our soldiers are viewed as occupiers, like the other military forces taking part in a war with a tragic balance sheet of civilian victims (97%)?

No, government representatives, no, Members of Parliament, it is not just, it is a grave error to continue along this path, we can't keep our soldiers in Afghanistan to kill and be killed.

5) The government's decision to make this measure a confidence vote requires that we sacrifice our fundamental dissent so as not to endanger the government. It is a painful choice, weighing heavily on our conscience and political convictions. We feel that we have been subjected to blackmail that we will no longer accept in the future.

The government should take note of this because on the war we cannot go along with a future vote of confidence. If the executive persists in its commitment to a war mission it will do so with the votes of those who support this choice; we will vote no. Just as we will vote no to other military operations, such as the Lebanon operation aired in NATO circles.

If Italy really wants to make a contribution to peace in the

Middle East, it will take a forthright stand against Israel's policy; bombing a defenceless country indiscriminately, with a substantial consensus among Western countries, provoking incredible devastation among the civilian population.

It would struggle for the construction of a real Palestinian state and in this framework, for a UN interposition mission, not only between Israel and Lebanon but also on the Gaza Strip and on the 1967 border between Israel and the West Bank! It would make it clear to the Israeli government that if Israel is entitled to stability, this will be possible if it recognises the rights of the other peoples of the Middle East, starting with the Palestinian people, that are currently crushed and denied.

6) The peace movement is our real partner in dialogue in this matter. Nowadays, this movement is seeking to re-establish its own dynamics, its own ideality and its own ambitions for peace. We believe we have contributed actively, with our explicit statement of dissent, of reopening a discussion that already seemed closed.

Different initiatives have been taken in Italy, with our contribution, and others will be in future. We will take part in all of these, to get to the next vote on military missions with the greatest possible forces against the extension of unacceptable military operations. We will do this with a clear, transparent position; we will do it without being subjected to any further blackmail and intimidation. We will do it in the name of peace and of the political coherence that characterises our commitment, knowing that we are only a part of the movement, but a necessary one.

Senate intervention 27/7/200

Franco Turigliatto was elected as a Senator for Piedmont on the PRC list in last month's elections. He is a member of the Critical Left current within the PRC, and of the Italian section of the Fourth International.

Yugoslavia

Dossier - On Slobodan Milosevic

Catherine Samary

Faced with the wars of ethnic cleansing which have ravaged Bosnia-Herzegovina, the dominant theses have centred either on deadly inter-ethnic hatreds or on Slobodan Milosevic - the "butcher of the Balkans" or adversary and victim of the great powers.

This ignores the deep causes of the crisis of the Titoist system and a major political and specific element concerning the "warlike transition" [1] in the former Yugoslavia : the specific alliance that the Serbian president formed with Franjo Tudjman, the president of Croatia throughout the 1990s.

This is the real black hole for the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY - see below) and the great powers, who precisely relied on the strong states of the region and their alliances to "stabilise the Balkans".

But this is also a black hole for those who presented Milosevic as the adversary of the great powers and the progressive counterweight to all reactionary nationalisms - including that of Tudjman.

The similarity of the two regimes and the choices of their leaders are much greater than their differences.

The real initial choice of the United States to support the Tudjman regime against "Serb-Communism", to cover up the aggressive dimensions of his policy in the media and to provide him with arms was relayed through the support given by Germany to Croat and Slovene independence.

These orientations gave a certain credibility to the thesis of Milosevic's defenders, according to which the "great powers" and "their media" led an anti-Serb policy of demonisation of the Belgrade regime, leading to the NATO war against Belgrade and the indictment of Milosevic.

This thesis is supported by the massive propaganda of the media during the NATO war (see point 4) and by partial truths, but it is globally false.

❖ On the one hand we cannot confuse the role of the media and what influences them, concerning the Yugoslav crisis and conflicts before and during (or after) the NATO war (March-June 1999).

❖ For before this war there was no united policy concerning these latter (and corresponding pressure on the media); nor were the media " simply" press organs of the rulers. The pressure which can be exerted on the media at a time when governments are involved in a war did not exist. There were, rather, other sources of information, emanating notably from all those who were effectively attacked by Belgrade.

❖ It is necessary in this framework to accord a particular attention - which would merit specific study- to the Croatian propaganda covering the regime of Franjo Tudjman precisely because it was a major hidden aggressor supported by the United States and Germany [2], because it took as its hostages the Muslim refugees, supposed "allies" who influenced the discourse of Sarajevo, and because the alliance between Milosevic-Tudjman and the Bosno-Serbian and Bosno-Croat militias was essential to understanding the war in BH as well as the Dayton Accords.

Paradoxically, the demonisation of Milosevic facilitated his defence at the ICTY.

It renders no service to the victims of ethnic cleansing policies. To denounce it does not imply any complicity with his regime -but there are (unhappily) many ways of being reactionary, other than being Hitler. Making this point politically involves taking into account all the victims of these policies whatever their community, and whatever the nationality of their aggressors. It gives meaning to a left discourse which should go beyond the misleading "socialist" and "Yugoslav" labels.

But also we should not accept silence on the role and the hypocrisy of the great powers - and demand a balance sheet of the policies pursued.

It is necessary then to approach in a distinct manner the general causes of the crisis of the Titoist system and federation to understand what led to the wars. Behind a fog of labels

and ideologies, it is necessary also to evoke the powerful media propaganda and counter-propaganda.

From whence the four following points:

I) the deep internal/external causes of the crisis of theTitoist regime and federation;

II) From the deconstruction of Titoist Yugoslavia (social ownership and multinational federation) to the recomposition of the dominant/dominated nation states.

III) The false thesis of the single aggressor: from the Milosevic-Tudjman alliance to the Dayton Accords - test and black hole of the dominant analyses of the ICTY.

IV) The NATO war in Kosovo and the indictment of Milosevic. Again on the ICTY

I) Internal/external causes of the crisis of the Titoist regime and federation

1. The points of support of the Titoist regime

Living together, despite the black pages of the past, is worth the effort if it involves living better and with more dignity; on the bases of converging living standards. Living better also means feeling more protected from external risks together than separately.

In all these respects, we can raise four main factors which gave Tito's party and the second Yugoslavia born from the résistance of the Second World War a real legitimacy and popular base. The first three are internal, the other external.

The first: increases in standards of living These were constant and general throughout the country from 1945 to the end of the 1970s - with rates of growth of production among the highest in the world, near to an average of 10% per year in the 1950s, subsequently falling to around 6-7%. This country of the capitalist "semi-periphery" before the second world war, more than 75% peasant in 1939, was no more than 30% peasant in 1980. The progress would remain considerable up to the end of the 1970s: in the area of education (a student rate which was among the highest in the world - and the highest in Kosovo among young Albanians, at the end of the 1970s!), of social security - extended to peasants, of health, of social promotion for the children of peasant or worker families.

Second factor: increases in social status, in human dignity. Self-management was very popular among the workers until the crisis of the 1980s, as surveys by the sociologist Neca Jovanov show; its introduction, at the time of the break with the Kremlin in 1948 was justified in terms of Marx against Stalin, the Paris Commune against statism. Self-management was extended to all the spheres of social production, opening real margins of accountability in conflict with the bureaucratisation of the system of the single party. The majority of intellectuals identified massively with the socialist ideals put forward, while criticising various aspects of the system and its reforms. The latter, frequent at the time of Tito, were always responses by the regime to the social movements and conflicts which appeared, after it had repressed their "leaders". This "Titoist" combination of rights and selective repression produced, on the one hand, an extension of the self-management rights recognised until the end of the 1970s; but, on the other, repressive measures killing initiative and free thought and the enlargement of horizons to manage conflict; the overall effect being incoherence and ineffectiveness. But the rights recognised also gave a feeling of dignity and real social well being until the end of the 1970s.

Third factor: the extension of national rights was considerable by comparison with the first Yugoslavia which smothered diversity in a "unitary" and dictatorial fashion; but there remained an inequality of status between Slav peoples, granted the right to self-determination and non-Slav communities treated as minorities - notably the Albanians, who were more numerous than the Montenegrins. The second Yugoslavia would not have emerged without the realisation of a federative system, but the conflicts with the Kremlin prevented the new state from orienting itself towards the project of Balkan confederation with the neighbouring states which would have facilitated the egalitarian treatment of the Albanian question, notably in Kosovo, and avoid the pre-eminence of the "Southern Slavs" of Yugoslavia. National rights would nonetheless evolve according to the conflicts appearing, in the framework of socio-economic reforms (what type of planned production and distribution of resources?), cultural reforms (in the broadest sense, recognition of the minority languages as official and Bosnian Muslims as an ethnic-national reality/religious substratum in the same way as the Bosno-Serbs or Bosno-Croats) and political reforms (what articulation between mode of decisions at the federal and republican levels, including in the election of the cadres of the single party?). From the mid-1960s onwards, the institutional evolution confirmed a durable recognition of the distinction between citizenship (civil rights) and "people" (in the ethnic-national sense), the republics being nearly all recognised as pluri-national like Yugoslavia (except for Slovenia). At the same time, the system became confederalised: the republics and provinces acquired growing rights in relation to those of the federal centre, in spite of persistent ambiguities and contradictions (Kosovo and Vojvodina had the same representations and rights as the republics with the constitution of 1974 - while remaining formally provinces of Serbia; the "subjects" who were given the right of self-determination were ambiguous: peoples or states?).

These three sets of factors did not then yield a coherent and conflict-free system; but being associated with a constant economic growth until the end of the 1970s, it was a system perceived as capable of reforming itself and of recognising new rights.

The fourth factor is "external": The Yugoslav project was attractive in terms of its ability to resist the risks of assimilation and external domination. During the Second World War, in spite of and against the violence and inter-ethnic hatred propagated by the Croat Ustachi fascists, or the Chetnik partisans of the Serbian dynasty, the partisans (anti-fascist resistance led by the Yugoslav Communist Party) organised diverse peoples against the foreign occupier, on the basis of a multinational popular army, anchored in the poor peasantry to whom land was distributed. And they also built a counter-power on federative bases, prefiguring another Yugoslavia resting on the assembly of the committees of national liberation (AVNOJ) in the reconquered territories, resisting the diktats of the great powers allied at Yalta - Stalin among them. With a regional impact which tended to escape the Kremlin's control. This is the underlying cause of the "excommunication" of Titoism by Moscow in 1948. But, far from making it disappear, this rupture would force the Yugoslav Communists to consolidate their popular base by radical reforms; encouraging them also to enlarge, via the non-aligned movement, the international margins of resistance to "campism" that the Cold War wished to impose: namely the pressures to submit themselves to the domination of Moscow in the name of resistance to imperialism. In 1968, again, the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia was exploited by the regime to consolidate by mobilising the people in a "popular defence" alongside the official Yugoslav Army; the rapprochement of links with neighbouring Albania was then consolidated together with the increase of the rights recognised to the Albanians of Kosovo (notably a university in Pristina in the Albanian language, then constitutional changes going in the direction of a quasi-republic).

In sum, until the end of the 1970s, the three sets of internal factors evoked appeared as the conquests of a system protecting the peoples concerned against external aggression - and giving Yugoslavia an international stature of which the people were proud.

2. Internal/external causes of crisis

But the absence of real democracy and of transparency of the system undermined over time the progressive and stable content of growth, of rights to self-management and national, individual and collective rights.

The suppression of any forceful criticism and recall faced with the necessary experimentation of reforms favoured the turning in of everyone on themselves and opacity, hence also waste and indebtedness. Resistance to measures of redistribution deepened inequality in living standards per inhabitant between regions. The nation in the ethnic-cultural sense of the Yugoslav Constitution became increasingly a political nation, as nationalism was used by the party-state to increase its privileges of power at the level of the republics and provinces. The system was increasingly hit by corruption, generalised indebtedness, and an overall ineffectiveness; but the bureaucratic powers in place, diverting the critiques towards nationalist interpretations, diverted the failings of the system onto "others", destroyed the necessary solidarity and made opaque and impossible any outcome based on socialist, internationalist and self-managed values.

Repressive responses to discontent and indebtedness affected growth adversely for the first time in the 1980s, marking major ideological reverses, favoured by the context of a crisis of socialist projects and neoliberal offensives in the 1980s. The repression by the single party of contested ideologies had meant, as in the USSR and the other countries identifying themselves with socialism, making the party - and then its leadership - the supreme judge of "truths" and of the collective interest, or the "historic" interests of the proletariat. The flexibility introduced after the break with Stalin in 1948, had been broadly challenged with the repression of the 1970s. The intellectual and revolutionary quality of the leaders trained in the resistance, internationalism (many of them had participated in the international brigades in Spain) and the anti-fascist struggle was real; but it did not immunise the effects of the privileges of power, nor give them the "science" of adequate responses to the problems which emerged. New cadres, increasingly marked by statism and bureaucratism, invaded the single party all

the more quickly as real or presumed adversaries were repressed.

The victims of this repression - left or right, Marxist or not, religious believers or not - would re-emerge in the years of crisis, in the context of a discrediting of a Marxism which had become an official religion, benefiting from their status as victim and rehabilitating pre-Titoist ideologies.

Pluralism would emerge then in the worst fashion and in a fog of labels as seen elsewhere in the world.

These "endogenous" causes of crisis would be aggravated by external factors.

With the arrival of Mikhaïl Gorbachev in power in 1985, the risk of Soviet intervention disappeared. But Germany and the Vatican were seen in Belgrade (with Austria) as favouring Slovene and Croat separatism and globally weaving an anti-Yugoslav and anti-Serb conspiracy. There was no longer a "common enemy" as factor of internal cohesion.

Parallel to this, the break-up of the federation and the system was catalysed by a foreign debt of more than 20 billion dollars by the turning point of the 1980s. The increase in the price of oil in the 1970s when the country indebted itself in a decentralised import strategy, then the increase of interest rates on private debt brought about by that of US rates in 1980 contributed, equally with the internal mess, to this " debt crisis" - which similarly struck Hungary, Rumania, Poland and the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

The "visible hand" of the International Monetary Fund weighed on the "structural adjustments", demanded ever more urgently. The "classic" neoliberal recipes, imposed as universals at this time had a specific impact in Yugoslavia: the market and privatisation finished off the disintegration of the system of self-managed social ownership, aggravating the overall crisis of the whole of the Federation. Faced with four figure inflation, the liberal prime minister Ante Markovic chose, in 1989, the road of "shock therapy" inspired by the IMF recipes: the new privatisation laws that he implemented sought to break the social resistance to a market which was supposed to reunify the economy and to give it coherence.

At the end of the 1980s, no unifying factor was at work on the social-political level.

Whereas the country experienced thousands of atomised strikes ,the workers of Vukovar, a multi-ethnic town in Croatia ,came to Belgrade calling for a general strike. But they would find no political (or trade union) relays

for their action. The old protagonists of a socialist alternative critical of Titoism mobilised in 1968 had been repressed and its protagonists had collapsed into the nationalist opposition, or again, particularly if young, had opted for neoliberalism, not forgetting those who had preferred exodus or passivity. Those who remained in the different Communist Parties were subjected to the discredit of the system and the parallel rise of nationalism and a collapse into neoliberalism of a significant part of the former Communists.

The Yugoslav Peoples Army (JNA) had been consolidated at the institutional level to attempt to limit the factors of disintegration. But it defended in fact its privileges on the scale of a federal state, without real political coherence, although attached to the tradition of the Titoist Yugoslav resistance. It was wary, from this viewpoint, of Serbian nationalism. Contrary to what has often been said, it intervened in Slovenia, in a "phoney war" (with its soldiers unarmed) on the orders of the head of government the Croat liberal Ante Markovic - the only one to really have a Yugoslav orientation - and not at the request of Slobodan Milosevic: the latter had neither the power to do so, nor the intention in this sense, while he colluded behind the scenes with the Slovene leader, Milan Kucan to manage the separation. This intervention (which led to several dozen deaths in this army, faced with the Slovene Territorial Defence) produced a major crisis in an army which remained "Yugoslav" before being nationalist; accelerating the independence of Slovenia and the disintegration of the Yugoslav army (by splits and purges) on the basis of new independent states. After the declarations of independence by Bosnia, Belgrade withdrew what remained of the Yugoslav army of the republic, leaving to the militias of the Bosnian Serb nationalist leaders the essence of the existing infrastructures and armaments. Like other generals faithful to the past of Titoist resistance, the Serbian general Jovan Divjak rallied the Armija of Sarajevo against Serb nationalism in Bosnia. Based on conscription, the rump Yugoslav army established in 1992 (Serbia-Montenegro) remained much less the direct instrument of the government in Belgrade than the paramilitary police forces.

The reformist party of Ante Markovic was the only political current opposed to the various nationalisms on the Yugoslav scale - on free market bases. And it is quite simply not true that liberal capitalism had as its objective and interest the dismantling of all of Yugoslavia. The IMF, the US and most European governments (Germany and the

Vatican apart) had initially hoped rather for a liberal Yugoslav state, and supported Ante Markovic, fearing the destabilising aspect of secessionist nationalisms. Pragmatism prevailed in the evolving alliances and the use of conflict - but in a very different context from the Balkan wars at the beginning of the 20th century and the two world wars between great powers. Independently of any privileged alliance and outside of conspiracy theories, it was primarily the intrinsic mechanisms of neoliberalism and its prescriptions which were responsible disintegration of the federation - rendering European construction fragile in a logic of competition and privatisation destroying social and national cohesion.

To the workers, the neoliberalism of Ante Markovic offered generalised competition, job insecurity, and wage austerity wrapped in a share ownership which challenged in practice the self-managed status and its protections.

As for the great mass of small peasants, the neoliberal programme brought them nothing; on the contrary, it threatened to suppress the social security and protections won under the Titoist regime.

There remains the urban middle layers and intellectuals and the bureaucracy of the party/state. The neoliberal project of privatisation, far from rallying them on a Yugoslav basis, would on the contrary differentiate them - each seeking from the state of "its" community protections or "clientelist" guarantees of privatisation which were more credible than those available on the Yugoslav scale. The absence of real Yugoslav bureaucratic unity also produced bourgeois aspirants of al nationalities and an initial uncertainty at the territorial level of the state which would manage the transformation of ownership.

Although conserving a certain "Yugoslavism" and a "socialist" label, the regime of Slobodan Milosevic was not the bearer of any programme, or orientation which could yield a progressive alternative which would be attractive to the peoples of the various nationalities. And this is not only an effect of external "propaganda" demonising him, no more than his fall was the product of external actions waged against his regime - contrary to what has been claimed by many: on the contrary, international sanctions against Serbia and the NATO strengthened Milosevic and postponed his fall. The latter, in September 2000, was not the product of a revolutionary uprising (although there were real mobilisations of youth and popular mass demonstrations to confirm his electoral

defeat), nor the victory of his discredited neoliberal and pro-NATO adversaries. Much more ambiguous and opaque than these propaganda images, the fall of Milosevic illustrates first the discredit of his corrupt and clientelist regime which had won a relative majority in various elections only because of massive abstention and an opposition which appeared not only divided but often worse than him.

It was the appearance of a "credible" candidate (discovered by polling!) [3] that changed the situation - with the decision of the opposition to support him by forming a front with nothing else in common than being "anti-Milosevic", whereas the popularity of Kostunica stemmed from three factors: he had not been corrupted either by the clientelism of the regime or by that of his western-funded adversaries; he had radically criticised the NATO war; and he had reproached Milosevic not for his Greater Serbia orientation but for having in his eyes betrayed, in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo by signing the Western peace plans. We are very far from the explanations founded on the apparent image of a NATO "victory" opening an era of "progress". But this new "Yugoslav" president no longer had a country (the rump Yugoslavia gave way to the state of Serbia-Montenegro, on the verge of breaking up) ; he no longer had any coherent socio-economic political programme to offer in resistance to the neoliberal polices that his erstwhile allies would radicalise. The effects of these policies explain the difficulties in building political majorities and the rise of the vote for the nationalist right.

Slobodan Milosevic was not the cause of all the evils and that is why his fall has resolved nothing. He embodied an eclectic politics and ideology, in evolution and thus differing, indeed in rivalry and in part in conflict with the systematic orientation of a Greater Serbia and of his adversaries/allies - and that is why he was a point of support for the great powers in their peace plans. But he was not a progressive alternative -he buried Titoism in promoting as in the rest of Yugoslavia the statisation/privatisation of ownership and the dismantling of national rights - and thus he could not be a response either to neoliberalism or Great Serb nationalism with which he not only flirted, but incorporated into his "Yugoslav" past.

This composite reality is at the source of the incoherency of the theses of the prosecutor Carla del Ponte, as well as those who have presented the Milosevic regime as an adversary of the world order and the great powers. It alone allows us to understand why the Milosevic regime has been perceived in a contradictory fashion. We can clarify this by

retuning to the inegalitarian recomposition of the nation states emerging from the crisis of the Titoist system.

II- From the dismantling of Titoism (social ownership and multinational federation) to the recomposition of dominant/dominated nation states

The general causes, internal and external of the crisis of Titoist Yugoslavia do not exhaust the debate because they do not necessarily imply war. If we reject the theses of fatal interethnic hatreds, we must examine the political actors in the disintegration, and the manner in which the ownership rights and national rights which accounted for the popularity of Titoist Yugoslavia - unlike the first Yugoslavia of the interwar period [4] - gave way to a decomposition without end.

The equation of all nationalisms, while having a partial basis, founders on the relations of power and domination. But in the decomposition of Titoist Yugoslavia we should bring out the dominant role of the governments in position in Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia, who imposed their choices on others.

1) Statism as a form of challenge to the socio economic system and the multinational federation

The transformation of the states as regimes taking decisions on ownership and national rights is of central importance to the "Yugoslav transition". These regimes have of course used history, memory, media propaganda, traumas and fear

But in the context of multidimensional crisis, debt and inflation of the 1980s the neoliberal precepts had to deal with an essential question to which they had not responded in advance what state was going to privatise the resources and wealth embodied in social ownership, on what territory, with what "citizenship" and "historic" legitimation?

a) Towards the territorialisation of ownership

On the socio-economic level, it was necessary to "prevaricate" over the rights of self-management to challenge "from above" and in opacity [5] - in complete constitutional illegality - the constitution of 1974 avoided tendencies to interpret and manage social ownership like that of the state, or again like that of the "groups:" workplace collectives, technocrats, bankers and so on), the law imposed a societal and self-management based approach. That obviously did not give a simple answer as to how to articulate "society" in its power of management and control. But it legally forbade the "sale" of

this ownership to private interests, without democratic consultation affecting the whole of society. Yet that is what all the new states - Serbia included - would do, primarily for their own profit.

The logic of privatisation advanced without speaking its name and without respecting any kind of societal "constituent" procedure, although it amounted to a challenge to the Yugoslav constitution. Behind the scenes of a federation which was increasingly paralysed and racked by corruption, three figure hyperinflation and debt, a certain "Milosevic commission" in May 1088, had made initial proposals, drawn up by neoliberal economists and directly drawn from the IMF recipe book, notes Susan Woodward [6]. The last Yugoslav government of Ante Markovic introduced a "shock therapy" of neoliberal inspiration against "inflation" (n reality against the self-management rights resistant to the market) in 1989. The new laws on "social ownership" were voted through by the federal institutions in which Slobodan Milosevic participated along with his Croat, Slovene and other colleagues. Statisation and share ownership would squeeze, as in a vice, the societal logic (shares were initially to be distributed free to the workers, to sweeten the pill).

The federal laws were then prolonged after the break up of the federation (Slovene and Croat secessions in June 1991) by the new independent states. Even in Slovenia, where there was no war and international sanctions to slow the pace of privatisation, social ownership was far from easy to "bury". it flourished in all the laws of Slovene as of Serb privatisation [7] in the early years of the "transition".

But everywhere, state territorialisation and commodification of property rights was radically modifying the status of workers, now dismissible [8].

b) Towards the territorialisation of "nations"

The "states" (republics), without being artificial realities on the historic level, had not set up the federation it is the latter which had made them emerge, recognised or consolidated, articulating a dual notion avoiding both the normative crystallisation and the narrow territorialsiation of "nations" Titoist Yugoslavia, distinguished citizenship - an objective notion defining civic rights and duties across the territory as a whole - and "nation" or "peoples" treated in subjective fashion and open to evolving individual choices (one could declare oneself "undifferentiated" at the national level)

❖ The Slav "peoples" were recognised as such everywhere where they were found independently of their percentage, and in a non-territorialized manner

❖ Yugoslavia was then not only a multinational federation, but based on republics which, in general, were also thus.

Resistance and defiance towards the possibility of the emergence of a "Yugoslavian-ness" - which the first Yugoslavia had wished to impose in a unitary fashion - had not stopped the spontaneous emergence in the censuses of a national category of "Yugoslavs" based on mixed marriages and cultural osmosis.

Croatia was in this context defined at the level of its constitution as the state of the Croatian people and of the Serbian people (12% of the population) because both were historic, secular, evolving components in their mixes and distinctions. This recognition of the Serbs of Croatia as a people was essential after the traumas of the Second World War It functioned as a protection of living together which did not imply a separate "territorialisation", but a rejection of the policies of ethnic cleansing waged by the Croat Ustashi against the Serbs in the name of "Croatness" which rejected the Jews, the Serbs, the Roma - but incorporated the Muslims (and thus the territory) of Bosnia.

The case of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BH) was both similar and different. The treatment of the "peoples" of Bosnia was the same - no territorialisation or recognition of the multinational reality dependent on some percentage (there was moreover no absolute majority in Bosnia, the Muslims (in the "national" sense of Titosm, distinct from citizenship) [9] - called Bosnians since 1994 - formed the relative majority of around 40%; against around 1/3 of Serbs and some 18% of Croats. Bosnia was then the state of its three peoples; but this notion had a subjective, historic, cultural sense integrating religion, with a freely determined choice in censuses, and not territorialised; all being at the same time citizens of Bosnia and of Yugoslavia. But this also protected everyone against the" historic" desires of Serb and Croat nationalism, each with their project of forced assimilation of the Muslim Slavs [10] of Bosnia: BH belonged neither to one nor the other, but to those who lived with the black and white pages of their own history and conflicts, mixed and neighbouring, their identities evolving, so magnificently recounted by the Nobel prize-winner Ivo Andric or by Mesa Selimovic in this "Death and the Dervish".

However, the non Slav communities were not a " people" -because of the idea that they had an external state of reference (with the exception of the Roma, an ethnic national community without a state)

Thus, for example, the Albanians of Yugoslavia (who represented half of all Albanians, and who were much more numerous than the Montenegrins) were not recognised as a "people" in Kosovo and in Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, to avoid the status, perceived as discriminatory indeed threatened with assimilation, of a "minority", Titoism had invented the notion of "nationality" (narodnost), without right to self determination and thus distinct from "nation" (narod), but capable of having similar rights Notably that of a locally official language Or representation in the federal bodies similar to other communities (in the rotation of the presidency, for example, each year attributed to another community, the Albanians counted as Slav peoples) The transformation of Kosovo into a quasi-republic, itself multinational, reflected this "Titoist" tendency towards a greater recognition of the diversity of the peoples of the federation

The growing confederalisation of the system from the mid 1960s crystallised in the Constitution of 1974 which gave the republican units and provinces increased rights, transforming them into basic actors of the system (in the control of taxes and external revenues as well as the nomination of cadres in the congresses which henceforth took place at the level of republics in autonomous fashion, allowing an "ethnicisation" of the composition of the institutions).

But in becoming key actors of the system, they tended to be bearers of a right of self-determination rivalling that which was recognised at the constitutional level to the "peoples". From another viewpoint, the procedure of dissolution of the common state also concerned the social actors, self-management, in that the outcome of the labour of each and the common patrimony belonged to everyone.

Globally, with the crisis of the 1990s all the underpinnings of Titiosm tended then to be challenged under a "statist" form.

2) New relations of domination

But three big blocs were distinguished at the level of the leaders in position, the first two playing in fact a dominant role imposing their choices on others - bypassing any really concerted procedure of dissolution.

First bloc: the new powers of Croatia and Slovenia, emerging from the first free elections of 1990, choosing to leave the sinking ship.

But Slovenia, together with Slobodan Milosevic, modified its constitution unilaterally to affirm the right of self-determination as right of the Slovene people, which coincided as it happens with the state [11].

Serbian nationalism acted as a foil in Slovenia as in Croatia - with a reciprocal game of mirrors in Serbia against the "anti-Serb" peoples. But the real adversary, whose policies were boycotted, was in Slovenia, Croatia as in Serbia, Ante Markovic who sought to build a neoliberal project of privatisation on the Yugoslav scale - with the support of the IMF and the main western powers (except, then, Germany, Austria and the Vatican).

The solidarity affirmed for a time in Slovenia with the Albanians of Kosovo in 1989 (in fact to weaken Belgrade) was very relative and rapidly forgotten: the rich republics were no longer interested in funding federal development or the resources which went to Kosovo The few intellectuals who, with the Croat economist Branko Horvat, fervent defender of Yugoslav self-management, launched a petition in favour of a "Yugoslav initiative" to manage the constitutional conflicts on Kosovo were rapidly marginalized in their respective republics. In Croatia Ustashi symbols reappeared, as did the Croat nationalist discourse embodied in Tudjman who prepared the unilateral modification of the Croat constitution suppressing its multinational Titoist dimension

Second bloc: Slobodan Milosevic and his allies of the "Serbian bloc ", made up of representatives from Montenegro, the Vojvodine and Kosovo taken back at the end of the 1980s by the constitutional changes challenging the rights won under Titoism: the ambiguities of the 1974 constitution making these provinces quasi-republics were suppressed by clearly re-establishing the subordinate status of the provinces to Belgrade. This logic can be characterised as "Great Serbian" (as Lenin spoke of the Great Russian behaviour of Stalin in Georgia and elsewhere), a major regression in relation to the rights won under Titoism but in synch with French and international law in relation to "minorities"...

It was not then a policy of genocide, nor of ethnic cleansing (Kosovo, with around 2 million people, is 80% Albanian) - moreover Milosevic has not even been indicted on the

question of Kosovo concerning the whole period of the 1990s - and until the turning point of 1998-1999 this was a situation of "Neither war nor peace" dominated by the peaceful resistance of Ibrahim Rugova. There was on the contrary a desire for political, cultural and socio-ethnic "re-Serbification" of the province (blockage of sale of Serbian lands, encouragement of the employment of Serbs instead of Albanians in the public sector or with Albanians being massively laid off for not respecting new laws, encouragement of the return of Serbs to the province, notably those fleeing the conflicts in other republics).

Beyond that, the reincorporation of Kosovo was, for the master of Belgrade, not part of a project of a "Greater Serbia" but of a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia incorporating all the Serbs, centralist on a federal (and not confederal) mode, applying a majoritarian principle to the benefit of the Serbs (and no longer a confederal Yugoslavia where the federal bodies functioned by consensus - thus independently of the numerical force of the national communities).

Milosevic's break with Titoism took place then on the two levels invoked: it began at the end of 1989 on the level of property rights, it continued with the challenge to the status of autonomy acquired by Kosovo in the constitution of 1974; the whole being translated by the suppression of the reference to socialism with the establishment of the 3rd and last rump Yugoslavia (Serbia-Montenegro) - all of this, which touches on the fundamental constitutional rights of the people, being done without any popular consultation.

Third bloc: Macedonia and Bosnia Herzegovina, which Titoist Yugoslavia had transformed and consolidated [12], treated as "artificial creations" of Tito by their neighbours. These two republics were rendered particularly fragile by the crisis of the federation, as much in their relations with their now threatening neighbours as on the internal plane, because of the diversity of their populations, polarised between several "solutions " in the defence of their rights. We should first look at the entanglements and conflicts through their eyes.

At the turning point of the 1990s, the leaders of the two republics tried desperately to contain a Yugoslav framework, against Croat and Slovene separatism: on the socio-economic level, as less developed republics, they were favourable to a more redistributive and federative logic than Serbia defended against the richer republics, but they fought at the same time against the departure of Slovenia and Croatia before the fear of

finding themselves politically in a Yugoslavia dominated by a Serb nationalist renewal. Their proposal was an asymmetric compromise, so as to maintain together all the republics, with more confederal rights for republics who wanted them and the maintenance of a common framework...

This formula was rejected both by the Croat and Slovene leaders and by Slobodan Milosevic: they would determine and impose their conception of the right of self-determination, each in their own way.

❖ The self-determination of the people and of the Slovene state were superimposed, except that it was not supposed to be unilaterally determined, without a procedure of consultation with the other peoples of the federation, without discussion on the management and sharing of the heritage, of the common "patrimony", on the Yugoslav scale - it was nonetheless in the framework of the federation that Slovenia had won its rights as a state, consolidated its language and its national rights. But the Slovene constitution was transformed to affirm the right to a unilateral choice.

❖ Self-determination was interpreted by Franjo Tudjman as self-determination of the Croat state (through a majority in a referendum of citizens) to smother any right as a "people" for the Serbs of Croatia; the new constitution adjusted the law and Croatia was defined as the state of the Croat people and other citizens and minorities. But the logic of the negotiations in Bosnia was to there demand a right as " people" for the Croats by seeking to territorialize it in the direction of a state-based separatism.

❖ In Serbia, the regime of Slobodan Milosevic would also play on two levels but in coming closer to the French model: Kosovo was reintegrated in the Serbian state, Serbianness being defined as republican and universal on the territory - the Albanians having the full right to be Serbs. The status of minority was codified in this framework, but it is the right of a Serb "people" which was advanced at the beginning of the 1990s in Croatia and in Bosnia, tending to territorialize it according to a state-based separatist logic (hence the self-proclamation of Serb autonomous republics): which was rejected by the Serbs - the status of minority, or dissolution - was imposed on the Albanians

Placed before a dilemma (a menacing independence or insertion in a Serbo-slavia) the leaders of Macedonia and BH would decide to proceed to referendums on self-determination towards independence, under the pressure of international diplomacy: these

procedures were supposed to reflect a democratic choice and independence would, it was said, prevent war.

None of this was true.

3) The majoritarian referendums - denials of democracy trapping all the minorities

Procedures uniquely based on "citizenship" and involving a majority vote, taken on a republic-by-republic basis, when the national questions remained sensitive and intertwined were denials of real democracy. They produced a generalisation of the crisis of "minorities", of their fears, and of the use of these latter in war-based strategies.

❖ The Serbs boycotted this type of referendum in a Croatia which suppressed their status as people - but they were also propelled towards violence against their neighbours by militias coming from Belgrade inciting the proclamation of the "autonomous Serbian republics" within a separatist logic.

❖ The Albanians of Kosovo boycotted the elections and institutions imposed in the new constitutional framework by Serbia in the province and unilaterally proclaimed the autonomous republic of Kosovo, electing a parliament and a president, Ibrahim Rugova: they would peacefully organise separate school and health institutions until 1998.

❖ The Albanians who represented around 25% of Macedonia also boycotted the referendum in this new state whose 1991 constitution only recognised one people (Slavo-Macédonian) and its official language. But the measures taken by the Macedonian President Gligorov of association of Albanian minorities with the government helped postpone the outbreak of violence. However, the inequality of status of Albanians, and notably of their language, would render them necessarily receptive to the evolution of the situation in Kosovo. The Ohrid accords of 2003, after the violent explosions which ravaged the "FYROM" (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - a name used to placate Greek nationalism), would modify the constitution, suppressing any reference to a Slavo-Macedonian people, but also introducing rights and procedures of collective decision, and strengthened the status of the Albanian language. In other words it went in the direction of recognition of a multinational state.

❖ In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the status of the three peoples was not changed following the pluralist elections of December 1990, and the three nationalist parties promised to govern together to win over the protest vote. The president of the collegial presidency was to

be a Muslim - Alija Izetbegovic. And, conscious of the danger for Bosnia of the break up of the federation, it was the latter who had, with the Macedonian president Gligorov, defended until the end the maintenance of a Yugoslav logic. Independence would disturb the fragile equilibrium, under the pressure of the transformations and orientations of the neighbouring states - Serbia and Croatia.

War of aggression or civil war? The war which ravaged BH was both. And we cannot understand it in its breadth and violence or the part of the Muslim victims without considering the Milosevic-Tudjman alliance, and the links between Bosno-Serb and Bosno-Croat nationalisms using the fear of an "Islamist danger".

III - The false thesis of the single aggressor: from the Milosevic-Tudjman alliance to Dayton - black hole and test of the dominant analyses and the ICTY

1) From the gelatinisation of the differences between the two regimes to their mirror game

We know well today what the "socialist" label was worth in Eastern Europe and in the world. The fact that Milosevic's party bore it has been a catastrophic trap for the Yugoslav left. We have stressed the major ruptures that he had inaugurated with the best elements of Titoism. And at the international level, the lucid and critical analysis of those who pursued rightist policies with left, worse still "socialist" labels, is imposed with an essential vigilance on all those who wish to restore meaning to words and to choices.

Some have also favourably contrasted the Yugoslavism of Milosevic with the nationalism of Tudjman. But that is to forget that Serbian nationalism dominated the first Yugoslavia in a dictatorial fashion and that a unitary "Yugoslavism" is another nationalism. In short, one can be "nationalist" in various ways on various territorial scales. Indeed we have already stressed that the Yugoslavism of Milosevic was at the idéological and political level (in his programme and alliances) oriented towards Serb domination in Kosovo, and a logic connected on many points with the first Yugoslavia against the gains of the second.

On the other hand the national questions and national rights should be distinguished from "nationalism" as a chauvinist ideology imposed on the backs of others. . But when it is about cultures in the broadest sense (linked to history, religion, language - without any unique and normative genesis), the rights of peoples to sovereignty - that is to say

responsibility, dignity and legal status - the collective defence of national rights is legitimate and necessary. Self-determination in this sense does not imply any uniform or universal response, rights can be defended and realised in pluri-national state frameworks. But the correct treatment of national rights imposes reciprocity, equivalence of rights and status.

The defence of the rights of Serbs against fears and real threats in Croatia was completely legitimate if it did not become transformed into violent aggression against the Croat neighbours, imposed by militias coming from Belgrade - and if it involves equivalent recognition of status and of rights for the Albanian communities.

More substantially, for a "socialist", the question of social ownership and social rights independent of nationality would involve a major difference with the "Yugoslav" orientation of Milosevic.

Both the regime of Slobodan Milosevic and that of Franjo Tudjman had the same approach to social ownership, with its clientelism (and nepotism) in the later privatisations; the same aggressive degradation of the national rights won under Titoism by the minority communities of each regime - Kosovo would remain a "Serbian internal affair" while the Krajina remained an "internal Croatian affair"; both combined the action of paramilitary forces behind the scenes with a parliamentary and pluralist regime (sufficiently pluralist, moreover, for both to be in the minority in certain regions or towns of their respective republics); both adopted a profile of victim rather than warmonger; and both sought compromises making them interlocutors of the great powers who were more "moderate" than their far right; both considered Bosnia-Herzegovina and the rights consolidated there as artificial creations of Tito.

The Serbo-Croat alliance of 1939 for the establishment of a Croat Banovina in the framework of the first Yugoslavia on the basis of a carve-up of Bosnia-Herzegovina was certainly at the heart of the Milosevic Tudjman meeting of 1991. Each regime had paid lip service to the integrality of Bosnia - and the recognition of the independence of Bosnia by Tudjman's HDZ reflected this. But the ethnic division of Bosnia was within the "logic" of the break-up of Yugoslavia - in Belgrade it was argued that Bosnia was a "mini-Yugoslavia" and that if the frontiers of the one were challenged, why should those of the other remain intact? And when the Western world rejoiced in the destruction of the federation and the Titoist system, why then maintain this "Titoist creation" - the

republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina? Better still, we know how much in France and beyond the notion of "Muslim" in the ethnic-national sense was not understood - this is moreover why it was replaced by that of "Bosnians". The "genesis" of the nations in the Balkans had been structured largely by religions - which organised social functions, education and justice in the former Ottoman millets; and this had been and remained one of the "cultural" and historic components, in the broad sense, of the Croat people (predominantly Catholic) and the Serb people (predominantly Orthodox).

But with the end of Titoist Yugoslavia, it was possible to adapt the strategy of ethnic division of Bosnia. With Bosnia being a state of its three peoples, Belgrade and Zagreb pushed the line that "Muslim" = terrorist; and basting themselves on the reality of the known Islamic convictions of Alija Izetbegovic, worked for a "self-determination" of the two other peoples, on territorialised bases. The reality, the meaning of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was there.

There was a mirror game between the two regimes and the predominant propaganda opposing the two regimes - either demonising exclusively the Serbo-Communist aggressor; or extolling it exclusively as the only progressive regime which resisted the great powers and NATO.

Tudjman's policy was all the more hidden and exonerated because it was denounced in Belgrade.

And reciprocally, the reactionary reality of the Tudjman regime blinded the defenders of the Milosevic regime (or led them into a culpable silence) to the dirty work being carried out by the regime's militias and its mercenary Arkan or/and by the militias of the Serb nationalist allies sof the Socialist Party in the early 1990s, in Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia.

2) The false thesis of the single aggressor - the ICTY tested

The thesis of the Serbo-Communist single aggressor and propagator of policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide is false from four points of view:

❖ it conceals the importance and mendacious aspects of the campaign of the international Croat lobby whitewashing the Tudjman regime of Greater Croatia;

❖ it conceals what the leaders in Belgrade and Zagreb had in common in these years of "transition", the alliance on the backs of the minorities of their states which lay at the heart of the drama of Bosnia's Muslims;

❖ it does not characterise correctly the Milosevic regime; the thesis hides its composite and evolving reality - the "simplification" hinders the critique of Serbian nationalism and the "Greater Serbia" policy;

❖ it conceals the real-politik of the great powers and the relationship of Milosevic to the great powers.

a) Again on Greater Croatia - first silence of the ICTY

The anti-Serb and anti-Semitic discourse of Tudjman, the return of the Ustachi symbols and militias, incorporated in the official Croat army, the demonisation of "Serbo-Communism" to prettify the Croat pseudo "democrats", the rehabilitation of a fascist past and leaders were all denounced in Belgrade and largely hidden or minimised in the mainstream media: Croat nationalism was, it was said, uniquely "defensive"

It is essential to distinguish the violence of the aggressors from the legitimate defence of those attacked. Yet is it necessary to verify that those who are victims here are not aggressors there. Serb nationalism borrowed a lot from Zionist propaganda - the genocide of yesterday committed by the Ustachi covering and legitimising the revanchist policies of ethnic cleansing today Alain Finkielkraut, rightly indignant at this use of past genocides to justify aggression today, unhappily fell into a total blindness on the reactionary Croat ideology and policies [13].

Indeed the objective of "Greater Croatia" had an institutional, ideological and military power which was "visible" to whoever wanted to see it [14], with two aspects:

❖ on the internal level, the reconstruction of a selective "Croatness" as the basis of the new constitution and modification of the status of the Serbs to return them to the status of "minority". To "consolidate" this regression, a violent ethnic cleansing was necessary which reduced their percentage from 12% to less than 5% with the military operation of summer 1995 which expelled several hundred thousand Serbs.

❖ The logic of Greater Croatia was extended on the external level towards Bosnia. At first hypocritically: with the right to vote in Croatia accorded to the Croats of Bosnia anticipating an incorporation in the same single state; but also from 1991, when the sovereignty of BH was recognised, by the implementation in practice of a policy of territorial expansion. There are several variants: one, advocated by the Ustachi troops, sought to aggregate the whole of

Bosnia and Croatia - thus "respecting" publicly the integrity of BH. The other, more "moderate" line defended by Tudjman's party (HDZ), worked for the territorialisation of the Croats of BH in Herceg-Bosna, next to Croatia, with its "capital", Mostar - so as to be able to demand the "self-determination" of the Croat people.

The thesis of the "sole Serb aggressor" was supported by the discourse from Sarajevo at the beginning of the war. To struggle on two fronts and denounce those that the United States supported was certainly difficult: the resistance of the Armija of Sarajevo, multiethnic and not only "Muslim" needed weapons. Croatia and Herceg-Bosna were on the road for the delivery of all aid sent to the resistance - and were also the only possible "rearguard" for the Muslim refugees. But it was a dangerous rearguard, a hostage taking which muzzled discourse in a disastrous fashion [15]. Inside the solidarity movement against ethnic cleansing, Croat pressures to designate only one aggressor - and one ethnic type of "rapist" - were terrible - the feminist movement knew it, notably Rada Ivekovic, a Croat feminist denounced as a "witch" because she had dared to say that the rapists were also Croat [16].

But after the anti-Serb ethnic cleansing, Herzeg-Bosna was ravaged in 1992-1994 by a policy of ethnic cleansing of Muslims by the Croat nationalist troops, with the razing of all the Muslim neighbourhoods of Mostar, in the shadow of the symmetrical policy carried out by the Serb militias.

The involvement in this violence of the Croat army under the control of Minister of Defence Gojko Susak was direct. Under pressure from the US - fearing the creation of a Muslim rump state, martyr and destabiliser at the heart of Bosnia, an orientation also rejected by the majority of Bosnian Muslims - a third variant emerged in the attempt to unify the Croat majority regions with the Muslim majority regions in the "Croat-Muslim federation". This "reconciliation" to coalesce against the Serb militias has bequeathed a "federation" which remains fragile to this day.

In these two dimensions, internal and external, the Croat regime was not as it claims a simple "victim" of Serb aggression, still less a friend of the Muslims, whose refugees were real hostages. It was known about and written about at the time. But today the publication of the Croat archives [17] witnesses to it in all clarity.

The silence or minimisation of these realties - on the political level or that of the "justice" of the ICTY is unacceptable and

counterproductive as to the possibility of combating the blindness of what was Milosevic's policy: the hundreds of thousands of Serb refugees in Serbia and their lives are sufficient to undermine the thesis of a single aggressor nationalism.

b) The alliance of Serb and Croat nationalisms against the "Islamist danger" at the heart of the war in Bosnia: what does the ICTY say about it?

The Milosevic-Tudjman meeting of 1991 was certainly decisive in the implementation of the political-military discourse and strategies. The regimes in Belgrade and Zagreb - but also the Bosno-Serb and Bosno-Croat parties, presented themselves on the international and internal level as a "rampart against the Islamist danger" - and the internal separatism relied on such a "danger" to justify the carve-up of Bosnia-Herzegovina, legitimised in its turn by the "right of self-determination" of peoples.

They would use the Islamic declaration drawn up in; 1970 by Alija Izetbegovic and reproduced at the beginning of the 1990s to identify a false equation: majority of Muslims (in the sense of people) equals Islamic or Islamist majority (with all the ambiguities in the meaning of the word, quickly assimilated to Islamist terrorism).

The thesis had "self-realising" dimensions: squeezed between two aggressor nationalisms the Muslims would supply some 70% of the 100,000 victims of ethnic cleansing, and when you are attacked for being "Muslim", you have plenty of reasons to affirm yourself as such. The legitimate solidarity of the Muslim world and the arrival in Bosnia of Mujahidin would increase the concerns manipulated by Belgrade and Zagreb.

Alija Izetbegoviic, for his part, oscillated between an Islamic project (sometimes ready to accept a "Muslim state", even a rump one, in the "peace" negotiations) and Bosnian Muslim nationalism, stressing first the maintenance of the frontiers of BH; and he was in conflict, even inside the Bosnian Muslims, with the orientation of a resistance built around secularism and a mixed Bosnia [18].

Because it was mainly in the Muslim majority regions like Tuzla, that "citizen" parties would make the most impact, contradicting the equation evoked later. The SDA, the party of Alija Izetbegovic was itself traversed by numerous currents and splits distanced from Muslim fundamentalism. The project of a Muslim state was not attractive in the Bosnian context - including for those who

wished to propagate a religious renewal in protecting it from the clientélist behaviour and corrupt practices which arose from integration in the government - visible in the movement of Alija Izetbegovic, as in the practise ce of the other parties in power.

If there were various Islamist currents it was then false to claim that BH had broken up because threatened by an "Islamist danger" - and if this latter was to grow, it was in the first place in reaction to the aggression suffered by the Muslim peoples.

The neighbours of yesterday were not, in general, the direct protagonists of violence [19] - and wished massively to return to live in their places of origin, with a great nostalgia for the past, But the ethnic cleansing functioned in the form of communicating vessels: people who had suffered ethnic cleansing were encouraged to come and live in the houses of others who had themselves been attacked and had fled their homes. The leaders in Belgrade and Zagreb, relayed by the Bosno-Serb and Bosno-Croat regimes would propagate fear through their media; while on the ground the militias propagated violence and hate to separate those who lived together.

Any ethnic map of Bosnia of 1989 shows that no part of BH was "homogeneous" ethnically. But Herceg-Bosna was next to Croatia and the Croat population was relatively concentrated there, although the towns - like Mostar - were not homogeneous; the Serb population was nearly twice as numerous as the Croats (around 33% against 18%) and much more dispersed in the territories which were mixed and far from Serbia: the project of building a Serbian state - the republika srpska - that the constitution of Dayton recognised as and "entity" of BH was then organically a bearer of greater violence.

But everywhere where the towns were mixed, there was ethnic cleansing with the goal of building states that "held" to expel the populations unsympathetic to the project of linking up to the big neighbours.

The instability of successive "peace plans" up until Dayton was fundamentally linked to the progress on the ground of these state projects: "the Islamist danger" as point of departure and arrival (with evocation of the presence of Bin Laden in Bosnia) - from which he fears and the will for secession; this latter attached to a right of self-determination as "people" - without discussing the fashion in which the "choices" have been established, the origin of the violence is seen in the appeal to resist of Alija Izetbegovic who is, in this "optic" the real "warmonger" [20].

Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic at the head of the Bosno-Serb nationalist militias and Mate Boban at the head of the Bosno-Croat nationalist militias were associated with the negotiation of the "peace plans" up until Dayton. They met at Graz in Austria and on the ground they worked together around Sarajevo besieged by a "sole aggressor". The first had received the weapons and infrastructure of the Yugoslav popular army, withdrawing from BH; the second were directly aided by the Croat army. This is the central cause of the wars of ethnic cleansing and the reason why the Muslim population (less than 45% of the population) accounted for around 70% of the victims.

It should be repeated: to see and condemn one without seeing and condemning the other is criminal, unjust and stupid - leading to the Serbs, themselves victims of ethnic cleansing, having the deep feeling of suffering from an international"anti-Serb" conspiracy. Which can only lead to their own blindness to the crimes committed in their name.

c) the evolving Yugo-Serb policy of Milosevic, another test for the ICTY

If the "anti-Serb" media campaign was mendacious and counter-productive, the criticisms of Milosevic were not "only" lies. There was certainly a "Yugo-Serb" orientation from the Belgrade government, using, until the end of the 1980s the fears of the Serb minorities in Kosovo, Croatia and Bosnia; certainly a policy of Serb domination was reaffirmed towards the Albanians of Kosovo in an aggressive fashion by the constitutional changes in Serbia; there was also, at the beginning of the 1990s the decomposition/purge of the Yugoslav popular army (the JNA) and the collapse of what remained behind the Belgrade government as rearguard of the Serb militias in the operations led in Croatia; and there was certainly an alliance of Milosevic with the Great Serb nationalist far right of the Radical Party of Vojislav Seselj giving this latter the resources for his aggressive policy with its relays in Croatia and Bosnia.

But this alliance was interrupted for some years, then renewed under the NATO bombs.

Because from 1991, Slobodan Milosevic would meet Franjo Tudjman to negotiate the essence on the backs of the populations concerned : the ethnic division of Bosnia. The political choice of Milosevic was also to attempt to reinsert himself in the international "accord", in return for approval of the UN peace plans in Croatia, then in Bosnia - thus his reversal of alliance. Namely the

renunciation of the logic of secession, less open and short term.

It was then that Milosevic renounced his alliance with the Serb leader in Croatia Milan Babic who killed himself in the Hague some days before the death of Milosevic. If Babic had been convinced by the prosecutor Carla del Ponte to testify against Milosevic in return for a reduction in sentence, he was in the days to come supposed to be called back to the court by Milosevic in his phase of defence. Certainly, this "hostile witness" was able to underline how much Belgrade "knew" of what happened, and allowed the nationalist militias freedom of action, or relied on its own mercenaries in the dirty work of ethnic cleansing. The uprising of Serbs of Croatia was both reaction and résistance to the multiple aggressions inflicted by the regime of Tudjman and anti-Croat ethnic cleansing perpetrated in a logic of secession. But Milan Babicshould have also witnessed to the fact that Slobodan Milosevic used his weight to arrest this logic and supported the UN plans provisionally freezing the situation, against Babic himself who rejected them!

Also the Bosno-Serb leader Biljana Plavcic was to be another "hostile witness" that prosecutor Carla del Ponte wanted to use against Milosevic. She did not call him, although it is not known why. The fact is that Milosevic was, from 1991, the point of support for the various peace plans from the UN and the Europeans in Bosnia against his former allies Karadzic, Mladic, and Biljana Plavsic. The opposition to Milosevic reproached him for this! We have even seen the photos of Zoran Djindjic alongside Bosno-Serbian leaders today still sought by the ICTY, criticising the "treason" by Milosevic!

The impasses of the thesis of Carla del Ponte lie there., In the opposite sense, the defenders of Milosevic have a certain difficulty in explaining the Milosevic-Tudjman alliance and Milosevic's suppor fort the peace plans.

Dayton is at the heart of these contradictions - because this was also the moment of a turning point in US policy towards Milosevic.

d) the great powers, Milosevic and Dayton

US diplomacy, initially sidelined from direct management of the Yugoslav crisis, took up and propagated the thesis of an aggressive Serbo-Communism in criticising the UN and EU "peace plans" in Bosnia. Which allowed the US to kill a number of birds with one stone: to present themselves as friends to the Muslims (Albanians and Bosnians) against

Serbo-Communism - making up for its policy in Iraq and its silence on Chechnya; to begin to emphasise NATO rather than the UN; and to ridicule the attempts at an autonomous European policy.

Whatever the hidden intentions of Washington, "peace plans" confirming the advances of the war were effectively hypocritical impasses. And such was the deep and sincere source in the solidarity movement of an appeal to interventionism from the great powers : visibly, arguing "you can't fight war with war" none of the western governments were ready to lose men on the ground to defend human lives, principles or rights (there was no oil in Bosnia, it was said in the solidarity movement, to explain the cynicism of the great powers and the lack of assistance to people in danger). Against the illusion of protection by bombings or foreign troops, some in the movement called rather for the lifting of the arms embargo which raised the right of legitimate defence. But pushing forward a debate on the meaning, form, organisation of the struggle in relation to a multi-ethnic future.

The games of internal politics in the US and in the world were the essence. For Clinton, it was about reinserting the US in the diplomatic game in Bosnia, with the European partners.

The European governments had themselves privileged "their common construction" over their disagreements: they were aligned behind Germany in the recognition of the independence of Croatia and BH, to save the façade of a EU "foreign policy" without really uniting their choices of privileged alliance - France and Britain seeking to balance on the side of Belgrade the support given by Germany to Zagreb.

The Croat-Muslim war undoubtedly opened eyes in the US, but did not lead to any change of discourse. But the bases for a new united real-politik were going to be posed: the search for a stabilisation of the Balkans by support for an understanding between the strong states of the region - Serbia and Croatia, sidelining the more radical nationalist forces.

The end of the war in Dayton was obtained on the basis of two sets of conditions - NATO bombs against Bosnian Serb targets playing totally at the margin, and in order to make this acceptable in the US, the passage from a discourse demonising Milosevic to to one which valued and consolidated him.

a) at the military level : the US pushed by all means for the end of fighting between Croats and Muslims and the unification of their two

armies, then refloated, to bring about an equilibrium of relations of military force on the ground. It was imposed to ratify the "ethnic" territorial division which had been negotiated: 51% for the "federation" (Croat-Muslim) and 49% for the second "entity" (the republika srpska) recognised at Dayton.

b) As Richard Holbrook stressed, the political aspect of the agreement was global -regional, precisely in the hope of overall stabilisation.

❖ The political-military agreement allowing the ceasefire was without winners or losers - and thus eminently contradictory : the Bosnian president signed because the frontiers of BH were maintained; the others because the ethnic cleansing had been ratified and links of confederation between each "entity" and the neighbouring states remained possible.

❖ Alija Izetbegovic could remain president of a BH declared sovereign;

❖ but Franjo Tudjman, signing in the name of the Croats and Slobodan Milosevic in the name of the Serbs signed because both were consolidated by this signature, on the international level, in BH and in their country.

That means questions for the great powers and the ICTY (and the defenders of Milosevic):

❖ Franjo Tudjman agreed to be a signatory at Dayton only when the "Serb question" had been "settled" by ethnic cleansing of several hundred thousands of Serbs over the summer of 1995 - in the sight of and in the knowledge of the great powers and of the ICTY, as well as Milosevic;

❖ The massacres of Srebrenica also took place just before Dayton. Mladic and Karadzic were indicted by the ICTY, notably for their direct responsibility in this massacre - and it is that which allowed them to be sidelined at the Dayton negotiations. Some dare to say, as an "excuse", that the leaders of the Bosno-Serb militias (Mladic and Karadzic) fell into a trap because they believed that the combatants of the Sarajevo army were going to defend the enclave, whereas they had abandoned it without warning [21]. It is undoubtedly true that the enclave was abandoned by Sarajevo - as Vukovar was undoubtedly sacrificed by Zagreb. The archives will speak one day. It is above all true that the enclave should have been protected by the forces of the UN and of NATO - and that it was not.

If these Srebrenica massacres are part of a genocide - as one of the ICTY cases against general Krsticahs concluded, and if we

condemn the military leaders like Krstic not, as was stipulated in the appeal, for having desired such a massacre or genocide, but for not having intervened to stop it, Milosevic would undoubtedly have been condemned on similar bases to Krstic - but the great powers should have been also.

The opponents of Milosevic, including Zoran Djidjic who would then become the point of support of the US and NATO or Vojislav Kostunica, who would be the victor over Milosevic in September 2000 would reproach the latter with having betrayed the Serbs of Croatia and Bosnia at Dayton. And if they were called to the bar at the Hague, they could only confirm the fact that they were hostile to the international plan unlike Milosevic at the time of Dayton.

Slobodan Milosevic accepted this "final solution" on the backs of the Serbs of Croatia, for it won him international recognition at Dayton, and won silence on Kosovo. Belgrade tried moreover to channel the Serbs fleeing Croatia towards the Repukika Srpska and Kosovo to consolidate the Serb ethnic presence there. He also won out over his former Bosno-Serb allies: on the eve of the Dayton accords, Ratko Mladic ant Radovan Karadzic, directly responsible for the massacres at Srebrenica were indicted by the ICTY. And it is this which allowed Milosevic to sign the Dayton accords in their place - "in the name of all Serbs" Does it need to be said that he could only do sit with a certain legitimacy among the Serbs of Bosnia, because the Republika Srpska, produced by ethnic cleansing, was recognised as one of the two entities of BH. Dayton set up not only a "ceasefire" but also a constitution, without consultation of the populations, ratifying ethnic cleansing as basis of citizenship in the various entities.

An unviable set-up, it is said today

Finally, as collateral effect of these "arrangements", the Albanian peaceful resistance led by Ibrahim Rugova lost any hope of international recognition at Dayton - and the activity of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) began from this point, seeking to internationalise by violence the conflict in Kosovo.

IV) Again on NATO's war in Kosovo and on the ICTY

Dayton signified then the consolidation of the strong powers of the region. The hope for international recognition of the self-proclaimed republic in Kosovo was buried.

Criticism then surged of the strategy of peaceful resistance pursued by Ibrahim

Rugova and his LDK (Democratic League of Kosovo) party, since the constitutional changes imposed by Belgrade in 1989. From the balance sheet of Dayton was born an alternative strategy of resistance for independence, seeking the internationalisation of the conflict by violence. the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) was born in 1995 with heterogeneous ideological bases. Its actions began in deployment against the Serb police apparatus - provoking reprisals all the more disproportionate as the frontier of résistance went well beyond the UCK and whole families, notably in the villages, solidarisd with their members who were involved: the more the UCK was repressed, the more its struggle became popular - although marginal, extremely sectarian in its behaviour including within the community and incapable then of challenging the popularity of its political adversary Ibrahim Rugova.

Between 1996 and 1998 this latter was "classed" as a "terrorist", not only by Belgrade, but also by all Western diplomacies including the US, who demanded only of Belgrade certain "moderation". Towards the end of 1998, the level of violence convinced the US that they could draw some geo-strategic advantages from the situation - extending those won at Dayton by Richard Holbrooke.

Globally, it amounted henceforth to using the conflicts of Kosovo in the goal of confirming and extending the redefinition of NATO and its deployment towards eastern Europe, establishing US military bases in this region and notably in the strategic zone of the Balkans, with access to the sea in Albania and Romania; working for the integration of European construction in an Atlanticist framework, against any autonomous EU policy.

The will to use the UCK was reflected by the demand to treat it as a political interlocutor - no longer terrorist but without supporting its pro-independence logic (for fear that the independence of Kosovo would destabilise Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, producing new conflagrations).

US diplomacy relied on a triptych: substantial autonomy - but not independence for Kosovo - thus domination by Belgrade and frontiers maintained (terms discussed with Belgrade and de facto acceptable for the Serb party), to gain acceptance on the main issue : NATO. Belgrade did not wish to hear about it but "Milosevic-Hitler" had already, from the accords negotiated in 1998, accepted the presence in Kosovo of observers from the OSCE.

France and Britain wanted to make Kosovo the Dayton of EU "foreign policy", Hubert Védrine and Robin Cook took in hand the negotiations at Rambouillet, on the basis of the project of substantial autonomy; the question of NATO was sidelined but not the presence of an international military force from the application of the agreement But the "worst" happened for the diplomats: in February 1999, two weeks of negotiations not between Albanians and Serbs, but between separate diplomats and delegations, would conclude with a refusal of the Kosovars to sign this draft - accepted by Belgrade - because it buried the independence of Kosovo. The military wing remained suspended.

The form and content of the negotiation (with a status for Kosovo written and imposed by the great powers, the US at the head), had been denounced by the leader of the UCK, Adem Demaci who advocated a boycott and had been sidelined from the delegation: the renunciation of the armed struggle for independence was considered as a capitulation.

Madeleine Albright tried to continue the process, in vain. This defeat for the first phase of Rambouillet at the end of February was commented on by Jean-Michel Demetz in l'Express under the headline : "Double setback for Madeleine : in Kosovo, neither agreement, nor strikes : the US secretary of State is disappointed" [22].

A new time limit was given- with the decision to resume negotiations on March 23. Meanwhile, the UCK was convinced by Madeleine Albright to sign the autonomy agreement, in return for an oral commitment to a NATO presence on the ground, rapid elections and a consultation of the population after three years.

Since the goal was NATO - it "sufficed" to impose it as integral part of the accord, and "punish" by bombings Belgrade's expected refusal to have NATO troops on its territory [23]. A few strikes were supposed to suffice, to make Milosevic back off, "as at Dayton", it was said in superficial journalistic commentaries.

The Dayton accords had, quite simply, brought satisfaction to their signatories - and it is hard to see what Milosevic had lost there. There was no war in Kosovo, but the change in rights and massive dismissals of those who did not accept submission to Belgrade, then a muscular police repression of the pro-independence armed struggle whereas the great powers legitimated in substance this repression and the maintenance of the existing frontiers, The more the US asked

Belgrade to repress the Albanians "not much" under pain of bombing, the more they logically incited the UCK to provoke the military and police forces of Belgrade in hoping for the bombardment of Belgrade.

On March 25, 1999, Le Monde headlined [24]: " Bill Clinton invokes Churchill against Hitler to justify intervention" with the subheading: "The US president wants to limit the Serbian ability to continue their "genocide" "

And on the NATO website [25], we find a text entitled "Fight against ethnic cleansing in Kosovo" which presented thus the action of NATO :

"NATO launched an air campaign,' Operation Allied Force, in March 1999 so as to put an end to the humanitarian catastrophe which was then taking place in Kosovo" [26].

The nature of the conflict and the negotiations, or what blocked them - the question of independence, on the side of the Kosovo Albanians, and of NATO on the Serb side, are not mentioned in this presentation.

Yet, Patrice de Beer (Le Monde, 25/04/1999) evokes the criticisms formulated in the US by the Brookings Institution analyst, Ivo Daalder, on the eve of these bombings: "In Kosovo we haves been incapable of offering anything other than this horrible and predictable choice between the end of NATO or a war with Serbia"..

The "air campaign" degenerated into war - without any UN mandate. The principal success of NATO was to avoid breaking up [27]. It was manifest that the bombings had catalysed a catastrophe in Kosovo - 800,000 Albanians fled the province; a civilian population was taken as target, either by error - given the "height" of the strikes - or voluntarily (the US command hoped that the Serb population would turn against Milosevic). And, visibly, the opposite happened, patriotism in the face of bombs perceived as unjust, immediately strengthening Milosevic and trapping his opposition [28]: the Belgrade journalist Stanko Cerovic, a declared adversary of Milosevic, analysed it bitterly [29].

On May 22, 1999 - during the war itself - the Canadian magistrate Louise Arbour, prosecutor of the ICTY, took the decision to indict Slobodan Milosevic, then president of the FRY and several other political and military leaders of the regime for "crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war". The indictment related to the period from January 1, 1999 (when the controversial massacre of Racak which led to

around 45 deaths took place) to the end of the war in June 1999. According to Pierre Hazan [30], such a decision was taken in a "preventive" fashion by the Canadian magistrate [31], out of defiance towards the great powers rather than under their pressure: she feared, according to this thesis, that confronted with a war which turned into a veritable fiasco for NATO, the governments of the Alliance had sought an agreement at any price with the leader in Belgrade. One can on the contrary note that the indictment of Milosevic went in the exact sense of NATO's propaganda to legitimate its action [32] - but we can admit that Louise Arbour (like Carla del Ponte) was herself victim of this propaganda.

The indictment of Milosevic for genocide in Kosovo was then predicted : hundreds of mass graves, dozens of Srebrenicas, tens if not hundreds of thousands of deaths from the genocide predicted by Clinton - and justifying the war [33].

To ensure Germany's military commitment which was no small thing especially for the Greens, the German Defence Minister could only play on a "never again" which evoked the anti-Jewish genocide. Rudolf Scharping affirmed the existence of a plan for "deportation" of Albanians on April 9, 1999, claiming that this had been implemented from November 1998 in Kosovo.

Except that ...

❖ the plan proved a fraud of which the ICTY no longer speaks;

❖ from the end of the war international observers were sent on the ground to the supposed mass graves (see. El Pais, 23/11/1999) with all the means of investigation of a protectorate under a NATO presence supposed moreover to protect all communities. According to the report of Human rights watch in 2001 [34], the mass expulsion of Albanians during the NATO war could serve in reality several objectives: a modification of Kosovo's ethnic composition; a negotiation on the territorial division of Kosovo; but also objectives inextricably linked to the NATO war itself - to destabilise the neighbouring states and make an intervention on the ground more difficult. The report evokes the balance sheet of the bodies exhumed by the ICTY after two years of enquiries, as of July 2001: 4,300 Albanians killed by the Serb and Yugoslav forces - less than in some hours at Srebrenica.

❖ While Joshka Fisher, German Foreign Minister justified the NATO war by a "humanitarian catastrophe" evoking a genocide, an official report of the German

security services, estimated on January 12, 1999 : "The East of Kosovo is still not involved in an armed conflict". Public life in towns like Pristina, Urosevic, Gnjilan, and so on continued on relatively normal bases during the whole of the period of conflicts. The actions of the security forces (were not) directed against the Albano-Kosovars as ethnic group, but against a military adversary [the UCK] and its real or supposed partisans " [35].

❖ Finally, on September 6, 2001, the Supreme Court of Kosovo, in Pristina, concluded, after enquiry that there was no genocide in Kosovo during the period incriminated (see AFP dispatch of September 7).

What did the European parliamentarians, or the US Congress know about it? What did "republican" France, which refuses to recognise the status of people to the Corsicans, and has declined to adopt the Council of Europe's Minority Languages Charter, say about it? What balance sheet did they draw of it? What accounts have the European parliaments and the US Congress demanded of a war which would be a precedent heavy with negative consequences?

In the absence of a genocide in Kosovo, the indictment was enlarged to include the two other big file : on Croatia (1991-1995) then in Bosnia (1992-1995) united in a sole trial to signify the coherence of a sole policy of Greater Serbia, propagating ethnic cleansing. But the trial stopped there

❖ The ICTY was silent on the policy of Tudjman and the Milsoevic-Tuddjman alliance

❖ The ICTY was silent on the policy of the great powers.

It would take some time and means to draw the specific balance sheet of the ICTY. Several approaches should be employed [36] - legal, obviously [37], but also historic, political and sociological. Against the tendency to hide the political questions behind an international law used in an arbitrary fashion by the great powers [38] imposing if not a right of the victors (there was not that much "clarity" in the ICTY) a law of the dominant.

It would be necessary to consider the genesis and evolution of this ad hoc tribunal ; analyse its dependency on the choices of real-politik of the governments that have created it; its evolving and limited possibility of collaborating with the new states and legal apparatuses emerging from the Yugoslav

crisis; its perception by the various peoples concerned, with sometimes the hope that it would prevent impunity but also disillusionment and defiance - the distance also of a Tribunal based in the Hague. It would be necessary finally to analyse what its own magistrates wanted to do with it as well as the attitude of the main accused, who rejected the legitimacy of the ICTY but decided to use it as a tribune and defend himself there. The trial was far from being a simple show trial, even if one considers it that it could not be a bringer of real justice [39].

Milosevic's defenders are in their turn confronted with a major contradiction of their thesis: Milosevic was the point of support for all the Western peace plans since 1991, and the ally of he who committed the worst crimes against the Serb populations, and borrowed from the US, for his defence, the discourse of the "war against terror".

To restore meaning to words - when the opposition to Milosevic is turned towards the right, leaving him the monopoly of calling himself "left", worse "socialist". To restore to the peoples concerned the right to appropriate their history, as actors and not as victims - instead of confiding it to the great powers who cynically use their fears and conflicts for their own egoist ends and who destroy any policy of real social solidarity in the name of "modernity" and "civilisation".

To shed light on all the crimes committed in the wars of ethnic cleansing as well as that of NATO - without accepting the one as the alibi for the other [40] - is a prerequisite to the future reconciliation that can lead to a progressive future. It is a prerequisite to any real "self-determination" (in the sense of the sovereign choice of peoples, in their history, their diversity and their mixtures) without accepting that "self-determination" of the one can be achieved on the backs of any other people. It is a prerequisite to finding, inventing (against the arrogance of those who claim to impose "models" nowhere validated) just solutions to the intertwined social, national and political questions of the Balkans - in a Balkanised world,

That will take time. But it is a political task to take on against all the mendacious propaganda - including that of NATO.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

The UN Security Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia - ICTY - in 1993 to deal with war crimes or crimes against humanity on the territory of the former Yugoslavia from 1991 onwards. It is based in The Hague.

Before the establishment of a quasi-protectorate in BH after the Dayton-Paris Accords (1995), the ICTY had practically no means (financial and military-police)to function and obtain arrests. after Dayton, its financial resources were increased the US decided to partially pay their debt to the UN - which is the main source ; but 14% of its resources are private, notably via the financier Soros). Its capacity to arrest criminals depends always on the good will of western governments having troops on the ground and on the cooperation of the states emerging from the former -Yugoslavia. Non-public procedures of indictment were introduced to facilitate the arrests. Just before the Dayton accords (signed by Serb president Milosevic, Croat president Tudjman and Bosnian president Izetbegovic), the Bosno-Serb nationalist leaders Rastko Mocnic and Radovan Karadzic were indicted notably for the crimes committed in Srebrenica, later characterised by the ICTY as genocide - and have not to this day been arrested.

On May 22, 1999 ,during the NATO war on Kosovo, the Canadian magistrate Louise Arbour, then prosecutor of the ICTY, indicted Slobodan Milosevic for crimes against humanity and war crimes (accusation relating to Kosovo between January and June 1999). The Swiss magistrate Carla del Ponte succeeded Arbour in September 1999.

The NATO war (which lasted from March to June 1999) ended with the signature of resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council by Milosevic, then Yugoslav president, establishing a UN protectorate with a NATO presence in Kosovo -but in the framework of the existing frontiers of the Yugoslav Federal Republic (RFY) of which Kosovo was to remain a province

Milosevic was beaten at the elections of December 2000 by Vojislav Kostunica (reproaching Milosevic for having betrayed the Serbs in Bosnia and Kosovo and criticism of the NATO war) -and not by the liberal pro-NATO opposition led by Zoran Djindjic. Under pressure from Montenegro, the FRY was dissolved, and provisionally replaced by the state of Serbia - Montenegro (in the new constitution, Kosovo is a province of Serbia ; being still a protectorate of the UN its final status is currently being debated).

On April 1, 2001 Milosevic, indicted by the minister of the interior for misappropriation of funds, handed himself over to Serbian justice. On June 28, 2001 he was transferred to The Hague. In September the accusation brought against him was extended to Croatia (August 1991-June 1992), and on November 12, 2001 Carla del Ponte filed a third indictment for crimes committed in Bosnia

between 1991 and 1995. The Prosecutors demanded the consideration of three indictments in a single trial, which Judge Richard May refused. But the Chamber of Appeal accepted the demand for a single trial on February 1, 2002 -a demand supported by the accused, who pleaded not guilty and wished to defend himself.

The trial began on February 12, 2002, (see. Le Monde diplomatique, April 2002) on the basis of Anglo-Saxon procedures. The first part of the trial finished in summer 2004.

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NOTES

[1] See notably Diane Masson, l'utilisation de la guerre dans la construction des systèmes politiques en Serbie et en Croatie -1989-1995, L'Harmattan 2002 ; and Marina Glamocak, La transition guerrière yougoslave, L'Harmattan, 2002.

[2] Initially supported also by the Vatican. But John Paul II, to the great joy of the Serbs of Croatia, explicitly distanced himself from the Croat propaganda notably during his 1997 visit and in Sarajevo.

[3] See Le monde diplomatique, November 2000.

[4] The "Kingdom of Serbs, Slovenes and Croats" emerged from the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire and that of Austri-Hungary after the First World War. Dominated by the Serb dynasty, it took the name of Yugoslavia in 1929 in the framework of a dictatorial regime. It remained 80% rural and in the "periphery" of western capitalism, dependent on foreign capital, incapable of industrialising the major part of its territory. It broke up under the invasion of a forces coalescing around Nazi Germany during the Second World War. The second Yugoslavia was born out of the armed resistance of the "Partisans" to this occupation, led on federative bases by the Yugoslav Communist Party, whose leader Josip Broz (Tito), died in 1980. After a decade of socio-economic and political crisis which paralysed the system in the 1980s, the federation broke up with the Slovene and Croat declarations of independence in June 1991.

[5] It is not possible to develop this point here. I have made an analysis comparing the transformations of ownership, state and social relations in "réinsérer la Serbie dans l'analyse de la transition", Revue d'études comparatives Est/Ouest, vol.35 - March-June 2004, n°1-2, CNRS, pp. 116-156.

[6] Susan Woodward, Balkan tragedy, chaos and dissolution after the cold war, Washington DC, the Brooklngs institutions, 1995, pp 106-107.

[7] And it has been attacked head on in Slovenia (which of all the new members of the EU did least during the 1990s to destroy its past social gains and apply neoliberal precepts). See. note 5.

[8] Unemployment existed under the Titoist regime, but it was the product of an insufficient creation of jobs notably in the face of a rural exodus, and not because of layoffs : one of the real powers of the self-management collectives was precisely over employment including hiring of directors - which would bequeath, in some cases, as in Slovenia, specific links between these latter and the workforce.

[9] In the first post-war censuses, Muslims could declare themselves to be Serbs, Croats or indeterminate - and they opted for the latter, when the possibility was offered to them in the 1960s to say they were Muslims (with a capital M, in the secularised ethno-national sense), they took it,

massively. Religion had been a component of their history - like Orthodoxy for the Serbs and Catholicism for the Croats. That does not imply any evolution or fixed "identity", contrary to the nationalist collapses of the 1990s where one was obliged to "prove" who one was on "objective" criteria.

[10] See "mouvante identité des musulmans"; on Bosnia-Herzegovina read notably Xavier Bougarel, "anatomie d'un conflit", La découverte, 1996.

[11] I cannot develop here an important point concerning the ambiguities of the right to self-determination in the Yugoslav context. I have dealt with this question in "Autodétermination, le cas yougoslave", in La justice et la guerre/Justice and war, document bilingue, Dialogue, Revue internationale d'Arts et de Sciences, vol. n°8, n°31/32, Automn/winter 1999

[12] The first unitary Yugoslavia had no republics and had initially recognised as constitutive peoples only the Slovenes, Serbs and Croats. Macedonia was considered as "south Serbia" by Serb nationalism, as "Bulgar" (in its language and national reality) by Bulgar nationalism -and as historically Greek land by the third neighbours.

[13] In recent radio broadcasts he "stigmatises" me for taking "pro-Serb" positions - a category of analysis that I reject precisely, since it is not "pro-Serb" to say that Serb nationalism is not alone in being guilty of crimes.

[14] Le monde diplomatique, August 1992 : "la dérive d'une Croatie 'ethniquement pure'"

[15] In Sarajevo in December 1992 I had direct contact with Alija Izetbegovic's advisors who spoke explicitly of the double aggression suffered - but the choice was not to fight on two fronts at once. The following year they were confronted with the explicit offensive of ethnic cleansing of the Muslims in Herceg-Bosna. The US pressures to establish the alliance with the Croats and the political choice of Alija Izetbegovic - unfavourable to a real multiethnic mobilisation which might rebound on him - rested on a simplistic public propaganda.

[16] The use of the women's cause and women's associations in this war, as in others, would nonetheless meet major resistance. In 1980s Belgrade some Serb female lawyers denounced a mendacious propaganda against Albanian rapists of Serb women in Kosovo; during the Bosnia war, Tudjman sought to control an international feminist conference blocking the arrival of the "women in black", Serb feminists demonstrating regularly against the war in Belgrade. But its operation was thwarted.

[17] See the publication in May and June 2005 of 36 stenogrammes on these meetings by the weekly Feral Tribune (Croatia) and the magazine Dani (Bosnia) and the commentary of Andrej Nikolaidis in the monthly Monitor (Montenegro) of July 2005.

[18] See. Xavier Bougarel, "L'Islam bosniaque, entre identité culturelle et idéologie politique", in Le Nouvel islam balkanique. Les musulmans acteurs du post-communisme 1990-2000, Maisonneuve & Larose, Paris, 2001.

[19] See Svetlana Broz (granddaughter of Josep Broz, known as Tito), Des gens de bien au temps du mal. Témoignages sur le conflit bosniaque (19921-1995), Lavauzelle, Paris, 2005.

[20] The book by Diana Johnstone presents "objectively" this thesis, simply by evoking the "discourses" adhered to inside the Serb population, without evoking any argument contradicting it ; however, she cites abundantly the Islamist Declaration and evokes the presence of Bin Laden ; the whole proceeds from a basic analogy with the policy of the sorcerers apprentice of the US supporting Bin Laden against the USSR in Afghanistan, confirming the basis of Serb fears, without evoking the role of propaganda and Serb nationalist militias and armies "The fool's crusade", Pluto Press, London.

[21] This is the thesis put forward in Johnstone's book.

[22] See the dossier of l'Express.

[23] Which the US has now obtained. See. Le monde diplomatique January 2006.

[24] Patrice de Beer , Le Monde March 25 1999

[25] The text came to light in February 2005.

[26] The text, in spite of the fact that it is supposed to have been updated in February 2005, dares to conclude by: "If it first intervened in Kosovo so as to protect the Albanian speakers against ethnic cleansing, NATO has shown itself just as determined to protectt he Serbs of the province against a similar fate, since the deployment of the KFOR in the province in June 1999". Both these "protections" have been just as unreal in fact.

[27] During a television broadcast on the BBC on August 20, the US Under-Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, said that the divergences inside NATO were so pronounced "that it would have been very hard to preserve the unity and resolution of the 'Alliance'" without the agreement concluded with Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic in early June. See www.wsws.org.

[28] And, when more than a year later, after having vainly hoped for popular uprisings, the West looked to elections to finish off Milosevic - a paradox when he was compared to Hitler - they detected by poll who could beat Milosevic : not Zoran Djindjic, devoted to NATO, but Vojislav Kostiunica, more nationalist than Milosevic (he reproached him for having abandoned the Serbs of Croatia and Bosnia following those of Kosovo) radically hostile to the NATO bombings, and not corrupt.

[29] Stanko Cerovic, Dans les griffes des humanistes, ed. Climats, 2001

[30] Pierre Hazan, La justice face à la guerre. De Nuremberg à la Haye, Stock, Paris 2000

[31] Read "Serbie, Louise Arbour : frappe préventive" (Institute for War & Peace Reporting), 29-05-99, Archives, Courrier des Balkans.

[32] The "political" 'image of the ICTY has been on the contrary strengthened by the indictment and by the fact that Carla del Ponte considered that there was no basis to pursue NATO for the complaints brought against it. Amnesty International and Human rights watch of 2001 (see note 34) have however estimated that in striking civilian targets and using fragmentation bombs, NATO has not respected international humanitarian agreements.

[33] See "L'opinion, ça se travaille... Les médias & les " guerres justes" Du Kosovo à l'Afghanista" Serge Halimi and Dominique Vidal, Ed. Agone, Coll. Contre feux.

[34] www.hrw.org/reports/2001/kosovo/undword.htm This report also establishes the balance sheet of the aggressions committed by the members of the UCK against Serbs or Albanians or minorities "collaborating " with the Serbs in 1998 and after the war.

[35] Intelligence report, German Foreign Office, 12 January 1999, cited by Michel Chossudovsky on 02/10/2000.

[36] Mark Osiel has implemented such a multi disciplinary approach in a study on other big international trials, which should be extended, with its specificities on the Milosevic trial : Juger les crimes de masse Edition du seuil, February 2006. Original title Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory and the Law, 1997. See. Also Olivier Corten and Barbara Delcourt, Droit, légitimation et politique extérieure : l'Europe et la guerre du Kosovo, Ed. Bruylant , éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2001, collection de droit international : droit international, politique et idéaologies, 1998. See also Le monde diplomatique, February 2002.

[37] See notably the reflections of Stéphanie Mauras, in Le monde 24-03 2006 ("ICTY : un bilan en demi-teinte"), on the Anglo-Saxon procedure and its tendencies to a "Manichean vision" of history. On the major stakes of the " responsibilities of command" in the various massacres, see balkans.courriers.info.

[38] Beyond their practices at Guantanamo, we know that the US exerted pressure on all the candidates to the EU, in ex-Yugoslavia and eastern Europe, to refuse to collaborate with the International Criminal Court in Rome concerning US citizens at the very time that they "demanded" that Belgrade collaborate with the ICTY. That has not helped the credibility of the ICTY in Serbia.

[39] The extract of the trial published in documents by the defenders of Slobodan Milosevic witness that it was often possible to destabilise the Prosecutor, in other words, paradoxically for those who wish to purely denigrate the ICTY, they show that it was far from the show trials of the Stalinist type. But they also highlight a major dimension of the defence of Milosevic : not opposition to the world order, but the desire to be a point of support in the "fight against terrorism"... See. Patrick Barriot, Eve Crépin, Le procès Milosevic ou l'inculpation du peuple serbe, L'âge d'homme, Lausanne, 2005.

[40] Such was the meaning of an appeal launched at the end of March with Pierre Bourdieu, where we rejected the NATO bombings in stressing at the same time "self-determination" - against a status of Kosovo imposed either by Belgrade, or by the great powers We rejected the false "choice" between NATO and Milosevic. Le Monde published the text under the signature of Bourdieu on March 30, 1999. The appeal then became European.

Yugoslavia

Slobodan Milosevic: Architect of Yugoslav break-up

Alan Thornett

Slobodan Milosevic died during his trial at the UN's International War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague - just after he was refused permission to go to Moscow for treatment. He was 64. He stood accused of war crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo. Whatever the legitimacy of the victors justice represented by the Tribunal - it is a poor substitute for a true international court - there is no doubt of his guilt. The evidence is overwhelming. He was indeed the butcher of the Balkans.

The role of Milosevic, however, remains controversial on the left. Not least because it involves controversies about the role and nature of Stalinism, the causes of its collapse, and the right of self-determination of nations.

It also raises the issue of whether the unity of Yugoslavia could have been preserved, after the collapse of Stalinism and the Warsaw Pact, and who was principally responsible for its destruction.

The SWP obituary of Milosevic in Socialist Worker (18.3.06) raised such controversies in that it makes no significant distinction between the role of Milosevic in the break up of Yugoslavia this and that of Franjo Tudjman of Croatia and even Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. They were all equally responsible. It even makes no distinction between them when it comes to war crimes - which in the case of Izetbegovic is scandalous. It is worth another hook at the history.

Yugoslavia was a federation comprising six Federal Republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. There were two Autonomous Provinces, Vojvodina (majority Hungarian population) and Kosovo (80% Albanian population) - both within the Serb Republic. There was a history of both Serb and Croatian nationalism prior and during the world war two. This declined in the post-war period under Tito (who was a Croat) to the extent that most people thought of themselves as Yugoslav rather than their original nationality or their religion.

Milosevic - who came to prominence in the 1980s through Communist Party ranks in Serbia and learned his politics in the Belgrade bureaucracy in the latter years of the Tito period - was pivotal in the break-up of Yugoslavia, and carries the principal responsibility for the carnage involved. The driving force behind the carnage was the resurgence of Greater Serbian nationalism, which he orchestrated from an early stage.

The internal social and economic crisis, of course, which brought down Stalinism in the Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, existed in full force in Yugoslavia. This caused tensions between the Republics and forced Yugoslavia into damaging arrangements with the IMF. Milosevic dealt with the crisis of the Stalinist like many of its top functionaries, by turning to nationalism

After Tito's death in 1980 it had been clear that Yugoslavia could only be held together by a guarantee against the rise of Serbia into the dominant position it held in the pre-war period. This meant strengthening, rather than weakening, the relatively progressive 1974 constitution - which had devolved power and autonomy to the constituent Republics. It defined Yugoslavia as a multinational state in which no single nationality could claim a majority. This was the basis on which the Federation coexisted.

This coexistence, however, was soon to come under pressure from Serb nationalism. In the spring of 1981, Kosovar Albanian demonstrators in Pristina - who were campaigning for Kosovo to be promoted to the status of a Federal Republic - were savagely attacked by Serbian police.

In 1987, Milosevic, who was now Serbian party boss and increasingly a nationalist demagogue, addressed a rally of Serbs in Kosovo and made his infamous "no one should dare to beat you" speech. He was lauded by the Serbs and came away as de facto Serb president in waiting.

Six months later Milosevic was indeed President of Serbia - and the direction he was taking was unmistakable. In 1989 even the limited autonomy enjoyed by Kosovan and Voijvodinan as Autonomous Provinces was abolished.

Both Provinces were annexed into Serbia. The de facto absorption of Montenegro quickly followed. Milosevic had torn up the 1974 constitution and was seeking to replace it with a highly centralised state dominated by Serbia.

The consequences for the Federation were absolutely clear. The more dominant Serbia became the less other nationalities were prepared to stay within it.

Milosevic now pledged to reunite Serbs which, he said, had been divided by the 1974 constitution. It was the launch of his Greater Serbia project - by which he meant the creation of a common mono-ethnic state for all the Serbs, currently spread across the various Republics. It was a concept supported by all political parties in Serbia and articulated as early as 1986 in the notorious Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts. It could not be achieved without the break-up of Yugoslavia and the annexation of at least a third of Croatia and two thirds of Bosnia-Herzegovina - with the ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs from those territories.

Once Kosovo, Voijvodina and Montenegro were swallowed up, resistance to the advance of Greater Serbia project fell to the newly elected governments of Slovenia and Croatia. They tried to negotiate acceptable terms for them to stay in the Federation; proposing that it take the form of "free union of democratic states" - proposals which were supported by Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia.

Milosevic rejected this and all subsequent proposals along these lines.

In December 1990 Slovenia voted in a referendum for secession from the Federation, though it did not act on the decision at that stage. Slovenia, however, was now increasingly dragging Croatia with it towards independence.

Franjo Tudjman was elected President of Croatia. He was a Stalinist bureaucrat turned Croatian nationalist, later to have war crimes on his hands.

In March (1991) the Serbs of the Krajina (borderland) Region of Croatia, in what was claimed to be a spontaneous uprising, took over the region and declared it an independent state. The uprising was led by Serb nationalist strongman Milan Babic. They named it the Autonomous Province of Krajina, later Republika Srpska Krajina.

The uprising had the full backing of Milosevic, and it was armed and supported by the Yugoslav National Army (JNA). Federal authority was collapsing and the JNA was already acting under Serbian control. It was a body-blow to the unity of Yugoslavia and a massive challenge to Croatia - which was split wide open by it. Tudjman had no army to resists the JNA and sought to stabilise the situation by diplomacy. He, in any case, had his own agenda for carving up the region (i.e. Bosnia-Herzegovina) in favour of a Greater Croatia once he was pushed towards independence.

Two weeks later, at the end of March (1991), yet another crucial decision was made. Milosevic and Tudjman concluded that Yugoslavia was now effectively finished, and that three, or more, successor states would eventually emerge. The issue now was how they would each carve out their own ethnic states to the detriment of Bosnia. Later, EC mediator Lord Carrington, after meetings with Milosevic and Tudjman, made the same point.

"When I first talked to Presidents Milosevic and Tudjman", he said, "it was quite clear that both of them had a solution which was mutually satisfactory - which was that they were going to carve up Bosnia between them".

In April (1991) Milosevic recognised the Krajina Serbs as a separate state. Ultra-nationalist Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadize, called for "an armed force of the Serbian People" to be set up throughout "the Serbs lands of Yugoslavia". He now articulated the Greater Serbian project even clearer than his mentor Milosevic.

Serbian forces were now occupying a quarter of Croatia, and expanding. It was undeclared war, although Tudjman was reluctant to recognise reality given the military imbalance he faced. On May 3rd (1991) Tudjman belatedly warned that war was probably unavoidable. It would be a war, however, that would have little to do with defending the rights of Croatian Serbs (the 200,000 Serbs living in Zagreb were ignored) and everything to do grabbing Croatian territory and undermining its right to independence.

On May 25th (1991) Slovenia and Croatia simultaneously declared independence. The EC opposed the declaration - which was Western policy at that stage. Two days later the Yugoslav National Army (NGA) invaded Slovenia in an attempt to prevent its implementation of the declaration. The JNA were forced to abandon the invasion after 10 days by a combination of international pressure and surprisingly strong Slovenian resistance.

Ultimately Slovenia could not have defended itself, but Milosevic only had limited interest in Slovenia since it had a negligible Serb population.

In August (1991) Serb forces carried out the first ethnic cleaning of the war in the Krajina village of Kijevo - which was a pocket of Croat population surrounded by Serb-held territory. Soon after Babic announced that the Krajina Serb paramilitary forces had fused with the JNA.

In early September (1991) the Croatian city of Vukovar (43% Croat and 37% Serb) was shelled by Serbian irregulars with heavy weapons supplied by the JNA. Tudjman responded by laying siege to JNA barracks across Croatia. On September 19th a JNA force, with tanks and heavy weapons, left Belgrade bound for Vukovar. Within days Vukovar was under siege and heavy bombardment.

On October 1st (1991) the JNA laid siege to the Croat port city of Dubrovnik - which was 82% Croat and just 6% Serb. Vukovar fell a month later. It was reduced to rubble after weeks of hand-to-hand fighting. Over 500 Croats were killed and nearly 2,000 wounded. Surviving Croats retreated in disarray.

In November (1991) the Bosnian Serbs, led by Radovan Karadzic, voted to secede from Bosnia and found their own state. Serb deputies had already walked out of the Bosnian Parliament and formed their own Parliament. Bosnia was now split apart in the way Croatia had been.

By the end of November (1991) Serb forces had achieved most of their objectives. Milosevic now advocated a cease-fire and UN intervention, which would freeze current battle lines to his advantage. Borisav Jovic, Krajina Serb Interior Minister, put it this way: "At this point the war in Croatia was under control in the sense that all the Serb territories were under our control, all, that is except central Slavonia. Slobodan and I decided now was the time to get the UN troops into Croatia to protect the Serbs there. We saw the danger - when Croatia would be recognised, which we realised would happen, the JNA would be regarded as a foreign army invading another country. So we had better get the UN troops in early to protect the Serbs".

Croatia had lost a third of its territory to Serbian forces. There were thousands of dead and half a million Croatian refugees. Early in December (1991) Tudjman visited Bonn to seek EC recognition. A week later Germany announced that if the EC did not recognise Croatia and Slovenia it would do so unilaterally.

Two weeks later Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia decided to seek independence. It was that or being a part of a Greater Serbia they could not accept. On January 17 (1992) the EC agreed to recognise Croatia and Slovenia but not Bosnia-Herzegovina or Macedonia.

On March 1 (1992) the assault on Bosnia started when Serb paramilitaries erected barricades in Sarajevo, dividing the city. Bosnia was torn apart by Serbian and Croatian forces for three years. Bosnian cities were bombed into rubble and their inhabitants starved out. Europe saw its first genocide, since world war two. Bosnian Muslims faced massacre, rape, and terror. In Srebrenica 7,000 Muslim men and boys were killed in the course of a few days. Three quarters of Bosnia's territory was occupied by either Serbian or Croatian forces. 30,00 Bosnian women were raped as part of a policy of terror. The war left a quarter of a

million dead and three million Bosnian refugees.

There is plenty for which the Bosnian regime could be criticised. But the idea that it was no different to those of Milosevic or Tudjman is preposterous. Bosnia was by far the most multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Yugoslav Republic. For Bosnia it was a war of survival and a war in defence of a multi-ethnic society. That multi-ethnicity mostly survived throughout the war. There were Serbs and Croats at every level of the Bosnian state and military. 10% of the army were Serb or Croat, and there were 50,000 Serbs and 30,000 Croats in Bosnian Sarajevo throughout the siege.

The war ended in 1995 after Bosnia had at last turned the tide on the battlefield and began take back parts of its territory. Suddenly Milosevic, the architect of the conflict, became the West's negotiating partner in Dayton Peace Treaty - which he signed on behalf of the Bosnian Serbs who he had drawn into the conflict. A divided Bosnia was turned into a UN protectorate and left to pick up the pieces.

In nearly 5 years of warfare in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia not a single military action had taken place on the soil of Serbia. Also in all three cases, war had been waged by forces receiving orders from Belgrade, aided by irregulars trained and equipped by the JNA.

As a result of these wars 200,000 died, mainly civilians, half a million wounded, and two million made refugees. All ideas of "equal responsibility" for these war should be rejected. We should not equate the aggressor with the victim. Milosevic was the prime mover of these wars, Tudjman was a second string dictator with regional ambitions and plenty of blood on his hands. Izetbegovic was the leader of the principle victim of these wars.

After the Bosnian war finished Milosevic was already developing another - his ethnic war against the Kosova Albanians. During the next four years 350,000 ethnic Albanians were driven out of the country to become refugees.

In 1998 the Kosovan Albanians mounted mass protests against Serbian rule, police troops were sent in to suppress them. In 1999 an escalating refugee crisis was used by Nato to launch an unprecedented bombing campaign against Serbia, which went on for

78 days. The US dominated Alliance had found a role for itself in the post Soviet era, an opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of it weaponry, and as a means of extending its influence to the East.

In Britain a campaign was launched against the war in the form of The Committee for Peace in the Balkans. The role of Milosevic remained controversial. The Committee itself was silent on the role of Milosevic. The SWP (within it) opposed the bombing but underplayed Milosevic's campaign against Kosovo. Socialist Action - which no longer exists but was influential in the Committee at the time - saw Milosevic as some kind of representative of actually existing socialism and described Serbia as "the chief obstacle to the capitalist break-up of Yugoslavia.

Such politics influenced the shape, and unfortunately the size, of the anti-war mobilisations as well - since it gave them a strong pro-Serb flavour. Most potential supporters of the anti-war movement, beyond the ranks of the organised left, started from strongly opposing the ethnic cleansing of the Kosova Albanians, and stayed away once they perceived the pro-Serb bias of the movement - even those who did not see NATO as a solution.

The issue of independence for Kosovo, which we advocated it as the only lasting solution, was not taken up by the SWP.

We argued that there were two wars taking place: one waged by Milosevic against Kosovo and another against Serbia by Nato and we were opposed to both. We called for NATO out of the region and Serbia out of Kosovo. We were part of a co-ordination within the Committee of those groups supporting this position: ourselves, Workers Power, the Socialist Party, the CPGB, Workers International and Workers Action.

Many on the left (particularly SA but including Tony Benn and other anti-war MPs) insisted that Yugoslavia had been broken up not by Milosevic's project but by imperialist intervention. They pointed the decision of Germany and the EC to recognise Slovenia and Croatia (the richest Republics) as independent states. Once Slovenia and Croatia had gained independence, they argued, it was "natural" for Serb minorities within Croatia and Bosnia to "rebel" and the scene was set for war.

As the above account sets out, however, German and EC recognition of Croatia and

Slovenia came almost a year after the start of war in the region. It came a long time after the invasion of Slovenia and Croatia by Serbian forces: i.e. well after the die was cast on the unity of Yugoslavia. Imperialism, particularly Germany, did seek to intervene, of course, but this was not the decisive factor.

The bombing of Serbia ended when a compromise was found acceptable to both NATO and Milosevic was struck. Key for Milosevic was that Kosovo remained part of Serbia and that the multi-national force moving in to occupy Kosovo was under UN (rather than NATO) control. Previously unacceptable conditions, such as the right of NATO to access to any part of Serbia were dropped. A similar deal could probably have been struck with Milosevic without the bombing.

The national rights and aspirations of the Kosovars were set aside in all this and remain unresolved. Yet again the lesson has not been learned that the problem of the Balkans cannot be resolved without the right of self-determination for all the peoples of the region being respected.

Fittingly Milosevic's final undoing came not at the hands of NATO or the UN but at the hands of the Serbian people. In October 2000 a mass uprising of Serbian workers a general strike and mass demonstrations and the storing of the parliament building - over a disputed election result drove him and his corrupt clique from office. Six months later after a stand-off at his mansion he was arrested and taken to The Hague.

As for the Tribunal at The Hague, it has been selective as to whom it pursues. Not only have Radovan Karadzic and his military chief Ratko Mladic never been brought to book for Srebrenica. But the likes of Tony Blair, Milosevic's old friend Bill Clinton, Madeleine Albright and Wesley Clark - who bombarded Serbia for 78 days killing thousands of people also go unpunished. The use of depleted uranium and cluster bombs; the targeting of a civilian passenger train, the Chinese embassy and Radio Serbia - killing 16 media workers - are of no consequence.

They can all rest a bit easier now. Even Milosevic's attempt to bring them to Hague as witnesses to their crimes has come to an end with his passing.

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Venezuela

The revolution seen from the left: Chavismo's original sin

Roland Denis

Neither "Chavismo" nor the "Bolivarian revolution" are political phenomena originating from the traditional left, and this is their original sin. They emerged from revolt in the streets and uprisings in barracks, not the rational decision of a vanguard or a left political bloc directing a revolutionary process to victory. We are dealing then with a strange and extremely complex phenomenon, informed by the most libertarian and radical elements of society and the popular movement, now bearing the flags of anti-capitalism and socialism.

But we are also dealing with a society traumatised by poverty and by the degree of corruption engendered by a model of accumulation founded on an "economy of extraction", that is a dependent national economy of a state subsisting fundamentally on the oil rent, and a capitalist structure reproduced thanks to the subvention of the rate of profit through an agreement of redistribution (which is moreover, not at all legal and open, hence the permanent "state of impunity" in which we live) between the dominant classes and the political elites in power. This structural base of our social formation, after nearly a century of existence, has created an extremely unequal society (those who profit from the oil booty and those who are excluded from it) but engenders at the same time the motivation for a popular resistance movement which struggles for the most urgent and often elementary popular demands (water, electricity, housing, land, work, education, health and so on.) and which suffers from being a marginal movement, largely excluded from the central debate on the production and distribution of the wealth created.

If there is then a "classist basis" it is undoubtedly formed in contact with certain combative nuclei of the workers and Marxist movement, but above all from the debates and the influence of very diverse and heterodox historic currents of struggle (cultural resistance, liberation theology, "cimarronismo" [1], the street democracy demanded in the neighbourhoods, social movements of every type, spontaneous popular uprisings, national liberation movements, revolutionary Bolivarism, armed struggle, Latin American critical Marxism, indigenous movements and so on). There lies the second original sin of the "Bolivarian movement": its unusual diversity and heterodoxy today represented by the figure of Hugo Chavez.

The errors of a certain left critique

The "revolutionary sectors", that is those who participate in political and social struggle seeking the necessary juncture between theory and practice, are faced with an immense challenge of comprehension and definition of a line of action coherent with our historic responsibility as well as with the complex reality in which we live. Obviously, that has not been easy and it is still very difficult to identify a pole in this revolutionary left which has clarified entirely its doubts and lacunas. Yet, in our perspective, obvious errors continue to be reproduced, perhaps by the necessity of seeking refuge in a perimeter of certainty which allows this or that organisation, group or tendency, to insulate itself from the chaos of reality and crisis "without certain outcome" of the order of domination in our country.

On the one hand, a left which radicalises its discourse starting from its appreciation of the "class nature" of this government (bourgeois, petty bourgeois), and of the "populist", "reformist", "nationalist" elements which run through it for class reasons. Thus it is a government condemned, beyond its declarations, to defend the interests of national and imperialist capital (we refer to the majority of Trotskyist currents, very active today in some workers' sectors). This can be totally correct if we restrain ourselves to a criterion of formal and sociological comprehension, according to which we would oppose in our political imagination this government (of petty bourgeois, peasant or marginal origin) to a possible government formed by the delegates of workers and exploited classes in general, organised and identified as such. But then we pose a question,

perhaps a stupid one: since the Paris Commune and the first Soviet government of 1917-1919, was there a single government in history which has responded to this indicator and which has lasted more than two years "in power"? If there has been one, send the reference. We prefer in these circumstances to admit that history has shown that this parameter of comprehension and action suffers from immense gaps and from political impotence. Perhaps the anarchists, autonomists, councilists, libertarians, the comrades of Durruti, Zapatistas, were right about the unviable nature of using the vanguard party and the state form as tools for the emancipation of labour? Doesn't this state form (its ideological affiliation doesn't matter much) concentrate in itself all the rules, culture, protocols, relations, which render capitalist domination historically viable?

The problem of the orthodox class-based characterisation, inherited from the Leninist tradition, tends to be its excessive contempt both for the social situation (its diversity, the relations which develop, the inter-relationship of social subjects) on which the order of domination rests, and for the recent events which have created new political values, new modes of resistance, new spaces of interaction between the exploited classes, new programmatic perspectives, outside of which the revolution

is impossible if not in the heads and mystifications of the vanguards. We don't want to say that we should ignore the role of the traditional working class, the founding act of the conquest and control of the means of production and the advances towards very concrete forms of organisation of power in which the place of this sector is central. The challenge is to extirpate from our heads the sociological obsession of "class" and to see in all these workers' dynamics another expression of the totality of the class struggle, the experience of rebellion and the constitution of new orders of society which emerge from the simultaneous insurrection of the exploited. In itself, the occupation of a building is no more important than the occupation of a rural holding or a factory, the most important fact is the multiplication of these phenomena of expropriation of capital, their massification, their political creativity and their capacity of defence faced with the attacks of the capitalist state.

Another fairly widespread left critique is what we would characterise as radical-nationalist. The focal point of these critiques no longer resides in the class affiliation of the government but in the question of the sovereignty, more concretely in the problem of the ambiguity the government has shown on its "anti-imperialist" positions. It criticises the fact that whereas the government makes declarations opposed to US imperial domination, there is a privatising alliance with the oil capital transnationals (extended now to the sphere of the exploitation of gas) through "mixed enterprises". It is also opposed to the abandonment of orimulsion [2] as energy alternative. We find here a lot of denunciations which bear on the question of the "productive model" as a whole. Criticisms are made that the plans for the mining industry, the carboniferous plan, the southern gas pipeline [3], the participation of Venezuela in the IIRSA [4], the payment of the foreign debt and so on are no more than a simple reproduction of the model of developmentalist

capitalism, dependant and predatory. The most extreme versions of this "radical nationalism" claim that Chavez is nothing more than a "puppet" of neoliberalism disguised as a socialist.

We are entirely agreed on the strategic "duality" that traverses the government and its economic policies (exploration of new relations of production/alliance with transnational capital). The establishment of mixed enterprises is without doubt a huge and unacceptable concession to oil capital. Beyond that, projects like the plan for the development of coal extraction in the region of Zulia, the transnational penetration in the territories turned towards mining activities (basically gold and diamonds), the models of development proposed, the very vision of continental integration, the concession of a privileged role for finance capital, witness clearly to the fact that, to say the least, the "transition towards socialism" is still doubtful and contradictory. But does that mean Hugo Chavez and his government are no more than pawns of imperialism? Again, a formal reasoning is employed, emptied of facts, totally abstract and politically impotent as several of these tendencies of ultra-nationalism have shown themselves to be. The problem us that, although some of them speak of a "clash of civilisations" [5] and even of struggle against state capitalism, they do not go beyond simple denunciation and ideological propaganda.

From their position, there is no alternative except a mystification of political power or a kind of original pure community beyond history which will be restored as saviour of humanity. There have never been "people, movement, real and current collective action of transformation". This discourse implies that in reality everything is resolved in closed conspiracies and between leaderships, or thanks to a programme which would impose anew the state Leviathan. A state owning everything and the

enemy of al imperialism. What other outcome could there be beyond a mystification? The most radical proposals objectively resemble the good old programmes of a great part of the Latin American left of the 1930s and 1940s, which have given birth to parties like APRA (Peru) and Democratic Action (Venezuela) and we know today how they ended up. If the problem is Chavez and his government, that would mean that the real revolutionary government, like a God descending from Olympus, would, with divine force and a great number of orders and decrees, establish a national state with absolute sovereignty in the framework of a new civilisational reality. Basically it amounts to the re-elaboration of one of the follies of which the old radical left (at least, its most consistent elites) remains prisoner, the offspring both of Soviet Marxism and the programmes of national liberation and voluntarism specific to our American lands.

The good critique

Of course, there are other wings of the "left" who expose their critical viewpoint, all "anti-Chavistas", like the new liberal left - "anti-Bourbonist" as Petkoff says [6] - annexed by the right opposition. The problem in their view is the "tyrant-despot", the "populist", the "anti-democrat" Hugo Chavez, with a political ideology which is Castroite or "archaic". A logic that one finds in certain anarchist nuclei, for whom the problem is more or less the same. Chavez the militarist, Chavez the authoritarian and so on.). But in truth, it is not in our interest to discuss with these tendencies because either we are their political enemies, or, more simply, because they add nothing to the debate.

What interests us is another critique, very left also but perhaps more ingenuous. We can call this the "popular-moralist" critique. As critique and political posture, it is very simple. It states that Chavez is an honest man, a genuine revolutionary, a man of the people committed to

his ideals, but surrounded by a band of traitors, hypocrites, crooks who profit from his authority, organised essentially in the parties of the government - the MVR, PODEMOS and PPT in particular [7] - who use them in their turn as the main tools of appropriation of the functions of government and posts in general, in the state and the organized popular sector. It sees the main difficulty of the Bolivarian revolution as corruption and bureaucracy, and reiterates its total support to the president but increasingly distances itself from the new elites who monopolise the political representativeness of the revolutionary process.

The most important dimension of this critique is not the justice of its analysis or its theoretical depth (obvious weakness: the idealisation of Chavez, the personalisation of the government), what counts, is that it is the only critique which has acquired a mass character. It has become "popular" in all senses of the term and little by little, it has been forced to make qualitative leaps which have obliged it to evolve from commentary to political fact and to the construction of strategies of political action to destroy the shameful enemy of corruption and bureaucratism. It is what we call in the Projecto Nuestra America [8]: the construction of a "reason for all". This is not the enlightened "reason" of self-consciousness/Hegelian self-reflection. It is simply the concrete domain of collective reasoning in which the revolutionary process is expressed in its most productive and transformative matrix. In fact, it has already led to magnificent processes of mobilisation, social irreverence, radicalisation of the libertarian and egalitarian spirit, self-organisation which is in fact the central point constructed by the Bolivarian revolution in the ideological field. It is also the space in which all our hopes are concentrated, no longer as arrogant vanguards but as revolutionary combatants who both in their material conditions and their emotions are identical to this people.

What should the left say and do?

Beyond interpretations in the vanguard circles or popular sectors, it is in our view important to understand that it is the development of a social movement which although several times encouraged to organise from the bureaucratic government structures (Land Committees, Communal Councils, Health Committees, energy and water committees) is beginning to take its distance from these forms of leadership and to establish its own policies and strategies developing a critical attitude towards the state as a whole and which is radicalising from day to day. With the most important autonomous social movements (peasants, recovered companies, students, indigenous peoples), this organised base of the popular movement is the unavoidable class matrix for the deepening of the revolution. If we do not found a common theatre for political action and the construction of a project of society, it is very likely that the Bolivarian revolution will in the coming years undergo a decline of such a magnitude that it would disappear as a real phenomenon of the exercise of justice, of freedom and the construction of sovereignty, independently of Chavez.

We are today at a time of "maximum confusion". On the one hand the imperialist offensive against Venezuela, the evolution of "Plan Balboa" and "Plan Colombia" as military plans for attacking Venezuela, and the pressure of the electoral campaign (the campaign for ten million votes [9], aid the cohesion of the popular bases around the figure of Chavez and the position of the government, on the other hand, the institutional decomposition under which we live, increasingly manifest at the level of the municipal and federal governments (town halls, provinces, in the immense majority in the hands of the "bloc of change") produce a collective exhaustion which sometimes borders on despair. In fact, even the institutional

authorities are concerned, leading to an increasingly marked tendency to control both the social processes of organisation and self-government and the productive and workers' experiences in the cooperatives and "recovered" enterprises. A situation of "maximum confusion" before which the rank and file leadership tends to repeat the same schema applied for at least four years: keep quiet, wait, pursue organisation, don't underestimate the enemy, but all this begins to look a little inadequate. It is necessary to take a collective step forward. Until now, the attempts have been interesting but insufficient (the mobilisation begun by sectors of the indigenous movements, miners, peasants and above all workers). Faced with the emergence of these phenomena, the state apparatus neutralises them, when it is incapable of repressing them as with the miners, by transforming them into centres of administration of resources which it will grant them for their development. This cooption removes their combativeness by strengthening the tendency to "depoliticisation" of their action and increasing the unity of their bases as corporation and not in class terms (such is the situation of a good part of the alternative communication spaces).

This context demands a qualitative leap towards a new conjuncture in which relations between the government and the "non-administered" popular movement would change radically. Today, critical and combative nuclei have emerged across Venezuela. They struggle in defence of the Bolivarian revolution, but at the same time represent a faithful testimony to the exhaustion of the institutional schema of the state as central lever of the process of transformation. We have proposed steps forward in the future presidential campaign (December 2006) by creating inside it an alternative dynamic axised on the synthesis of all these programmes through dialogue, mobilisation, mass meetings, raising the themes of anti-bureaucratism, the struggle

against corruption, capitalism and imperialist aggression. We propose as slogan: "Ten million wills to deepen the revolution".

We have called this campaign "for all our struggles". An "other" campaign [10] on Venezuelan territory so that the real struggles can breather, so that the right words are found, so that the rank and file nuclei can organise, through the necessary mobilisation to erect the bases of an "autonomous transitional programme" shared by all the communities in struggle. The idea is not to limit this campaign to the elections. The ideal would be to go beyond them so that by February 27 [11] we have the bases of a common programme and plan which allows the effective deepening of the revolutionary process. There is even talk of an electoral ticket common to all the movements associated in this initiative to form a counterweight to the parties of the government [12]. It is a significant decision but it will be still in the background in relation to the priority objectives of mobilisation, meeting, listening, the construction of the programme "of the poor" so as to initiate from next year a new stage of the revolutionary process, characterised by the autonomy and unitary radicalisation of the popular struggles. This campaign should begin in one or two months, following a unitary conference to form "the command for all our struggles". Our creativity and political will are going to be determinant to its development, and we want to find ourselves in a totally different terrain, in which equality and the fight for the dignity of others will be the priority and not a political use of the collective.

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NOTES

[1] "Cimarronismo", one of the most original components of the cultural syncretism of the "New World", emerged from numerous new artistic forms originating from the mix of Amerindian, African and European cultures.

[2] A combustible created in Venezuela from the combination of water and bituminous or extra-heavy oil.

[3] A single and united gas network from Venezuela to Argentina.

[4] An initiative to integrate the regional infrastructure of South America, a vast programme of construction of new roads, bridges, waterways and energy and communication links especially in the tropical and Andean zones. It is a wing of the ALBA (Bolivian Alternative For the Americas).

[5] The quotation is from Douglas Bravo. A long-term anti-imperialist militant, Douglas Bravo was leader of the Party of the Venezuelan Revolution (PRV) and its armed wing, the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN, 1962-1969). He is today the main leader of the "Tercer camino" movement, an evolution of the PRV-FALN of which Hugo Chavez was a member until 1986.

[6] A former member of the PRV and the Venezuelan Communist Party, Teodoro Petkoff created the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) in 1971 on a line of democratic critique of Stalinism before evolving towards social-democratic and then outright neoliberal positions. Under the government of Rafael Caldera (last Christian Democrat government before Chavez), he was minister of planning (Cordiplan) and applied a neoliberal programme of reduction of inflation and the size of the administration (Agenda Venezuela). He left the MAS when the majority of the latter decided to support Chavez in 1997. He is now the main representative of the social-liberal anti-Chaves left and is a candidate for the presidential elections of December 2006.

[7] The government coalition is made up of these parties and others: the MVR (Movement for a Fifth Republic) was founded in 1997 to provide Chavez with an electoral presence; PODEMOS (POr la DEMOcracia Social) is the pro-Chavez split from the MAS whose leadership left the Chavez coalition in 2000, protesting against the radicalisation of measures; the PPT (Patria Para Todos) exists since 1997 as a successor to La Causa Radical, a split from the PCV in the early 1970s; the PPT has provided the main cadres of the Chavez government. Among the parties of the governing coalition, we should mention the PCV (Venezuelan Communist Party).

[8] "Our America Project"

[9] So that the legitimacy of the coming elections - the right, which knows it will lose, is considering a boycott - is not contested, Chavez has spoken of an objective of 10 million votes.

[10] The author here clearly refers to the "other campaign" of the Zapatistas.

[11] Reference to the popular uprising of February 27, 1989.

[12] In Venezuela, voting is done through a party. One can thus vote for Chavez by voting for the PCV, the MVR, or any other group which presents him as its candidate.

South Africa

Resistance to neoliberalism

Josep María Antentas

The victory of the African National Congress (ANC) in the democratic elections of 1994 marked the end of apartheid in South Africa, after a long period of negotiations between the forces of the regime and the liberation movement, initiated in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These culminated in an agreed model of transition whose strategic perspective had been established in the camp of the liberation movement in a clear form in 1990 with the formation of the Tripartite Alliance between the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) which was well integrated into the former, and the main trade union confederation of the country, the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

The ANC came to power with a neo-Keynesian program, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) whose initial implementation was very partial, but which was abandoned two years to later in favour of the Growth Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR), a program of neoliberal aspect.

The adoption of GEAR was accompanied by the promotion of a regional sub-imperialist project based on a neoliberal agenda of rapid economic integration of the African continent and its insertion in the global economy, through the New Partnership for Africa' s Development (NEPAD, Bond, 2004).

The objective of the ANC government is to consolidate a new dominant historic bloc based on capital oriented to large-scale export, the promotion of a "black bourgeoisie", and the inclusion in a subordinate form of the middle layers and sectors of the working-class (Dessai, 2004).

The social consequences of GEAR have been very drastic for the popular sectors: increased unemployment, rising from 16% in 1990 to more than 40% in recent years; a fall in the average income of working class families of around 19%, in particular in those sectors linked to the informal economy, around 50% of the economically active population; a strong polarization of the distribution of wealth and income; an increase in poverty, with the official rate at 70% and of extreme poverty, estimated at 28%; an increase in the price of basic public services, like water or electric lighting, due to privatisation and the policies of "cost recovery", that have caused massive cuts in supply to some 10 million families for not having paid bills, and maintenance of the structure of land

ownership which has undergone very few alterations with respect to the period of apartheid (McKinley, 2004).

These processes of increased inequality have been accompanied by the emergence of a small "new black middle-class" with its own specific interests. By this conjuncture of elements, the evolution of South African society has been defined as a transition from racial apartheid to class apartheid (Bond, 2004).

From the 1970s to the end of the 1980s, South Africa was characterized by a mighty workers' movement, formed in the heat of the processes of industrialization of the 1950s and 1960s that led to the formation of a significant industrial working class. Between 1950 and 1980 the number of black workers in manufacturing industry rose from 360,000 to 1,103,000, and in mining from 450,000 to 768,000 (Bond, Miller, and Ruiters, 2000).

The strikes in Durban in 1973 marked the birth of a new combative trade union movement. As Jacquin explains (1999), several currents with different union projects emerged within this movement:

A first current inked to the ANC; a second linked to the Black Consciousness Movement inspired by Steve Biko; and a third, formed by independent Marxist trade union cadres, who constituted what Jacquin calls the "trade union left", and which was involved in setting up the main industrial unions of the country, whose culmination was the formation of FOSATU in 1979.

The trade union left initially embodied an independent project with respect to the ANC and, from the 1980s onwards, a part of its nucleus considered the possibility of

impelling its own political project, with the formation of a "Workers' Party", inspired more or less by the Brazilian model and disputing the political hegemony of the ANC and the SACP. But gradually this project was abandoned and the political leadership of the ANC and its hegemony within the union movement was accepted, with the SACP in a stronger position at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, on the eve of the negotiations for the transition towards a post-apartheid society.

A road without return?

The first part of the 1980s was marked by debates and negotiations between the various union sectors for the formation of a single unitary confederation, which would culminate with the setting up of COSATU in 1985, integrating the broad majority of unions in the country. Different orientations coexisted from the beginning, but progressively those linked to the ANC acquired a hegemonic position and the old "union left" fragmented and adapted. COSATU developed a very significant role within the fight against apartheid, although its relations with other pillars of the liberation movement, the neighbourhood and civic groups rooted in the townships and poor districts, were always an element of controversy.

The militancy and combativeness of the trades unionism incarnated by COSATU made it an organization which was admired internationally. Along with the formation of the Brazilian CUT in 1983, and the eruption of independent trades unionism in South Korea in 1986-87 (which would culminate with the creation of the KCTU in 1995), the constitution of COSATU was one of the best

examples of development of a model of combative trades unionism in the countries of the semi-periphery, in a context of an international ebbing of workers' movements, the zenith of neoliberalism, and progressive adaptation of the first to the second.

In 1990, COSATU formally joined the tripartite Alliance with the ANC and SACP and from 1994 it maintained a subordinate relationship with the ANC government. From 1994 the trade union model of COSATU, and its members, experienced a progressive transformation towards a unionism of more institutionalised agreements, less militant, and lacking a horizon of socialist transformation.

This involved changes in its organizational culture, a greater bureaucratisation, and the cooption of important union leaders in positions of responsibility in the government, and also of middle cadres at company level in departments of human resources (Jensen, 2004)COSATU was affected by neoliberal policies and unemployment, and it has suffered a significant fall in affiliation.

In 1996 COSATU unions had 1.9 million affiliated members, whereas in 2005 the number was 1.7 million. In fact from 1996 500,000 affiliates were lost, although they gained 300,000, the majority due to the entrance of new unions into the confederation, like DENOSA or SASBO, of conservative tradition. The profile of membership also experienced significant evolution with a growing greater weight of qualified and "white collar" workers to the detriment of semi-skilled and "blue collar" workers. Faced with the application of GEAR, the strategy of COSATU has been simultaneously to maintain its subordinate Alliance with the ANC and at the same time to express its disagreement with its policies.

The confederation has oscillated between mere verbal opposition to governmental policies without any real strategy of confrontation with them, and the organization of important punctual mobilizations, among them several general strikes. Within the confederation, the most combative sector has been the union of municipal workers, SAMWU, protagonist of important struggles against privatisation.

There is no organized union left current, but the negative effects of neoliberalism on COSATU's base places it in a situation of permanent structural tension. As indicated by Trevor Ngwane (2003), there is reason to believe that the accumulated malaise will lead to a greater union combativeness since "the leadership of COSATU has captured the bodies of the workers, but not their souls"

The emergent resistance

The impact of neoliberal policies led to the emergence, from the end of the 1990s, of increasing social resistance that experienced a period of rapid growth from 2000 to 2003, although it later contracted partially. This must be considered not only as a result of the increase in poverty but as a direct response to the policies of the government (Dessai, 2004), in particular against the policies of privatisation of basic services like water or electric lighting, which constituted a central mechanism in what Harvey (2004) calls "accumulation by dispossession".

This "neoliberal dispossession" is added to the "historical dispossession" caused by apartheid and its legacy. The social base of these movements (habitually referred to in South Africa as "new social movements", in a usage of the term different to that used by "European theory" in relation to new social movements) is formed by the most impoverished sectors of South African society, the inhabitants of the townships, the local communities and the most stricken urban areas affected by massive unemployment, an extraordinary s housing crisis and lack of services. A good part of the social base of these struggles is formed by the unemployed, although they have not developed a collective identity as unemployed in the style of the Argentine piqueteros, and women also play a significant role.

Many analysts, like Dessai (2003) have talked about the protagonists of these movements in terms of the "poor", a vague and loosely defined category but also one used by the movements themselves, and that includes in this amalgam of marginalized sectors that sustain them (Dwyer, 2003). Dessai (2004) makes a comparison with the struggles of the "urban crowd" at the beginning of industrialization, analysed by authors like Hobsbawm, as loosely structured and inconstant movements of the urban poor for economic change.

We can conceive of them as reactive and defensive movements for daily survival carried out by what Davis (2005) calls the "urban informal proletariat" of the hyper-degraded peripheries of the great cities of the South, whose way of life is "informal survivalism". Their characteristics reflect the transformations undergone by the working-class and the impact of the processes of "urbanization disconnected from industrialization" that according to Davis is distinctive of the present dynamic of capitalism (except in China) and that fits well with South African reality.

A number of campaigns and organizations have emerged. Among the most important are the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), set up in 1998 around the demand for access to drugs for carriers of the HIV virus, a movement with a large social base and a formalized organizational national structure.

It has acted as a "single issue" campaign, focused against the pharmaceutical multinationals and avoiding confrontation with the ANC government; the Anti-Privatization Forum (APF), essentially based in Johannesburg, set up in 2000 as point of contact between several organizations, most importantly the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC).

The SECC was set up as a riposte to the increase in the cost of electric lighting after privatisation, organising the famous Operation Khanyisa of illegal reconnection of supplies to families who had been disconnected because of non-payment; the Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC), created in 2001 in the region of Cape Town as a response to the increasing evacuations of families for non-payment of mortgages or rents; and the Landless People' s Movement (LPM), formed in June 2001, because of the extreme slowness of the agrarian reform. Its

base is formed by an amalgam of sectors ("landless", small farmers, rural poor and so on) and its self-definition as "landless" expresses the demands for justice of the impoverished rural sectors. It is inspired by the Brazilian MST but has neither its force nor its global significance (Greenberg, 2004).

These different movements have had a fragmentary existence and little mutual coordination. Nevertheless, they participated jointly in the mobilizations for the UN World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in Durban in 2001 under the umbrella of the Durban Social Forum (DSF) and, later, during the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002, within the framework of the Social Movement Indaba (SMI) coalition.

The latter later became permanent as a national coordination, although weak and superstructural, of the movements. Johannesburg was testimony to the strong division between the social movements, whose demonstration mobilized 20,000 people, and the forces of the governmental Alliance who in their own march mobilized only 5,000. Both counter-summits were also the occasion to symbolically insert the struggles against neoliberalism in South Africa in the international cycle post-Seattle.

This resistance has emerged as periodic movements on the basis of concrete defensive demands directed fundamentally against the local administration, ordered to implement the policies of privatisation (Dessai and Pithouse, 2003). They have unfolded a broad spectrum of strategies, including a "repertoire" of actions like: legal processes, demonstrations, public occupations of offices, illegal reconnection of services that have been cut off, physical blocking of the evacuations of houses, and confrontations with the police (McKinley and Naidoo 2004).

Its organizational structure is variable in terms off organizational formalization and geographic scope. The number of people effectively organized, beyond punctual mobilizations, is relatively weak. It is possible to consider that they are movements that do not have a mass base, but a mass orientation (Ngwane, 2003).

Politically, this resistance to neoliberalism has emerged outside of the forces of the Alliance bloc and the historic forces that headed the fight against the apartheid. They were created outside the "politics of the transition" but they operate on the political terrain (McKinley, 2004) and fill, albeit in a very partial form, the vacuum left by the neoliberal turn and the institutionalisation of the traditional forces of the working-class (Ngwane, 2003), in a context however of lack of political alternative to the ANC and the SACP and the great weakness of the socialist left.

Relations with the forces of the Alliance, and the ANC itself, has been in general very conflictual, although the type of concrete relationship is variable and goes from open confrontation, as is the case of the APF and the AEC, to tense relations, as is the case of the LPM which has members of the ANC and SACP inside it, and the search for agreement, as is the case of the TAC that has tried to win the support of the government in the face of the multinationals (Benjamin, 2004).

Challenges and perspectives

After their unstoppable growth between 2000 and 2003, the social movements experienced a certain ebb tide and several difficulties as facing simultaneously strong state repression and attempts at cooption; while maintaining concrete struggles; continue developing after having obtained some initial basic successes; translate their mobilizing force into stable organizational consolidation; advance medium and long term strategic perspectives, and, in particular, extend their organized social base and establish alliances with other social sectors, beyond the "poor" and the unemployed, as well as students and the organized working-class.

For this reason, the relationship between these movements and COSATU is a central strategic element. Globally, this is tense and distant. COSATU is identified by the movements as part of the governmental bloc, and the movements are described as "ultra-leftist" bye COSATU, which fears their anti-ANC approach. Against this background, it seems reasonable on the part of the social movements to look for bridges with the unions, without losing the capacity for their own initiative, through concrete agreements for unity of action, so dragging significant sectors outside the camp of the Alliance (AIDC, 2004). The strengthening of this social resistance must be accompanied also by attempts to construct a political alternative to the ANC and the SACP, a process that, given the weakness of the socialist left, will take time.

(*Beyond the bibliography cited below, I thank Brian Ashley and Marcia Andrews of the AIDC of Cape, Mark Weinberg of Johannesburg, Thabo, Arthur and Bongwani Lubisi of the SECC, and Bongani Masuku of COSATU for information on South African realities*).

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Repression and electoral fraud

Showdown in Mexico

Phil Hearse

Teachers rally in Oaxaca

On 16 August Mexican president Vincente Fox sent 800 federal riot police with armoured cars to guard the parliament building in Mexico City, against the possibility of attack by the tens of thousands of protestors occupying the centre of the city in a semi-permanent encampment. The protestors are demonstrating against the giant fraud in July's presidential election, which robbed centre-left candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (popularly known as 'AMLO') of victory, and handed the presidency instead to right-winger Felipe Calderón, candidate of Fox's National Action Party (PAN).

This summer has witnessed a series of harsh struggles and street battles as the outgoing government of Vincente Fox sought to stem the rising tide of social protest - using the traditional methods of the Mexican elite - vicious repression and electoral fraud on a grand scale.

While the protests are currently centered on the electoral fraud, over the summer there have been several other key battles - a mass movement in the state of Oaxaca to bring down the corrupt right-wing government (including a 44-day strike by Oaxaca schoolteachers leading that mass movement), a prolonged strike by miners and steelworkers and a huge conflict with federal and state riot police in the militant community of San Salvador Atenco in Mexico state.

There is more to come. Already Lopez Obrador's centre-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) has set a series of dates for mass mobilisations going into the autumn, mobilisations which could easily escape its control.

Why has this huge social conflict built up over the summer? Two factors underlie much of the tension - the build up to the presidential election which the Mexican oligarchy, in close collaboration with the United States, was desperate not to lose to even the moderate left, and the progress of the 'Other Campaign' - the project of uniting and building Mexico's social movements from below, launched by Subcommandante Marcos and the EZLN a year ago.

But behind these factors are more fundamental issues. Since the election as president of right-wing Svengali and narcho-politician in chief Carlos Salinas de Gotari in 1988, Mexico has been suffering the continued pressure of neoliberalism, which in as a result of the NAFTA agreement has wrecked traditional communal peasant agriculture and devastated agricultural communities.

The net result is an avalanche of migrants to the cities, particularly Mexico City, flooding the ranks of the informal economy and with it urban mass poverty in the huge edge of town barrios. Social inequality has deepened massively, in a country already one of the most unequal in the world. Like Brazil, Mexico is a country where the rich live like the rich in Switzerland and the poor live like the poor in India.

Social tensions have been high since the emergence of the Zapatista indigenous movement in 1994. With no independent mass party representing the interests of the workers and the poor, Subcommandante Marcos and the EZLN have acted as a sort of substitute leadership, giving consistent support to every militant struggle. But paradoxically the Zapatistas themselves have been largely confined to their Chiapas mountain strongholds, a limitation that the Other Campaign aims to overcome.

How has this spring and summer of battle unfolded?

Miners and steelworkers strike

More than a quarter of a million miners and steelworkers walked off the job between March 1-3 in wildcat strikes at 70 companies in at least eight states from central to northern Mexico, virtually paralyzing the mining industry.

The strike resulted from an attempt by the government to remove the Mexican Miners Union's top officer, General Secretary Napleón Gómez Urrutia, and replace him with Elías Morales Hernández, a union dissident who is reportedly backed by the Grupo Mexico mining company. As Mexico labor expert Dan La Botz explains:

"The strike by members of the National Union of Mining and Metallurgical Workers of Mexico (SNTMMRM) resulted from both labor union and political causes. The explosion and cave in at the Pasta de Conchos mine in San Juan de Las Sabinas, Coahuila in northern Mexico on Febuary 19 killed 65 miners. The Miners Union leader Gómez Urrutia blamed the employer, Grupo Mexico, calling the deaths "industrial homicide." The Pasta de Conchos cave-in set off a storm. Throughout Mexico politicians, academics, intellectuals, and ordinary people criticized the mining company.....

"While miners throughout the country mourned the death of their brothers and complained of health and safety conditions in their own mines, there was no official or wildcat strike in the immediate aftermath of the accident.

Atenco stand-off

"Then, on February 28 the Mexican Secretary of Labor announced that Gómez Urrutia was not actually the head of the union, but that the real general secretary was Elías Morales Hernández. The government's action was based on part of Mexican labor law known as "taking note" (toma de nota), under which the government recognizes the legally elected officers of labor unions." [1]

The government turned to violent repression of the striking miners and steelworkers supporting them. On April 20 eight hundred state and federal police launched an assault on 500 striking workers who had been occupying a steel mill in Lázaro Cárdenas. Two were killed, five seriously injured and 40 wounded.

Since Felipe Calderón declared himself winner of the presidential elections Grupo Mexico has been on the offensive against the miners. At Nacozari, one of the world's largest copper mines, just a few miles south of the US border, 1400 miners have been on strike since March 24. On July 12 the board said they'd abandoned their jobs, and gave the mine's owner, Grupo Mexico, permission to close down operations, effectively firing the strikers. At the time of writing the strike is unresolved.

Bloody conflict in Atenco

San Salvador Atenco, 30 kms west of Mexico City, is a largely agricultural community which in 2001 led a huge and successful battle against the building of a new Mexico City airport, which would have confiscated their land and destroyed their livelihoods. The organisation which led the struggle, the FPDT (Peoples' Front in Defense of Land), remained in existence.

This militant community invited Subcommandante Marcos to speak in the town on May 1. Two days later police attempted to arrest flower sellers from Atenco who set up their stalls on some land owned by the American multinational Walmart in the nearby community of Texcoco. The flower sellers called for help on their mobile phones and hundreds arrived to beat back the police attack. A day of bloody battles followed, in which two people were killed by paramilitary riot police.

Next morning the federal riot police carried out a brutal attack on the town, which involved - as is the style in Mexico - brutal beatings, the wrecking of homes, the theft of money and the arrest of more than one hundred. In jail dozens were subject to torture and more than 20 women were raped or otherwise sexually abused. Some key leaders of the community, including FPDT leaders Ignacio del Valle and Felipe Alvarez, remain in jail accused of 'armed kidnap' (a reference to the abduction of several cops during the first day of the battle).

The Atenco attack caused outrage in Mexico and beyond because television reporters were allowed to film many of the events, including the beating of one man by more than 20 riot cops. As a consequence of the Atenco attack the Zapatista leadership declared a red alert and started a nationwide campaign for the release of the imprisoned Atenco campesinos.

In a statement on 4 May, the Revolutionary Workers Party who support the Fourth International, declared the events at Atenco to be "a deliberate provocation against the Other Campaign" saying that "without a shadow of doubt" the police attacks has been designed to coincide with Marcos' visit, and to impede the progress of his campaign. After finishing the Valley of Mexico part of his trip Marcos was due to travel to San Luis Potosí, were an important rally for the release of political prisoners was due to take place.

Uprising and terror in Oaxaca

Oaxaca state on the Pacific coast has a long militant history. In the early 1970s it was the site of a militant guerrilla struggle led by the Party of the Poor, which resulted in near-genocidal repression in which thousands of young people assumed to support the guerrilla were killed.

Over the summer there has been a prolonged struggle against the ultra-corrupt state government of right-wing Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, a member of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party, until recently the main party of the Mexican elite). It started with a strike by militant teachers for better wages and more financial support for poor students, by soon mushroomed into a general campaign to force Ulises Ruiz to quit.

The teachers and their allies occupied the main square (Zócalo) in the city of Oaxaca, including taking over some government buildings. On June 14 state and federal paramilitary police launched a violent attack on the protestor's encampment in which several people (the exact number is unknown) were killed. The very next day the teachers and their supporters re-took the Zócalo , instituting a two-month period of virtual 'dual power' in the city and much of the state. Indeed on July 5 the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (known by its Spanish initials APPO) declared itself to be the legitimate government of the state.

Since then there have been repeated mass marches, assassinations of popular leaders by 'unknown' gunmen who have opened fire on several demonstrations, the takeover of several radio and television stations to put the mass media at the service of the people, police attacks on those radio stations and at the time of writing (late August) a threat by Oaxaca business people to stage a state-wide strike against...the inability of the state government to stop all the strikes!

In response to their inability to crush the mass movement politically, Ulises Ruis - backed by Vicente Fox's national government - has unleashed a reign of terror in the streets of Oaxaca. Right-wing death squads prowl the city by night and have carried out drive-by shootings at the radio and television stations, as well as opening fire on several demonstrations.

Riot police wait in front of Oaxaca cathedral.

On 21 August the Channel 9 television station headquarters, used as a headquarters by the dissident movement, was attacked and burned by right-wing thugs, making it unusable.

On 22 August city and state police agents, dressed in black and wearing masks, traveled throughout the city in a caravan of motorcycles and pick-up trucks. The convoy of 34 vehicles joined up at about twenty minutes after midnight and opened fire on TV and radio security watchposts from their moving vehicles. As the caravan passed radio station La Ley 710, teacher Lorenzo San Pablo Cervantes received bullet wounds to the back. He was taken to the hospital and later died.

In Oaxaca, as elsewhere, right-wing government forces are trying to effectively militarise the struggle, create an atmosphere of fear and tension, create mass feeling of crisis and disorder and blame all this on the rebellion - to create the atmosphere for a future bloody crushing of the movement by the army or police.

The situation is now extremely dangerous for the mass movement, especially as tactical divisions have emerged, with the teachers abandoning their 44-day strike without having achieved their objectives. The fate of the Oaxaca struggle is closely linked with that against electoral fraud centred on the occupation of central Mexico City.

Electoral Fraud

In the run-up to the July 2 presidential election the two leading candidates, Felipe Calderón of the PAN and Manuel Lopez Obrador of the PRD appeared to be neck and neck, but with some polls putting Lopez Obrador slightly ahead. In the event, when the final result was posted, the official result gave a slight advantage to Calderón, leading to widespread suspicions of electoral fraud.

As Mexico City journalist and left-wing activist Peter Gellert points out:

"Given the close vote and AMLO's (Lopez Obrador's) charges of electoral fraud, a partial recount of 9% of the country's 131,000 polling stations was ordered by the Federal Electoral Tribunal. AMLO and his supporters, however, have been demanding a 100% recount. The recount, which began on August 9, has not resolved the dispute. The AMLO forces charge serious discrepancies, even on the basis of the small 9% sample, among them:

In 43% of the sample, Calderón had been accredited with more votes than he actually received, lowering his total number of votes by 13,500. This was 5000% more votes than AMLO lost in the recount.

In 65% of the recounted polling stations, there were either more ballots deposited than there were voters or more voters than there were corresponding ballots. In Mexico, control of the paper ballots is extremely strict. In the 9% of the polling stations that were recounted, these discrepancies involved 120,000 ballots - half the difference between the two candidates nationwide across all the polling stations.

More than 30% of the supposedly sealed ballot boxes had been opened after the elections, raising the spectre that their contents were altered." [2]

Since July 30 the centre of Mexico city, including the Zócalo, has been occupied by tens of thousands of protestors. According to Gellert:

"Many far left and social organisations that didn't participate in AMLO's campaign are involved in the anti-fraud protests. Along the eight kilometre stretch of encampments, a wide array of neighbourhood associations, unions, student groups and political organisations can be found.

"Unfortunately, the Other Campaign, an initiative launched by the Zapatista National Liberation Army and headed by the charismatic Subcommandante Marcos, while condemning the fraud, has abstained from the mass demonstrations. During the election campaign, the Other Campaign centred most of its fire on AMLO and the obvious deficiencies in the PRD's program and methods. Some organisations that participated in the Other Campaign are, however, involved in the anti-fraud protests."

The huge political crisis in Mexico is deeply rooted in the massive social inequality that has been deepened by nearly two-decades of neoliberalism and intensified subordination of Mexico to the needs of US multinationals and agri-business. Violent repression, harsh methods of struggle and occasional outbursts of fury on those at the bottom of the pile are the inevitable results.

Regrettably what the poor and oppressed of Mexico lack is a nationally structured anti-capitalist political party which can represent them, co-ordinate the struggles and intervene on the national political terrain. As we noted above, the Zapatistas and the Other Campaign can to a certain extent play the role of a substitute leadership, but only partially, occasionally and inadequately. While the far left in Mexico has been correct to support the Other Campaign, the key question is what lasting political results it will lead to.

Phil Hearse, a veteran revolutionary socialist in Britain, writes for Socialist Resistance.

NOTES

[1] Mexican miners and steelworkers on strike - International Viewpoint May 2006

[2] Green Left Weekly August 30 2006

Workers movement

The European trade union movement today - a rapid overview

Thadeus Pato

The neo-liberal policies of the last twenty years have had important consequences for the trade union movement. We have, however, to make a distinction between the objective effects, those that are so to speak interiorised, of these policies on the trade union movement as a result of the transformation of work and of the forms of employment, and the measures taken by the ruling class and its representatives in the parliaments by means of changes in legislation that are explicitly directed against the unions.

1. Preamble

In what follows we will avoid using fashionable terms such as "neo-liberal policies" and "globalisation". This is for the following reasons:

First of all, they lead to confusion, because they amount to implicitly affirming that we are seeing at the present time a new phase of development of the capitalist system. This is not the case. We are still in the period that Mandel designated by the name of "late capitalism" or "the old age of capitalism" and all the characteristics of this period that he defined correspond to the present development of the policies of capital. The only thing that has changed is the speed at which capitalism has imposed itself everywhere in the world. This formidable acceleration dates from the collapse of the Eastern bloc.

Secondly, the term globalisation is just another denomination to designate a tendency that is inherent in capitalism, its expansion throughout the entire world - which is therefore in no way a qualitative change.

Thirdly, the concept of "neo-liberalism" is an imprecise term, because in reality there are several neo-liberal schools, some of which are very far from the present economic policies based on supply (thus, the classic German neo-liberalism of the school of Eucken, Ropke etc., envisages state intervention in economic life).

And fourthly, these two concepts are often used in a sense that lets it be understood that there exists "another capitalism"- in the same category of ideas there also appear zoological classification such as, for example, "capitalism". It is absolutely necessary to put forward the objection that, today as yesterday, we are dealing with capitalism in the ordinary sense of the term and that the question of knowing whether it is more or less "rapacious" depends only on the relationship of forces in society.

And there is the subject, because what is decisive for evaluating this relationship of forces is the state of the workers organisations.

2. Liberal economic policies and their consequences for the trade union movement

On the European and world scale, we are still in a phase of a dominantly depressive long wave. The objective of the class in power over the last twenty years has been to find a solution to get out of the ongoing economic crisis, a solution that would quite simply enable it to raise the rate of profit thanks to a whole series of measures.

Basically, it's a question of the following points which we will deal with in a more thorough way later on:

❖ Increasing casualisation of working conditions. As we can see for example in Germany, there is a drastic diminution of so-called "normal working conditions" in other words a full-time job with a permanent contract.

❖ An attempt to import cheap labour: in this domain the Bolkestein directive was meant to be a decisive step forward for capital.

❖ Reduction of costs in the social field (lowering of pensions and reduction of sickness benefits, etc.), thanks to privatisation and the cutting of subsidies.

❖ Internationalisation of production (within and outside Europe). That is what we call today "globalisation", which from a qualitative point of view is not new. The difference is that today, on the one hand this process has considerably increased and on the other hand, because of the technological revolution, the transfer of units of production is easier and faster than ever, which means that production becomes located above all where wage costs are lowest.

❖ Reduction of taxes for the rich.

❖ Maximum utilisation of the possibilities of the technological revolution: rationalisation, automation, lean production.

All these measures have been more or less applied in all the countries of Europe, but all of them have not been applied in every country at the same time and to the same degree. That is what explains in part the unequal development of national economies, considered within the European Union. In this process a part of the measures that we have mentioned, in particular the internationalisation of production, is used as a threat against the working class of the country and its organization. The ruling class pursues, with this global policy, two important objectives:

1. To make the European Union the most powerful and most dynamic economic bloc in the world. That is what is involved in the "Lisbon process":

2. To overcome the crisis of the fall in the rate of profit.

3. Policies that are directly aimed against the trade union movement.

Here, we must not ignore the fact that there exist different strategies in different countries and that it is therefore difficult to proceed to a generalisation.

The explanation for this is that there subsist in the different countries different judicial rules defining trade union rights. As a consequences, the way of acting openly against these rights, with the aim of putting in place the conditions for the policies described in point 2, will be different in each country.

In Germany, for example, the rights of the trade unions, particularly the right to strike, have always been very strongly codified. A strike is only authorised in the case of negotiations concerning wages or the terms of the work contract, political strikes are in general illegal and there are certain rules which restrict trade union activities. Furthermore, in Germany social democracy has exercised and continues to exercise a strong direct influence on the DGB (the general trade union confederation), an influence that is not in any significant fashion contested in the country. That is why the need to change the legislation concerning the unions has not been felt in Germany, even though some judicial decisions have introduced certain restrictions.
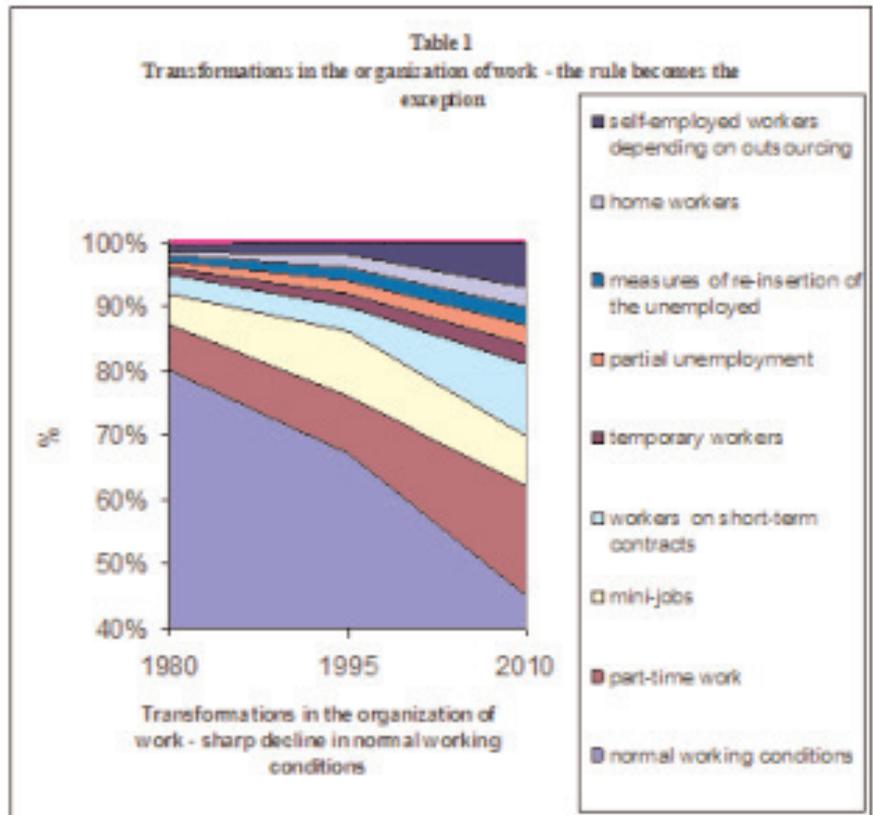
In most of the other countries of the EU there are several trade union confederations, linked to different political currents or parties, but mainly to parties that defend the dominant political and economic ideology (except in Spain).

The country that has suffered the hardest attacks against trade union rights is Britain, where in the 1980s, under the Thatcher government, the unions suffered considerable losses in strength and in influence, because of significant changes in the legislation.

We do not think that it is the measures taken against the trade union movement, including legislative measures, which best explain the situation of the unions. It is certainly the liberal offensive of the last 25 years that has played an essential role, but the trade union leaderships totally capitulated in front of it by allowing themselves to be caught up in the inherent logic of liberal economic policies.

4. The Detailed Effects of Liberal Economic Policies

With the help of some figures and statistics, we will try to sketch some elements of this evolution and its background. This description cannot be exhaustive, but it will contribute to an understanding of the resemblances, but also the differences in the

Table 1
Transformations in the organization of work - the rule becomes the exception

- self-employed workers depending on outsourcing
- home workers
- measures of re-insertion of the unemployed
- partial unemployment
- temporary workers
- workers on short-term contracts
- mini-jobs
- part-time work
- normal working conditions

Transformations in the organization of work - sharp decline in normal working conditions

evolution of the trade union movement in the different European countries.

4.1 The Transformation of the Labour Market

The following graph has been built up starting from figures from the German Federal Republic, but the general evolution that is perceptible here can be observed in the whole of Europe. As we can see, working conditions have been dramatically transformed. In 1980 we still had in Germany 80% of workers who benefited from normal working conditions, that is, full-time and unlimited contracts, whereas all the other forms of work, such as part-time work, short-term contracts, casual jobs, occupied a negligible place - temporary work was practically non-existent. Today, normal working conditions represent less than 50% and the tendency is still downwards. The most important increase is in the number of part-time workers and of mini-jobs and limited term contracts.

Temporary work has also increased enormously. It is particularly interesting to observe the increase in the number of self-employed workers, who do work that is outsourced by enterprises. These workers, who previously carried out the same work as wage earners. now do so as self-employed workers. In general, they work for the same company as before, but they themselves take on the risks and very often have markedly clearly inferior revenues. That has, of course, non-negligible effects on the fighting ability of unions in certain sectors, since the workers

who are supposedly self-employed are no longer unionised and are even less easy to mobilise.

It is the same for workers who are employed on short-term contracts, casual workers and temporary workers. These people are for almost identical reasons very hard to mobilise for trade union action.

It would of course be a mistake to present this evolution as the culmination of a consciously worked-out plot against the workers' movement. What is involved here is essentially a consequence of the capitalist strategy we spoke of above, with the aim of reconstituting their rates of profit. It is not necessary to develop here how the flexibilisation of working conditions has consequences which make resistance from the working class and its trade union organisations difficult, indeed is some sectors impossible, and this obviously has a positive secondary effect for the employers.

The repercussions on workers' consciousness of this transformation of the reality of the working class, particularly the increasing rise of individualism, very noticeable among self-employed workers, as well as the accompanying loss of trade union consciousness, are taking on an importance that is difficult to appreciate with any accuracy.

We can see here (Table 1) that because of this dramatic transformation of the structure of work, on the one hand the fighting capacities of trade union organisations have been

Table 2
Evolution of the Number of Trade Union Members in Europe, US, and Japan (1965-2000)

GB, Irland, USA und Japan — Legend: Irland (IRL), Großbritannien (GB), Japan (JAP), USA

Norden und Belgien — Legend: Schweden (S), Dänemark (DK), Finnland (FIN), Norwegen (N), Belgien (B)

Kontinentaleuropa — Legend: Österreich (A), Italien (I), Deutschland (D), Niederlande (NL), Frankreich (F)
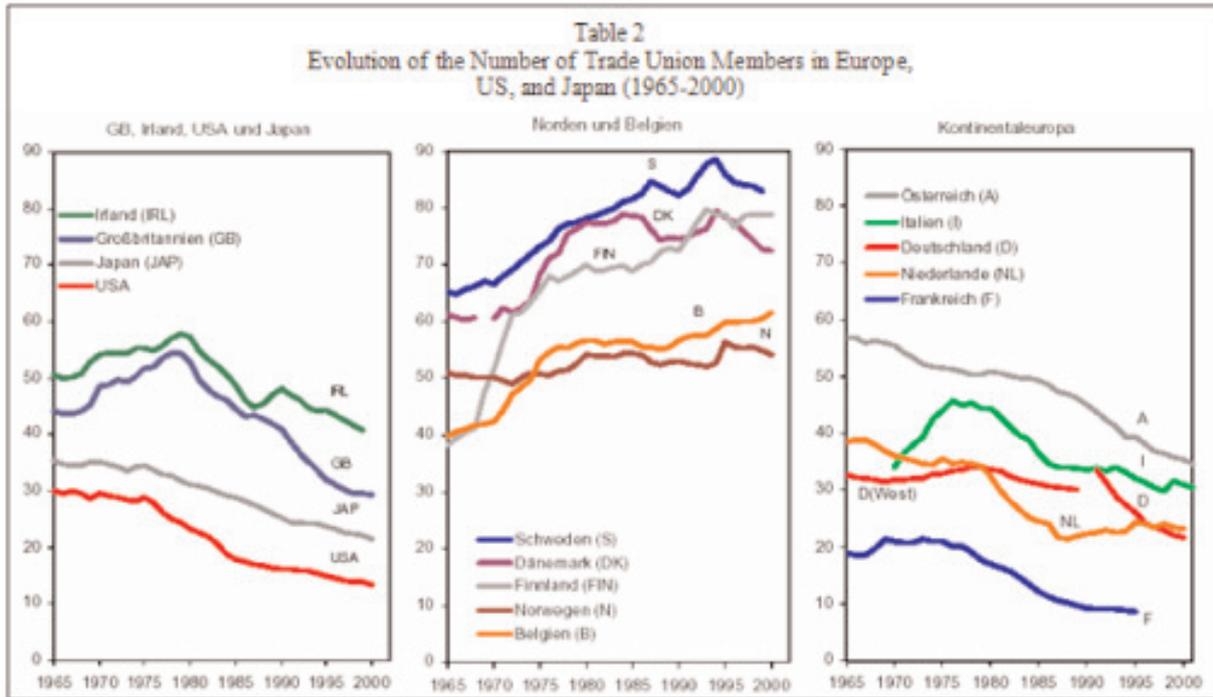
considerably reduced, and on the other that for many workers, it has had negative consequences for trade union consciousness.

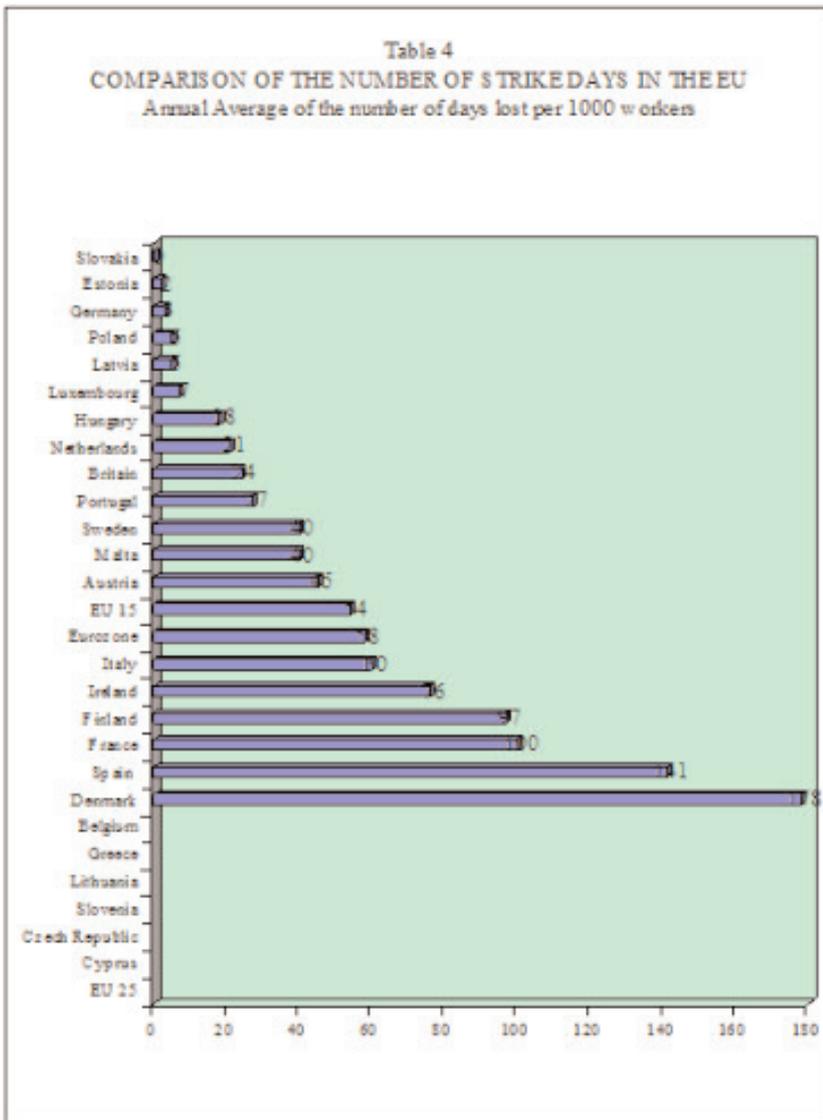4.2 The evolution of trade union membership

At first sight, we could think that Table 2, which follows, partly contradicts the evolution described in the preceding paragraph. As we can see, trade union membership in continental Europe, that is to say in Austria, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and France, but also in Ireland and Britain, has fallen continuously since 1980 at least (this is also true for Japan and the United States).

In the Scandinavian countries and in Belgium the situation is quite different. We have in these two cases a regular increase in membership, or at the very least a stabilisation of the number of members in the same period.

Table 3 Length of Strikes: Number of Days Lost per 1000 workers																
Country	Average 1990-2003	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Belgium	31	34	22	65	18	23	32	46	13	27		8	41	18		
Denmark	163	42	30	27	50	33	81	31	41	1250	36	48	23	75	21	30
Germany	14	42	30	27	18	7	7	3	2	1	2	0	1	9	5	1
Finland	173	446	230	41	10	309	547	11	48	61	10	110	26	31	28	18
France	104	67	48	37	49	40	291	54	29	55	56	102	74	44	193	
Greece	241	1720	432	209	116	47	31	52	26	18						
Britain	36	82	33	24	30	13	18	55	10	11	10	20	20	51	19	34
Ireland	124	266	100	218	70	28	128	107	66	31	164	70	80	15	25	13
Italy	157	342	195	179	236	237	57	119	72	33	54	51	57	49	45	38
Luxemburg				0	0	60	2	0	0	0	5	0	0	0		
Netherlands	25	37	17	15	8	8	122	1	2	5	11	1	6	354	2	
Austria	40	3	19	8	4	0	0	0	6	0	0	1	0	3	393	0
Portugal	46	63	53	83	24	30	19	16	36	44	31	19	18	44	22	18
Sweden	57	191	5	7	54	15	162	16	6	0	20	0	3	0	152	4
Spain	338	283	486	701	147	732	121	123	138	92	102	233	119	297	46	249
EU (15)	81	175	120	133	84	133	92	53	36	49	35	56	40	63	59	
Zone Euro	92	197	144	162	97	164	105	54	42	34	41	66	45	67	66	
Estonia							0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0
Latvia							0	0	0	0	37	0	0	4	0	0
Lithuania												10	2	0	0	0
Malta				1	20	21	38	114	110	14	9	32	19	5	22	11
Poland					58	6	8	3	4	11	8	0	0	1	0	
Slovakia				7	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Slovenia																
Czech Rep				5	0	1	1	5								
Hungary				1	2	10	94	1	1	0		11	55	3	1	1	7
Cyprus											111	5	18	26	29	37
Switzerl'd	2	1	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	7	1	1	6	6	2	
Norway	79	79	1	207	19	54	26	279	3	137	3	233	0	70	0	66
USA	44	55	43	37	36	45	51	42	38	42	16	161	9	5	32	
Japan	2	3	2	5	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	0		

Table 4

COMPARISON OF THE NUMBER OF STRIKE DAYS IN THE EU

Annual Average of the number of days lost per 1000 workers

Country	
Slovakia	0
Estonia	2
Germany	3
Poland	5
Latvia	5
Luxembourg	7
Hungary	18
Netherlands	21
Britain	24
Portugal	27
Sweden	40
Malta	40
Austria	45
EU 15	54
Eurozone	58
Italy	90
Ireland	96
Finland	97
France	110
Spain	141
Denmark	178

prevent the maintenance of a relatively high number of strikes in comparison with other countries.

To explain that, it must not be forgotten that the right to strike has a different legal status depending on which country. So in Germany, it is codified in a very restrictive way. Political strikes are in general forbidden. Solidarity strikes are only authorised in a very limited framework. But if we consider the European Union or the Euro zone, we have to take note that on average, we are seeing regular fall in the number of strikes since 1990.

The following graph (Table 4) shows the average number of strike days per year per 1,000 workers during the period 1995-2003. We can make two observations: first of all, the countries which have by far the lowest number of strike days are the countries of Eastern Europe, which after the dissolution of Comecon experienced a dramatic process of de-industrialisation and which have thus lost "the biggest battalions" of trade union members.

It is also interesting to observe that during this period Germany had a low number of strikes. There are two reasons for that: on the one hand, East Germany experienced, after the Wall came down, the same process of de-industrialisation, with the same consequences (high unemployment and the disappearance of stable jobs), and on the other hand economic growth in Germany since 1990 has been markedly weaker than in the other Western countries of the European Union.

And that is the second interesting point: we can see that, with a few reservations, the importance of the number of strike days is in correlation with economic growth. It is n Denmark that we have seen, since 1990, the highest average number of strike days, and it is also in Denmark, along with Finland, that economic growth has been strongest.

However it must be noted that historical factors are also to be taken into account; in countries like Spain, France, and Italy the habit of struggle is firmly embedded and

But this evolution, at first sight very divergent between Scandinavia and the rest of Europe, is explained by other factors. Changes such as those which have occurred in the structure of work do not act in a linear way on the degree of trade union organisation. Other factors also play a role : we will come back later to the most important of them. The level of unionisation does not allow us to draw conclusions as to how strong struggles are in the countries concerned.

But it should not be forgotten that not only in Europe, but also in the industrialised countries outside Europe, the liberal economic offensive of the last 25 years has had the effect of considerably reducing the level of unionisation. One of the main reasons for this is undoubtedly the modification of working conditions described above.
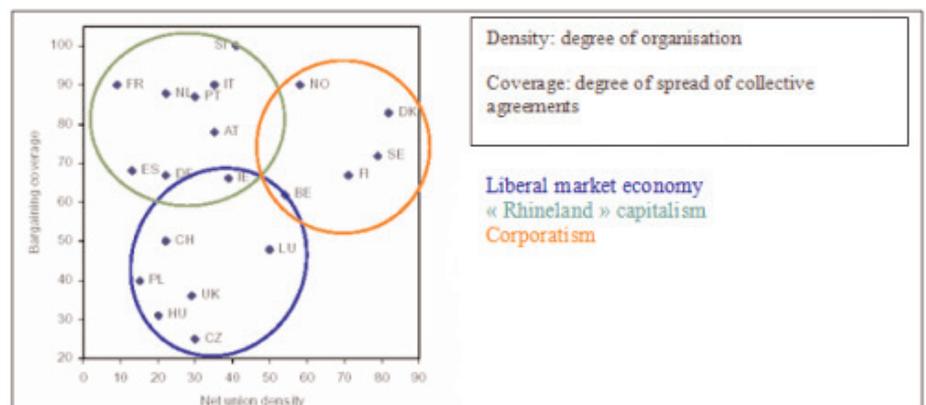
4.3 The development of working-class struggles

It is interesting to consider the evolution of the number and the length of strikes in the course of the last 15 years (Table 3). Two things stand out clearly: first of all, we see that there is no automatic correlation between the degree of trade union organisation and the number of strike days.

It is true that in a series of countries, particularly in Germany, the numbers of days lost because of strikes by thousands of workers has decreased, parallel to the continuing fall in the level of unionisation. However, elsewhere there are countries, for example France, where at the start of the phase the weak degree of unionisation did not

Density: degree of organisation

Coverage: degree of spread of collective agreements

Liberal market economy
« Rhineland » capitalism
Corporatism

because of that it is independent of the level of unionisation. This is for a multiplicity of reasons which we will not go into here.

4.4 Degree of organisation and contractual system

In the graph which follows (Table 5), a bourgeois economist tried, in 2002, to show the relationship between the level of unionisation - the percentage of workers who are organised - and the way in which the system of collective bargaining is regulated, the degree of extension of collective bargaining, in other words to what extent the collective agreements negotiated by the unions apply to all workers. In the graph, we can see that it is possible to proceed to different regroupments according to the economic system and the type of trade union organisation which predominates in the groups of countries. Of course, it is not here either a question of ideal forms, but of certain transitions. The author basically differentiates between three types: a decentralised and deregulated economy, what he calls the free market economy; next, Rhenish capitalism, in which there is a power of regulation by the unions, with state intervention and powerful workers' organisations; and lastly, co-operativism, with highly centralised unions which have an ability to regulate.

Here we find the solution to the problem evoked in paragraph 4.1, that is that the Scandinavian unions, particularly in Sweden, have a level of unionisation of more than 80 per cent, but that on the other hand the frequency of struggles is in no way comparable. This results from the fact that in a system of co-operation, the unions take on part of the functions that would be the responsibility of the state in another system. Belonging to the union plays a role of social protection.

To sum up, this graph shows that in a system of co-operation, the degree of unionisation

attains its maximum level, while in the system called Rhenish capitalism, the degree of organisation is rather weak compared to the extent to which workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements, which is identical or even superior to it. The decentralised and deregulated system, which is prevalent in the liberal market economy, is marked by an average level of unionisation and a low degree of cover by collective bargaining agreements.

If we now compare this with the figures presented earlier concerning the number of strikes, we see that generally speaking the most liberal economic systems also have the lowest number of strike days.

4.5 Women in the unions

An important change in the trade union movement over the last 30 years is the change in the level of unionisation of women workers. We present here the comparative figures in 1970 and 2001 for three countries. In general, the number of women who are unionised has increased by 100 per cent over the period. The reasons for this are partly the explosive growth of women's employment and partly also the fall in the number of male trade unionists. However, it must be noted that these important structural changes have in the majority of countries found very little reflection at the higher levels of the union hierarchies.

5. Conclusions

We had over these 25 years a situation:

❖ of economic crisis.

❖ of a decline in the activity of the class struggle, with symbolic defeats (the British miners in the 1980s).

❖ of political accommodation and capitulation by the main trade union organisations in the capitalist countries of

Europe in the face of the liberal offensive of Capital.
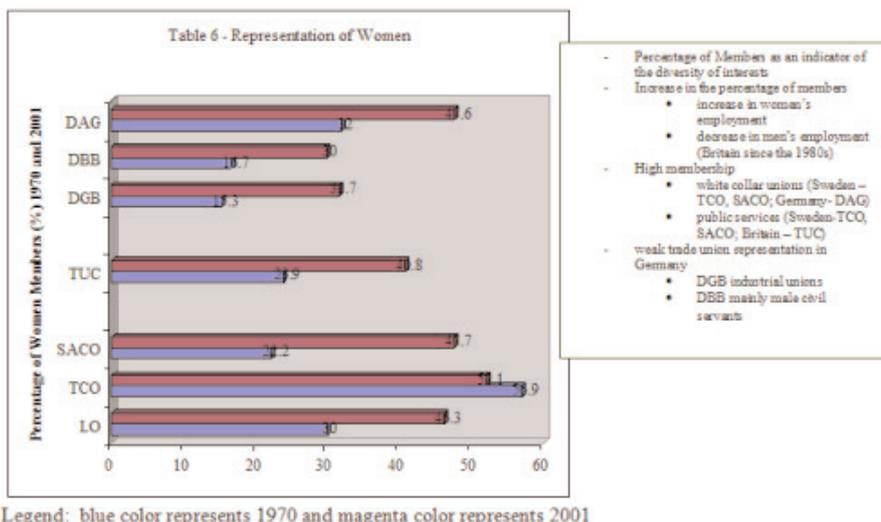
❖ of a general decline in the level of unionisation.

In the last three years, it seems, according to recent figures, that a turnaround is taking place - the number of strike days (and in some places the level of unionisation) is on the increase and we have seen a succession of economic and political struggles led by the unions, but:

❖ Almost all these struggles (and their number is growing) are of a defensive nature. In Germany for example they are directed against the attempt to lengthen working hours, lower wages and make working conditions even harder.

❖ Faced with the European employers, who have developed a common strategy against the working class, there does not exist any visible common strategy of the trade union organisations (with the exception of the transport unions, which have successfully organised action against the directive on transport in the European Union) and there are very few joint actions.

❖ The unions are still too national.

❖ A large part of the trade union leaderships is closely linked to parties which defend a line of liberal market policies and/or which are purely and simply corrupt.

The essential task of the European trade union movement in the coming years is to oppose the European strategy of the employers, which manifests itself on the economic level in a visible way by aggravated job flexibility and mobility. On the political level, it is to oppose projects such as the Lisbon Agenda and the attempt to put it into practice thanks to a battery of specific measures, including the directive on transport, the Bolkestein directive and the projected Constitution.

It is a question of opposing that with a unitary cross-border European trade union strategy that really organises action, which necessitates going beyond the framework of the present purely bureaucratic international trade union organisations.

Thadeus Pato, Leadership member RSB, Germany and of the IC and Bureau of the Fourth International.

Table 6 - Representation of Women

Legend: blue color represents 1970 and magenta color represents 2001

Scotland

ISG statement on the crisis in the SSP

International Socialist Group

The following statement on the acute internal crisis which has broken out in the SSP was issued by the ISG, the British section of the Fourth International.

The Scottish Socialist Party - long a beacon of hope for those seeking to build broad alternatives to the rightward march of social democracy - is in the grip of an acute internal crisis.

On the one side of a very sharp divide is its most prominent member, and former convenor (effectively party leader) Tommy Sheridan. He has the support of MSP Rosemary Byrne, the SWP and CWI platforms as well as a section of the membership.

On the other side are those around long-time SSP central leader Alan McCombes. This includes MSPs Frances Curran, Rosie Kane and Carolyn Leckie and a majority of the recently disbanded International Socialist Movement platform. It also includes the bulk of the SSP youth organisation, Scottish Socialist Youth.

Although tensions have existed since the SSP made its electoral breakthrough in 2003 - winning six MSPs, the current crisis broke out at an emergency Executive Committee (EC) meeting on November 9 2004. It was convened to discuss the expectation that the Sunday scandal rag, the News of the World, was planning to publish scurrilous allegations about Sheridan's private life in its forthcoming edition.

Tommy Sheridan insisted that if this happened he would take the News of the World to Court.

This, apparently, was strongly opposed as potentially damaging, or even disastrous, for the SSP and for Sheridan himself, and he was urged to reconsider.

He refused and the meeting voted unanimously (including the platforms) that he should be asked to resign in order to limit the upheaval of a court case, which would be more severe if he remained national convenor of the SSP.

Whether his resignation would in fact provide much protection for the SSP was another matter. Going to the courts was a reckless strategy and was likely to have implications for the SSP whether Sheridan was national convenor or not.

In any case there was an alternative, and that was to tell the News of the World to mind its own business, and stop telling lies. What happens amongst consenting adults is there own business and no one else's.

Sheridan resigned, however, the following day, quoting family issues. The consequences of this were always going to be dramatic, given his centrality to the SSP. The News of the World did indeed publish allegations about him the following Sunday, claiming that he had had a lengthy extra-marital affair.

Three weeks later on November 27 the decisions of the EC including Sheridan's resignation was put to a full meeting of the SSP's delegate body the National Council (NC) by National Secretary Allan Green. His report was and endorsed with 93 for and 10 against. Sheridan himself voted for it.

According to Green (SSV 269) the way the NC also endorsed the decision to keep the EC minutes confidential.

Eighteen months later, in May 2006, with relationships further deteriorated, the issue exploded again. The court action was under way and News of the World lawyers were asking for the minutes of the November 2004 EC and any other documents relating to the meeting to be handed over as evidence.

The EC discussed this and agreed unanimously - including the SWP and CWI platforms - that the SSP had the right to keep its minutes confidential and they should not be surrendered to the court. The EC also renewed its call for Sheridan to drop the case.

Allan McCombes, who held the minutes, was promptly ordered to hand them over or be jailed. He refused and was sentenced to 12 days in jail and ordered to appear again. At the same time the SSP offices in Glasgow and Edinburgh were searched by the Sheriff's officers, with crippling financial implications for the SSP. Alan McCombes's house was also searched.

On May 28, an emergency meeting of the NC was called to consider what was now a major crisis. The only proposal from the EC to the meeting was to maintain the refusal to hand over the minutes. It was an untenable position. Alan McCombes would stay in jail, and it could lead to long prison sentences for individuals and financial bankruptcy for the SSP.

Tommy Sheridan arrived at the NC - in a highly charged atmosphere - with an Open Letter from himself, which he distributed simultaneously to the media. Its practical proposal was that the minutes be handed to the court, in a sealed envelope, in order to release Alan McCombes from prison - the release of the minutes to the News of the World could still be challenged in court.

Releasing the minutes was now unavoidable, but Sheridan's proposal was embedded in a huge, politically unsupportable, diatribe against the EC majority.

It described the EC majority variously as "an unsavoury cabal"; "akin to the dark days of Stalinism"; "McCarthyite" and "effectively acting for the state"; It was designed to show that it was not his decision to go to the courts which caused the crisis

but the actions of his opponents since.

It attacks the SSPs policy of 50-50 women's representation by saying "we are a class based socialist party. Not a gender obsessed discussion group".

To raise the temperature even more the Sunday Herald carried a story that morning that the proceedings of the November 2004 EC meeting had been revealed to the court and the media by an unnamed member of the SSP leadership. An emergency resolution was adopted calling for the immediate resignation anyone responsible for this or who had knowledge of it.

The Sheridan Open Letter was a bid for a new majority and it was successful, at least at that NC. The EC resolution was defeated and a resolution reflecting the Sheridan letter was carried. The entire strategy which the EC had been pursuing (keep out of the courts) had been overturned and the NC gave full support to Tommy Sheridan in his case against the News of the World.

Events at the NC have brought about a sharp realignment of forces within the SSP, not least given the decisions of the SW and CWI platforms to throw their weight behind the Sheridan initiative. Sheridan has called for a new leadership to be elected on the basis of what he is putting forward. His letter concludes: "The battle to reclaim the SSP to class politics begins today".

Recently a group from the NC minority have launched a new platform in the SSP called the SSP United Left. In our opinion this represents the best opportunity on offer to rebuild the SSP on principled lines.

We urged our comrades within the SSP to support this initiative and work constructively within it. Unfortunately three of our comrades took a different view and put their names to an Open

Letter to the SSP United Left which was distributed at a meeting of the SSP NC meeting on June 25. This contained criticism of the SSP United Left statement which we find unacceptable.

Interventions are being made into this situation by the SWP and the CWI, most crudely the CWI. Peter Taaffe claims that he and Phil Stott, CWI leading member in the SSP, met with Tommy Sheridan in advance of the NC and that the Open Letter and its general approach was produced on his advice.

The position put forward in Socialist Worker is that the choice on offer is between Tommy Sheridan's model of a broad based party and Allan McCombes's model of a narrow inward looking one. This is rubbish. The idea that Allan McCombes wants a narrow party of that kind flies in the face of everything he has done and said for the last 10 years and his record of building the SSP. There may be implications involved in this debate as to the character of the SSP, its structure and accountability, and how it should be built - but they do not take these lines.

It is crucial that the SSP survives as a united organisation out of this crisis since it demise would be a blow to the left and the wider movement on a European scale. The NC meeting on June 25th rightly took the decision to bring the conference of the SSP forward to the autumn of this year. It is important that this conference build on the strengths and traditions of the SSP and does not try to divert it into a difference course. It is also important that elects a leadership which is representative of all strands of opinion within the SSP.

Statement by ISG Political Committee 29.6.06

The International Socialist Group is the British section of the Fourth International.

SSP is split by Sheridan

Socialist Resistance statement - August 27 2006

Socialist Resistance

Tommy Sheridan won the first round of his defamation action against the News of the World (NoTW) in the Scottish Court of Session (Scotland's highest court) on a majority (7- 4) decision of the jury. He was awarded his claimed £200,000 in damages. The NoTW has said it intends to appeal and an investigation by the Lothian and Borders police has begun into allegations of perjury committed during the trial which is expected to last six months or more.

Since then Sheridan has moved quickly to split the SSP. He has called a rally for Sunday September 3 to form a new party in opposition to the SSP. Though he told The Herald of August 20 that this was only one of two options he was considering - the other being to go out of politics and become a barrister - the new party option seems to have won out. Now both the SWP and CWI platforms [1] have met, declared support for his call, and are building for the September 3 rally.

Socialist Resistance is opposed to this split and supports the United Left and others who are appealing to the members to stay in the SSP and continue to build it. The unity of the Scottish left, on which the SSP was built has to be defended.

The jury majority may have been more than happy to see a reactionary rag like the NoTW given a bloody nose - a sentiment we can all share. But it was not just Tommy Sheridan and the NoTW who were involved in this trial. Others were drawn into it whose integrity has been trashed. There were the 18 witnesses for the NoTW, including 11 members of the SSP EC, who were dragged into court under citation against their will. These SSP members have been branded as liars by

their decision to tell the truth to the court. They now face the possibility of perjury charges against them.

Both the SWP and the CWI immediately lauded the decision of the court as a "fantastic victory". No doubt for Sheridan, who must have expected to lose, it was a fantastic victory. But for the Scottish left the whole thing is a disaster. It is also a setback for the British and European left, given the positive influence the SSP has had on the development of the European left since its foundation eight years ago

It was Sheridan's decision to take the NoTW to court, and his repeated refusal to consider any other course of action, which was the cause of this disaster. Once he went down that road, under the circumstances he did, the SSP was certain be dragged in, and the outcome disastrous - whatever the decision the jury had taken.

Mistakes were no doubt made by the EC, who were desperately trying to deal with the crisis Sheridan created, but the responsibility was his. For him to turn reality on its head and blame the EC majority for the crisis is like the arsonist blaming the victim for failing to put out the fire.

Sheridan's unilateralism reflects one of the political factors behind this crisis - the "Great unaccountable Leader" syndrome i.e. the idea that a party is built around a central charismatic leader, who in the end regards his or her self as bigger than the party, and unaccountable to it. It is one of the dangers which small mass parties like the SSP face. There are other such examples around as Alan McCombes points out in his statement in the SSP bulletin issued on August 7.

Sheridan was originally part of a team. He was the most visible member, the one in the media spotlight, and perceived as the party leader, but he worked with others and depended on others who made contributions which were more hidden even inside the party. The team was under strain before this issue exploded and could not withstand the impact of this crisis.

This crisis was triggered by two articles published in the NoTW in November 2004. These claimed that Sheridan had had extra-martial affairs, engaged in group sex at a Glasgow hotel, and had visited Cupids (a sex club in Manchester) with NoTW journalist Anvar Khan and others.

Eighteen months later, in response to defamation charges filed by Sheridan, the NoTW defended the articles as "substantially true". They cited five women witnesses who claimed to have either had affairs with Sheridan, or had seen him at Cupids or having group sex in the Moat House hotel in Glasgow. The evidence of two of these as witnesses was tainted in that they had sold their stories to the NoTW. This is sordid journalism typical of the NoTW but not proof that they were telling lies.

The NoTW also cited evidence from within the SSP Executive Committee (EC) itself. This concerned statements Sheridan had made, at a meeting of the EC

on November 9 2004, called to consider allegations published in the first of the two NoTW articles. These allegations referred only to a "married MSP", but it was clear from the context that it was Sheridan. He admitted to the meeting that he had indeed visited Cupids in Manchester on two occasions. He had told this to two of those present previously.

The minutes put it this way: "Tommy admitted to the meeting that he had in fact visited the club on two occasions, in 1996 and 2002 with close friends. He acknowledged that this had been reckless behaviour and had, with hindsight, been a mistake.

At the same time he made it clear that if he was named in this regard by the NoTW the following Sunday (which was the expectation) he would sue them for defamation, despite the truth of the matter. It was on the basis of the stance - that he would sue over allegations which were none-the-less true - that he was asked to resign as SSP convenor by a unanimous vote of those present. It was his stance which created the depth of crisis in the SSP.

The minutes record the opposition to this which existed in the meeting: "Without exception all contributors disagreed with the strategy of denying the allegations. All felt that this would be the most damaging strategy for the party. The general feeling was that this was a bad situation and that the "least worst" option should be found". Had Sheridan been insisting on suing over false allegations would have been a different matter altogether.

And there were other options he could have taken. He could have ignored the allegations, come clean, or denounced them and they would have blown over. The idea that the only way he could survive politically was to take the NoTW to court was nonsense.

Tommy Sheridan with Gail Sheridan after the court decision

The NoTW obtained a citation that the minutes of this meeting - which they had controversially extracted from the SSP through the powers of the court after Alan McCombes went to prison in an attempt to keep them confidential - be used as evidence at the trial.

Central to the process of splitting the SSP was the open letter Sheridan circulated at the emergency SSP National Council (NC) meeting on May 28 2006, called to discuss the situation and held whilst Alan McCombes was in prison. The letter had been issued to the media prior to the meeting

In its first paragraph it says: "Today there exists an unsavoury cabal of comrades at the core of the leadership, their hands on the apparatus, who are more interested in pursuing personal vendettas, through vile lies and slander, than conducting the class struggle". It goes on to describe them as: "akin to the dark days of Stalinism"; "McCarthyite" and "effectively acting for the state". The letter was designed to either stampede a majority into supporting him at that meeting, which is what happened, or provide the basis to lead a minority out of the SSP at the end of the meeting or soon after.

At the heart of the open letter was a major political attack on women in the SSP and a dangerous attempt to claim that feminism is alien to class politics. The letter attacked the SSP's 50-50 policy which ensures equal numbers of women and men in elected

positions and insisted that: "We are a class-based socialist party. Not a gender-obsessed discussion group. Our socialist principles and class identity define us first. Not our gender or sexual orientation".

Catriona Grant argued in Julia Bindel[1]'s article "a win for machismo" in the Guardian of August 8 that the trial was not about class but about gender. There has indeed been a problem of male power relationships involved. With the exception of Gail Sheridan, who achieved celebrity status, all the women involved in the case came off badly.

As Julie Bindel observed all but two of the witnesses on Sheridan's side were men and most of the witnesses against him were women. Sheridan has referred to fellow MSP[1]'s Frances Curran, Rosie Kane, and Caroline Leckie as the three witches in a misogynistic attempt to undermine three strong women who disagreed with the reckless way he was threatening the party.

In court Sheridan claimed that there were two separate conspiracies against him. The first by the NoTW, which he said had been out to get him for a long time, the other by a faction inside the SSP leadership who were out to oust him as part of a political take-over. This was nonsense but it neatly diverted the proceedings way from eye-witness accounts of sexual activities, some of which were difficult to rebut, to political conspiracy theories which the jury were hardly in a position to

assess. There had certainly been political tension in the SSP, but that is very different to a factional conspiracy. The SSP has had sharp political debates before without factionalism.

The NoTW cited 11 of the 19 SSP members who had been present at the November 9 2004 EC meeting as witnesses at the trial. These were MSPs Rosie Kane, Carolyn Leckie and Colin Fox, plus Allan Green (national secretary) Richie Venton (Glasgow organiser), Alan McCombes, Keith Baldassara (Glasgow councillor), Catriona Grant (EC member), Jo Harvie (editor SSV), Allison Kane (treasurer), and Barbara Scott (minutes secretary).

Remarkably they were able to make these citations because of a fabricated set of minutes of the meeting (as opposed to the official minutes) which had been sent to the NoTW anonymously, presumably by Sheridan or one of his supporters. Who else would fabricate minutes to his advantage? These contained Sheridan's version of proceedings and included an incomplete list of those present. At this stage the SSP had not given the minutes to the court and the names for citation were taken by the NoTW from the fabricated minutes.

These witnesses attended court under the strongest protest and were each asked, under oath, if the (official) minutes were accurate, and if Sheridan had admitted that he had visited Cupids in Manchester. They each confirmed that both were the case. Sheridan promptly denounced them in front of the court as liars and perjurers and the minutes as a fabrication. It was he said "the mother of all stitch-ups". It was not just the NoTW that Sheridan had put on trial - it was the SSP as well.

In fact of the 19 present at the EC meeting of November 9, 15 have confirmed the accuracy of the minutes - the 11 who appeared in court under citation

plus four more who were not cited but who have issued a statement since to that effect. The 11 include Allan Green and Colin Fox, neither of whom are members of the United Left and who strove hard to persuade Sheridan against his defamation case.

The other four EC members appeared as witnesses for Sheridan and said exactly the opposite to the 15. They agreed with him that what he had actually said at the meeting was that he had never visited Cupids, and that the minutes had been fabricated. Only one set of witnesses could be telling the truth -hence the perjury investigation.

The rights and wrongs of these statements and Sheridan's denunciation of the 11 are at the core of this issue and the crisis it has created. Alan McCombes has said of Sheridan's allegations: "this was to accuse the 11 of a monstrous political frame-up including the forgery of documents, a criminal conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, and systematic perjury". Indeed it was. It was, as Richie Venton says in his letter to SSP members, "the mother of all inventions".

The conclusion is inescapable. Tommy Sheridan lied his way thought the case and in the course of this repeatedly accused others of lying whilst knowing they were telling the truth. He had expected the entire EC, who had urged him not to take court action, to lie in court in order to back up his case. He then regarded them as traitors because they refused to do so. The message was loud and clear. Sheridan was prepared to go to any lengths to the defend the moralistic reputation he had cultivated as a clean living sexually loyal husband and if that meant smashing up the SSP then so be it.

Right up until the momentous NC meeting on May 28 - when everything changed in the SSP,

when the framework was set for the trial and the split, and when the SWP and CWI platforms swung behind Sheridan - the validity of the minutes of November 9 2004 had not been in question. Now Sheridan's open letter proposed, on the one hand, that the minutes be handed to the court, and on the other questioned their authenticity - claiming that they were falsified as part of a conspiracy to remove him from office.

This made sense from his point of view. Once he had proposed handing the minutes to the court he had to either drop his defamation action or discredit the minutes. If he accepted that they were true that would be the end of his case. Up till then no one had questioned the minutes, which had been known to those who were at the November 9 meeting for the last year and a half. There had been questions raised as to whether they should have been kept confidential to the EC, but not about their accuracy

As an alternative to the publication of the minutes to SSP members aggregate meetings had been held up and down Scotland in order for EC members to give verbal accounts of the circumstances under which Sheridan was asked to resign. There is plenty of evidence that members were told details of what happened at the November 9 2004 EC meeting at these meetings.

Sheridan also claimed, in his open letter, that he had never read the minutes. This is flatly contradicted by Alan McCombes who insists that the minutes were discussed in a meeting between Allan Green, Colin Fox and Sheridan on May 12 2006 soon after they had been cited by the NoTW. If he had not read them before then it was because he had not bothered to read them. At that meeting, McCombes reveals, it was Sheridan himself who proposed the adoption of the policy of refusing to hand the minutes to the court. His

proposal only made sense if he accepted that the minutes were accurate in the first place.

Sheridan, the CWI, the SWP and others tell us that it is scandalous that 11 SSP EC members appeared in court as witnesses for the defence. But what were they supposed to do? If they had refused to appear they would have been arrested and charged with contempt of court. If they refuted the minutes and lied they would risk perjury, which carries a heavy prison sentence. But more than that were they to deny something in court which they knew to be the truth in order to protect Sheridan's image as a respectable married man?

There are certainly times when socialists would do otherwise, but this would be in situations where what is at stake was the defence of collective action or an issue of principle. This was not an issue of principle. These comrades were being asked to put the interests of one man above the collective interests of the SSP. They were right to say no.

Others have argued that the 11 should have had a bout of collective amnesia. It would have been extremely difficult, however, for 11 people to all say that they could not remember what happened at a meeting as unforgettable as that one. It was held in the glare of publicity, and has had a profound effect on the SSP. It would have been even more difficult for the minutes secretary, who was one of the 11, to have argued that she could not remember what she had recorded.

The dilemma faced by the 11 was understood in advance and was discussed at a meeting of the EC two weeks before the trial started. That meeting voted 17 for, 2 against, and 1 abstention, that if witnesses were asked a direct question in court they should not lie or commit contempt of court. Those who voted for this included Graeme McIver and Jock Penman, who

were two of Sheridan's witnesses in court, and Sinead Daly of the CWI. This restated a position which had been taken at the NC itself. No one proposed any alternative.

The scandalous allegations of scab (i.e. crossing class lines) and liar against the EC majority escalated after the trial finished. The Daily Record carried an interview with Sheridan on August 7 with the headline "I'll destroy the scabs who tried to ruin me". There are photos of MSPs Frances Curran, Rosie Kane, Carolyn Leckie and Colin Fox with the word "scab" stamped over them. Frances Curran was not even a witness! Colin Fox issued a statement the same day which called on "all SSP members, regardless of their views during the court case, to immediately disassociate themselves from Tommy Sheridan¹s scurrilous smear".

This is the same Daily Record which paid Sheridan £30,000 for his story! Sheridan takes action against one section of the capitalist media and then sells his story about it to another. He calls the media "scum" on the one hand and uses it to attack fellow SSP members on the other.

The charge of scab relates to Sheridan¹s demagogic claims - taken up with relish by the SWP and the CWI - that the trial was a battle between capital and labour in the form of a battle between Tommy Sheridan and Rupert Murdoch. Socialists have to know which side they are on in such a battle, they have repeatedly claimed. It is simplistic nonsense. The idea that socialists are committed, as a matter of principle, to support any case, however reckless, simply because it is between a leading socialist and the likes of Rupert Murdoch, irrespective of the facts or the consequences for others (including other socialists), is preposterous. It reduces politics to crude sloganising.

The treatment of some of the women witnesses by Sheridan was demeaning to say the least. After sacking his legal team in order to bring his own considerable persuasive powers directly on the jury Sheridan cross-examined them himself. Katrine Trolle broke down after three hours in the witness box. She had at first denied that she had had a four-year affair with Sheridan but accepted it was true after being cited to appear in court as a witness for the NoTW. Her story was backed up by evidence from her flatmates and phone records of Sheridan¹s phone calls to her. Sheridan put it to her in court that she had invented the whole thing to undermine his position in the SSP. Far from seeking publicity, or anything else, she had done all she could to keep out of the whole issue.

In terms of mistakes made by the EC the minutes of the meeting of November 9 2004 should, in our view, never have been taken in the way they were. The various explanations for taking them with the details involved are unconvincing. But in the end it was not the minutes which were the problem for Sheridan. It was what happened at the meeting, and that existed as the truth whether it was minuted or not. Without the minutes EC members could still have been cited to appear and asked to explain what happened at the meeting and exactly why Tommy Sheridan had been asked to resign in the way he was.

It is also hard to see where the policy of withholding the minutes from court was going to go after the NC on May 28. The policy that the EC was putting to that NC was not sustainable. It was the non-viability of that policy which - although he had proposed it himself - gave Sheridan the opening in that meeting which he seized upon.

The issue is not over, however. Unusually the judge did not put a restraining order on the NoTW to stop them repeating the

allegation. They are consequently keeping the story running around lie detector tests which have been taken by some of their witnesses (not the SSP ones) and challenges to Sheridan to take such a test himself. The issue is still selling newspapers for them. Perjury charges at the end of the police investigation are unlikely but possible. Some of the witnesses, SSP and non-SSP, are strongly demanding perjury charges in order to clear their names. The NoTW is appealing on the basis that the outcome of the trial was perverse and are seeking a retrial. Anything could happen.

This damaging split in the SSP does not in any way devalue the importance of building broad pluralist parties of the working class. Such parties are the product of objective political developments - the collapse (or semi-collapse) of the CP's, the march to the right of social democracy, the decline of the Labour left, and the emergence of mass resistance in the form of the global justice and anti-war movements. The need for such parties is not about to go away. What has the be re-emphasised, however, is that genuine pluralism, gender equality, democracy, accountability, including the accountability of the most prominent members is not an options extra for such parties. It has to be built into their culture and their practice if they are to have a long-term role.

What are the prospects for Sheridan¹s new party, which will be based, presumably, on a slightly different version of the SSP manifesto? Its starting point is not good, based as it is on a wrecking action against the SSP over the refusal of SSP members to lie in court in order to protect his personal reputation. It could well be engulfed in a battle with the NoTW again before it has existed very long where all this will dragged out again. It will be an alliance - and probably called and alliance or a movement rather than a party - between Sheridan and the SWP not unlike

the alliance between George Galloway and the SWP which forms the basis of Respect. It would be a huge step back from the democratic unity on which the SSP was constructed.

There is also likely to be sharp difference between it main components. The SWP have regarded Sheridan as a nationalist in the past, but maybe this is something else which will be reassessed.

Then there is the CWI, which will be in an awkward situation in this alliance given their hostile relationship with the SWP in England and Wales and the model they are pushing for their new mass workers party. They regard Sheridan as an ultra-nationalist and a parliamentary reformist. These are all forces which were held together inside the SSP by the existence of the ISM which formed the core of the organisation from its inception.

These developments are a defeat for the radical left in Scotland and internationally. This is a defeat brought about by the determination of one man to put his ego, his desire to create an image of a respectable family man, before the interests of the party he and others had worked for nearly a decade to build.

The only winners from a split in the SSP will be the pro-market forces in Scotland, the nationalists, and the Blairites. Socialist Resistance will stand with the comrades of the SSP in their determination to rebuild their party out of the debris.

NOTES

[1] Supporters, respectively, of the British Socialist Workers party and the Socialist Party

Fighting "Jurassic Park" capitalism

Russian Social Forum Success

Aleksander Buzgalin

The second Russian Social Forum has just come to an end in St.Petersburg. Despite various obstacles put by the state authorities (including arbitrary detention of activists and other forms of police repression), more than a thousand people from different regions of Russia, and also from many other countries, attended the gathering. The forum declared its support for a number of constructive program proposals concerning education, housing policy, labor issues, human rights, energy and environment. Those who love bloody spectaclesand unhealthy sensations were disappointed; the alterglobalists did not organize any brawls, and no shop windows were smashed.

1. Why riot- and mayhem-lovers were disappointed

Unfortunately, in today's Russia (and not only here), philistines and journalists pandering to the philistines' taste prefer to report crimes, violence, bloodshed, scandals and other "hot" topics. For this kind of public, a serious, constructive debate on urgent problems faced by people in Russia and other countries is simply too boring.

There were no fistfights, so the alterglobalists' scheme was a 'failure'. And you can explain endlessly that the forum organizers had other goals, and those goals were mainly achieved. The gathering was organized not by "antiglobalists" guided by moth-eaten ideas of isolationism, Stalinism etc. but by supporters of world integration quite different from the present one that is imposed by the so-called "G-8".

For us, the aim of integration is not in realizing the US and NATO geopolitical ambitions, nor in helping to satisfy the profit-thirsty transnational corporations who dominate the world markets under the cover of the slogans of free trade, nor in the spiralling growth of international financial speculations (up to 2500 billion dollars a day!). It is something else. We say, "A different world is possible!", and on the basis of world experience and expert studies, we show, just what kind of the world this would be.

We call for a serious debate on possible alternatives. Neither the authorities, nor the philistines, nor mass media serving their demands like the idea of such a debate.

So what are these alternatives all about? Who were the participants at the forum in St.Petersburg, and what were they doing there?

2. Who we are, and what are we going to do.

The Russian Social Forum is a network of diverse social organizations and movements, a network that shows in practice, constantly working, that another world is possible and necessary - a world oriented not toward the "market fundamentalism" but toward human development andsolving social and environmental problems. Among the most active groups that took part in the forum were: independent trade unions; campaigners against the commercialization of housing and communal services; the "Education for All" and "For Human Rights" movements; alterglobalist organizations proper, such as "Alternatives" (a movement that supports citizens' social initiatives), "Collective Action" Institute; organizations of victims of the Chernobyl disaster and those who helped to liquidate its consequences; "greens", and dozens more.

In all about 1500 people registered at the forum that took place on July 14 and 15 in the Kirov Stadium in St.Petersburg. Many of them came simply to see what was happening at this gathering that frightened the authorities so much. In the author's opinion, about 300 people worked actively in seminars, round-table discussions and symposia at the forum. Many militants of left-wing youth organizations, anarchists and other politically-oriented activists saw participation in meetings and protest actions outside the stadium as their priority.

3. What happened at the forum, and what are our positive demands

The opening event was intended to be a working session, including presentation of main thematic blocks of the forum's work, but the well-timed visit by the St.Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko kept us busy

for some minutes. The journalists who flocked towards the big boss, with their usual servility, inevitably diverted general attention to a certain extent, and we decided to make use of this situation in order to protest against the detentions and arrests of our comrades. The forum participants chanted "Freedom!" and other slogans denouncing the repression by the authorities, while Matviyenko tried to explain that the authorities loved us.

Despite all that, the basic aim of the plenary meeting - providing information about the main directions and tasks of the forum's work - was achieved. Then, the serious work started.

Discussions were held on issues of defence of human rights, forms and methods of the struggle against "filling-in" house construction, against evictions from dormitories, against the rise of costs of housing and utilities, and so forth. As a result, constructive recommendations have been developed - what needs to be done and how should it be realized, with creation of new networks and strengthening of old ones. In a longer term, these networks will provide more effective organizational base for citizens defending their rights and interests as inhabitants.

Similar steps were made to develop solidarity of independent trade unions that are defending workers' rights in the conditions of Russia's present-day "Jurassic Park capitalism".

The forum discussed a wide range of human rights issues, from developing constructive steps consolidating the structures of civil society to very definite demands for release

of political prisoners and our arrested comrades. Facts were presented demonstrating that in Russia, there is more and more arbitrary repression by bureaucrats and police, less and less real democracy, and that it becomes more and more difficult to exercise elementary civil and social rights.

Important practical steps toward establishing a united action network involving "traditional" human rights defenders and left activists campaigning for social justice were proposed. At the forum, one could point out a positive role played by Lev Ponomarev, the leader of the movement "For Human Rights", and by Lyudmila Alekseyeva, the head of the Moscow Helsinki Group. They stated unambiguously that human rights defenders in Russia are increasingly oriented to a constructive dialogue with left-wing defenders of social justice.

Among the most important constructive initiatives proposed at the forum was the "Education for All" program document presented and discussed at a special symposium where it was shown that the government?s policy, with its efforts to privatize educational institutions and to introduce a new Chubais-style "voucherization" (this time in the field of education), would lead the country to a loss of what remains of its (once great) intellectual potential, making it impossible to achieve a "society of knowledge" in a proper way. The positive part of the "Education for All" program contains concrete proposals for ensuring high quality and universal accessibility of education; these are measures that would allow the education to be oriented to human development, not to "the markets".

The basis for elaboration of the program was provided by materials prepared by O. N. Smolin, professor and State Duma deputy, and by dozens of well-known scholars, teachers, and education experts. It also explains how to obtain resources for the development of education, and how to use them effectively, how to make attractive the teacher's work, and much else. The All-Russian Movement "Education for All" becomes, more and more, the organizational basis for realization of this program, in collaboration with trade unions and youth organizations.

These are only a few examples of specific documents discussed at the forum, and practically-oriented decisions made. There were also documents on energy, environment and other issues.

So, we have carried out the work that was intended to be done in St.Petersburg. In this respect, the forum was quite successful.

Very important was the fact that activists of social organizations, parliamentarians, young people from many countries addressed us at the stadium and worked together with us. The forum participants reacted enthusiastically to interventions by a well-known Italian social activist Vittorio Agnoletto. A member of the European Parliament, where he serves in the Human Rights Commission, Agnoletto sharply condemned the police outrage initiated by the Russian authorities. Speeches by German comrades, French trade union activists, many other guests from abroad were received with enthusiasm. The youth delegation from Ukraine, young people from the Baltics and Poland were particularly active.

At the same time, the forum encountered a lot of problems and contradictions. A major problem was arrests and detentions of our comrades. There were also numerous internal disputes and disagreements, some of them essential, others arising from difficulties in understanding and interaction between such diverse groups as human rights activists, left political organizations, youth groups, anarchists, "presentable" professors from education networks...

Sometimes we could not avoid organizational problems and disputes. We also had to discuss at length how to react to the police blockade of the stadium and to the authorities' ban of our demonstration. Some members of the organizing committee reacted positively to the idea of our meeting with Putin, that originated from within the presidential administration. However, an agreed decision was made: we could engage in a dialogue with the government leaders only on the condition that all our comrades were freed (of course, they weren't, and no such a "dialogue" took place).

Nevertheless, all these disputes did not prevent us from carrying on our work.

4. The right hand of the government doesn't know...

...what the left hand does. As a result, more than two hundred people arrested, held in custody, humiliated...

An extremely harsh attitude of the authorities was a feature of this forum. More than two hundred participants were arrested, held in custody, or persecuted in another way. In some cases (including that of the author himself), the dialogue was conducted politely, but many of our comrades were detained without explanation or taken off from trains, and some were charged with criminal offences, with explosives or narcotics planted on them.

A couple of days before the forum, the member of the organizing committee Mikhail Druzhininsky was arrested, and later, another organizing committee member, Ilya Ponomarev, was detained. A number of the St.Petersburg activists could not return home in the evenings, since they had been told that preparations were being made to detain or arrest them.

During the time the forum was held, especially on July 15, our comrades were constantly being detained using all sorts of cooked-up pretexts. After the end of the forum, several dozens activists who participated in anti-G8 protest actions were taken into custody.

We should give their due to a number of media outlets, and in particular to the radio station Moscow Echo, as well as to a number of internet sites who reported honestly on these repressive measures by the authorities.

Most of the pro-Putin media, however, reported "a picture of total harmony" playing up the fact that the St.Petersburg authorities had provided several army tents and a field kitchen for us. At the same time, there were "inaccurate" reports that the participants were also given free meals. Everyone who attended the forum and ate that soup and buckwheat knows that we paid for everything ourselves.

The fact that we were allowed to occupy the stadium was the result of a compromise with the authorities, compromise not very pleasant for us. They agreed that we would use the arena of the stadium (which, it should be noted, was closed for reconstruction) only after they had understood that we would not change our minds about holding the forum in St Petersburg anyway. Probably, they decided that it was better to lock us up in the stadium than to face far bigger problems if we would hold the forum somewhere else, in more "open" place.

Some representatives of the presidential administration constantly tried to convince us that federal authorities' attitude to the forum is exceptionally democratic and friendly. But mass "clean-ups" of our comrades, the ban on demonstrations, and riot police in vast numbers around the stadium clearly showed exactly the opposite. So, it was very relevant that before the end of the forum, Lev Ponomarev presented a declaration strongly

condemning the authorities' actions and demanding release of our comrades and stopping their persecution.

5. The alterglobalists: "white fluffy kittens", or...

In concluding these quick notes that are being written during the first hours after the end of the forum, I would like to stress that organizations and movements that form the network of the Russian SocialForum are not "white fluffy kittens" admonishing everybody "to live together peacefully". Not by chance, the main slogan of the forum was: "Rights cannot be granted ? rights are to be conquered!". We'll demand from the authorities that our legitimate social and civil rights be realized. We'll fight for this demand using all methods permitted by international law and by the Russian constitution. We'll advance it resolutely, in serious dialogues between experts, at meetings and in discussions, - and, if the authorities are unwilling to listen to citizens, in the same way as participants of protest actions against the "monetization of social welfare benefits" did it in early 2005; many of those people who took part in the second Russian Social Forum were also active in the 2005 campaign. At the same time, we have been and remain opposed to senseless hooliganism and to provocative violent acts. The image of "antiglobalists" smashing windows is forced upon us by those people who are really afraid of our constructive initiatives. And the authorities are afraid; otherwise, they would not have detained scores of citizens who wanted to make their way to the forum.

In any case, what the authorities think of us is not so important. We know perfectly well that the government implements its policies of "market fundamentalism" and bureaucratic lawless rule not because it is ignorant of the interests of citizens, but because these policies are beneficial to those who put the government in power. This is why we address our words and actions, above all, to the society, to the citizens, to those who solely is able to change our life, finding in themselves the resolve to unite with comrades, so that another way of life, more humane and just, will become possible in Russia and throughout the world.

Alexander Buzgalin is a professor at Moscow State University and the coordinator of the Social Movement "Alternatives". He was a member of the Organizing Committee of the 2nd Russian Social Forum

Brazil

Socialists of the World Support Heloisa Helena

Support on-line petition!

Many of us signed, two years ago, a protest against the exclusion of Heloisa Helena and other members of parliament from the PT, the Brazilian Workers Party.

Today, Heloisa has become the presidential candidate of the new Party of Socialism and Liberty (PSOL), founded by several bureaucratically excluded or dissident members of the PT, and of a Left Front. While Lula's government followed a typical social-liberal course, disappointing millions of people who voted for him in the hope of a radical social and political change, and people all over the world who expected from Brazil a new impulse for anti-imperialist struggle, Heloisa Helena and her comrades remained faithful to the original anti-imperialist and socialist programme of the PT.

She is today the only candidate in the Brazilian elections who raises the historical banners of the Brazilian labour movement, of the peasants, the poor and the oppressed:

❖ a radical agrarian reform,

❖ suspension of the payment of the foreign debt,

❖ rejection of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (ALCA),

❖ a substantial reduction of working hours without loss of pay,

❖ a moratorium on the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (such as Monsanto's Terminator seeds),

❖ support for the ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba).

The elections in Brazil are of concern for socialists everywhere in the world. In solidarity with the poor and the exploited Brazilian masses, we support the only socialist candidate in the next Brazilian presidential elections, Heloisa Helena.

Please email your name (with your position or capacity) or the name of your organisation, to:

socialistssupporttheloisa@googlemail.com

or sign at

www.petitiononline.com/heloisa1/

Principal signatories so far (all in a personal capacity unless otherwise indicated):

Gilbert Achcar, university professor and author

Antony Arnove, International Socialist Organisation, US

Chris Bambery, editor, Socialist Worker, Britain

José Barreto, Coordinator, Carabobo Region of the National Union of Workers (UNT), Venezuela

Emilio Bastidas, Coordinator, Aragua Region of the National Union of Workers (UNT), Venezuela

Daniel Bensaïd, LCR, France

Olivier Besancenot, presidential candidate, LCR, France

Alister Black, International Committee, Scottish Socialist Party

José Boda, Executive member, Oilworkers' Union, Fedepetrol, Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela

Patrick Bond, political economist, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Peter Boyle, national secretary, Democratic Socialist Perspective, Australia

Sue Branford, writer on Latin America

Robert Brenner, economist, US

Andrew Burgin, Press Secretary, Stop the War Coalition, England and Wales

Alex Callinicos, Socialist Workers Party, Britain

Joan Collins, Dublin City Councillor, Campaign for an Independent Left, Ireland

Orlando Chirino, National Coordinator of the National Union of Workers (UNT) Venezuela

Frances Curran MSP, Scottish Socialist Party

Mike Davis, University of San Diego, California

Roland Denis, on behalf of Proyecto Nuestra America/M-13 de Abril, Venezuela

Colin Fox, MSP and Convenor, Scottish Socialist Party

Ana Gabarró, member of the National Council of the Catalan United Left, Spanish state

Richard Gallardo, National Coordinator of the National Union of Workers (UNT) Venezuela

Marcos García, National Coordinator of the Public Employees Union (FENTRASEP), Venezuela

Lindsey German, convenor, Stop the War Coalition

Mike Gonzalez, Professor of Latin American Studies, Glasgow University

Tony Gregory, Independent TD, Dublin Central, Ireland

George Grollios, university professor, Thessaloniki, Greece

Joe Harrington, Former Mayor of Limerick City, Ireland

Richard Hatcher, Director of Research, Faculty of Education, University of Central England, Birmingham

Ismael Hernández, Coordinator, Carabobo Region of the National Union of Workers (UNT), Venezuela

Dave Hill, Professor of Educational Policy at the University of Northampton, England

Espacio Alternativo, Spanish State

Linus Jayatilake, President, United Federation of Labour, Sri Lanka

John Percy, Democratic Socialist Perspective, Australia

Dr Vickramabahu Karunarathna, President, Left Front, Sri Lanka

Claudio Katz, economist, Argentina

Alain Krivine, LCR, France

Dharmasiri Lankapeli, General Secretary, Media Employees Federation, Sri Lanka

Paul Laverty, screenwriter

John Lister, London Health Emergency

Ken Loach, filmmaker

Francisco Louçã, MP Portugal, Left Boc

Michael Lowy, Brazilian author

Finian McGrath, Independent TD, Dublin North-Central, Ireland

Patricia McKenna, former Member of the European Parliament, Irish Green Party

José Melendez, Finance Secretary, Steelworkers' Union (SUTISS), Venezuela

John Moloney Public and Civil Service Union NEC member, Britain

People's Democratic Party (KPP-PRD), Indonesia (Dita Indah Sari, Chairperson; Zely Ariane, Department of International Relations)

Pedro Montes, economist, member of the Federal Presidency of Izquierda Unida/United Left, Spanish state

Jaime Pastor, member of the Federal Political Council of Izquierda Unida/United Left, Spanish state

Stalin Pérez Borges, National Coordinator of the National Union of Workers (UNT) Venezuela

James Petras, Professor Emeritus, adviser, MST in Brazil

Lluis Rabell, member of the National Council of the Catalan United Left, Spanish state

Mick Rafferty, Dublin City Councillor (Independent), Ireland

John Rees, national secretary, Respect

Andy Reid, Public and Civil Service Union NEC member, Britain

Revolta Global, Catalunya

Teresa Rodriguez, member of the Federal Presidency of Izquierda Unida/United Left, Spanish state

Edgard Sánchez, on behalf of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT), Mexico

Alfredo Saad Filho, university professor, London

Ahmed Shawki, editor, International Socialist Review, US

Oscar Sogliano, Bolivia

Alan Thornett, Respect National Executive, Britain

Diosdado Toledano Gonzalez, member of the Presidency of Izquierda Unida/United Left and member of the Permanent Council of the Catalan United Left, Spanish state

Greg Tucker, National Train Crew Secretary, Rail, Maritime and Transport Union, Britain

Marcos Tulio Díaz, General Secretary, Construction Union (UBT), Venezuela

Jesús Vargas, Coordinator, Carabobo Region of the National Union of Workers (UNT), Venezuela

Vilma Vivas, Coordinator, Táchira Region of the National Union of Workers (UNT), Venezuela

Hector Wesley, Public and Civil Service Union NEC member, Britain

Niel Wijethilake, General Secretary, Corporation Co-op & Mercantile Union, Sri Lanka

Howard Zinn, writer, US

Slavoj Zizek, Slovenian philosopher

Pakistan

Gorja - a great victory for textile workers

Farooq Tariq

The 39 days strike by some 15,000 textile workers at Gojra ended in a stunning victory for the workers. This did not come without sacrifices by the workers involved in the strike. Twenty-eight workers are still in jail waiting their plea of bail application to be heard. On 15th August, a meeting of representatives of striking workers, power looms bosses and district administration lasted well over seven hours at District Coordination Officers House in Toba Tek Singh.

The meeting agreed to raise the workers wage from Rupees 97 ($ 1.61) to Rupees 160 ($2.66) per day. They agreed that all the power looms factories will be registered by the government. Social security cards will be made for the workers. A social security hospital will be built in the district.

The wages had not been raised for the last 18 years, an unprecedented freezing of wages by the local textile bosses.

There are a total of 20, 000 workers at Gojra, a town 40 kilometers away from Faisalabad, the hub city of textile industry in Pakistan. The workers were subject to all sorts of oppression during these years. The town is divided by two gangster groups who a long history of conflict with each other. This has resulted in dozens of murders from both sides. But these groups were united in suppressing the workers.

The strike started on 8th July by some 70 percent of the power looms workers of the town. A day earlier, they had a public meeting where well over 3000 attended, demanding an immediate raise in the wages. The workers formed a union and gave a 15 days notice for the acceptance of the demands.

On 8th July, one worker was kicked out of a factory and was accused of forming the union and attending the meeting. This sparked an immediate walkout of the workers in that particular street. Within two hours most of the workers of the town left the factories in protest. "Now or never" was the slogan. The strike has started.

A local advocate Saif Cheema played a vital role in supporting the workers. His house became the center of the strike. He helped the workers to set up a strike camp in the town center. The Toba Tek Singh district secretary Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) put the workers in contact with the Faisalabad power looms workers movement called Labour Qaumi Movement. Majority of the leadership of LQM are member of LPP. The cooperation of the two movements played a decisive role in sustaining the strike. The district leaders of Awami jamhoori Tehreek, the left alliance in Pakistan, gave full solidarity to the striking workers.

The striking workers were tortured by the gangsters of the local textile bosses on several occasions and the local police did not take any action against them. The workers were harassed by the police who took several striking workers in day custody without charges. But the workers were determined to go on.

When the well circulated Daily Express Pakistan printed a lie that most of the power looms were working, the striking workers burnt copies of the paper in protest. This gave an excuse to the local textile bosses to manipulate the situation and some of the journalisst turned against the striking workers. The local journalists were mainly close friends of the bosses. They boycotted the strike news and no reports of the strike were printed in most of the local and national news papers.

On 1st of August, the local police dismantled the strikers camp late at night. This was to sabotage a public meeting the next day where I was supposed to speak in solidarity of the workers. On 2nd August, over a 1000 workers attended the public meeting. It was agreed on our suggestion to put up the camp next morning come what may. It was also agreed that a national and international solidarity campaign be started. The meeting was full of emotions and the workers were really happy to hear us and some of the trade union leaders from Lahore.

The attempt to set up the camp on 3rd August resulted the arrest of 28 workers including the president of LQM comrade Mian Abdul Qayum. The workers were physically assaulted by the local police and a strike leader was garlanded with shoes round his neck to humiliate the workers. He was paraded in front of the bosses by the local police.

A case was registered against me and 30 others with charges of provocative anti- government speeches and breech of section 144 of the penal code. The arrests and registration of the case made the strike known to many through the electronic and print media. The news could not be suppressed by the local hostile journalists.

Despite the arrests and tortures, the workers were able to set up the strike camp once again. It became the rallying point for the workers. Hundreds of workers will get together everyday at the camp and distribute their leaflets. The police had to give in on this question.

On 5th August, over 80 workers were arrested who were going to Toba Tek Singh to meet the local administration. The whole district was cordoned by police and many workers were not allowed to enter the district. Still over 400 workers were able to gather at the district courts to protest against the arrests. The local administration invited the representatives to start the negotiations. It was accepted. Several rounds of negotiations were held between 5th to 15th August.

The union made it clear that we are not just demanding the release of the arrested workers but main demand is better wages and conditions. It made it clear that more aorkers are ready to go to jail but the strike will not end.

I went again to Gojra strike camp on 8th August from Lahore alongside with other leading comrades of LPP. Speaking to workers at the camp, I invited the Gojra police to arrest me as well because a case has been registered against me as well. This was to show complete solidarity with the striking workers and to show that we will not leave them. The police did not come to arrest me while they were just outside the camp. The press conference on the same

day at Toba Tek Singh was well reported all over the country.

A delegation of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan went to the town on 11th August to meet the local administration to protest the violation of the human rights. They also spoke at the strike camp in Gojra. Two LPP leaders were part of the delegation.

The national and international solidarity campaign to send protest letters to general Musharaf, Labour minister and minister interior resulted also a good pressure. Finally the district administration took a firm position to help the workers.

The 39 days strike by those who had been earning less than two Dollars a day ended ina success. The workers are happy. The camp is taken away by the workers themselves. The strike ended only when a culture of resistance, solidarity, determination and sacrifices was very evident. It was clear to the bosses and administration that the strike will not end. Although, only 70 percent of the local workforce participated but it never went down than that. The leaders are still in jail. But hopefully, they might be released on 19th August on bail.

The workers at Toba, Kamalia and other towns are contacting us to help them in their wage increase. We are planning a power looms workers convention in the end of August to demand the increase of the workers in the whole area and Pakistan.

Farooq Tariq is the general secretary of Labour Party Pakistan..

Theory

Marxism and classical sociology

Marx, Weber and the Critique of Capitalism

Michael Löwy

Despite their undeniable differences, Marx and Weber have much in common in their appraisals of modern capitalism: they share a vision of the capitalist economic system as a universe where "individuals are directed by abstractions," (Marx), where impersonal relations and objects [Versachlicht] replace personal relations of dependence, and where the accumulation of capital becomes an end in itself and, by and large, irrational.

Their analysis of capitalism is inseparable from a critical posture-explicit in Marx, more ambivalent in Weber. But the content and inspiration of the critique are very different. And, whereas Marx banks on the possibility of overthrowing capitalism by workers of socialist persuasion, Weber is a fatalistic and resigned observer to the mode of production and administration that seem to him to be inevitable.

I

The anti-capitalist critique is one of the main strong points extending throughout Marx's work, and gives it its coherence. This does not prevent one from seeing a certain evolution in his thought: whereas the Communist Manifesto (1848) is insistent on the historically progressive role of the bourgeoisie, Capital (1867) is more prone to denouncing the ignobility of the system. Nothing could be more false than to oppose, as is so often done, a young "ethical" Marx to a mature, "scientific" Marx.

Marx's anti-capitalism is grounded in certain implicit values or criteria, the most frequent among them being:

(a) Universal ethical values: liberty, equality, justice, autonomy, selfaccomplishment. The articulation between different human values constitutes a coherent whole; that one can design a revolutionary humanism that constitutes a principle benchmark for the ethical rejection of the capitalist system. The moral indignation against the infamies of capitalism burst from every page of Capital;

Max Weber

it is an essential dimension of that which makes the impressionable force of the work in its dual political and scientific dimension. As Lucien Goldmann has written, Marx did not "mix" the distinction between fact and value, but developed a dialectical analysis in which explication, understanding and valorization are rigorously insperable. [1]

(b) The point of view of the proletariat, a victim of the system and its fossilizing potential. This class-based perspective inspires-as Marx clearly recognizes in the preface to Capital-his critique of bourgeois political economy. It is from this point of view that values like "justice" are reinterpreted: their concrete meanings differ according to the situation and interests of different classes.

(c) The possibility of an emancipated future, of a post-capitalist society, of a communist utopia. It is by the light of the hypothesis-or wager-of a free association of producers that the negative traits of capitalism appear in all their vastness.

(d) The existence, in the past, of more human social or cultural forms destroyed by capitalist "progress." This reference, of romantic origin, is especially present in the texts where Marx and Engels analyze primitive communism, a form of communal life without a market or state, and without private property and without the patriarchal oppression of women.

The existence of these values does not mean that Marx takes on a Kantian perspective, opposing a necessary transcendence to

existing reality: his critique is immanent, to the extent that it is made with reference to a real social force which is opposed to capitalism-the working class-as well as to the contradiction between the possibilities created by the impulse of the productive forces and the limitations imposed by bourgeois relations of production.

The anti-capitalist critique of Marx is organized around five fundamental themes: the injustice of exploitation; the loss of liberty from alienation; venal quantification; irrationality; and modern barbary. Let's examine each of these points, emphasizing their lesser known aspects.

1) Injustice and exploitation. The capitalist system is grounded, independently of this or that political economy, on the unpaid surplus labor of workers, giving rise to, through "surplus value," all forms of rent and profit. The extreme manifestations of this social injustice are the exploitation of children, miserable wages, inhuman working hours, and the sordid conditions of working class life. But these conditions of the laborer are a matter of a specific historical moment; the system itself is intrinsically unjust because of the parasitic exploitation of the labor force by direct producers. This theme occupies a decisive place in Capital and was essential in making the Marxist workers movement.

2) The loss of liberty from alienation, reification, and commodity fetishism. In the capitalist mode of production, individuals-laborers in particular-are dominated by their own products which take the form of autonomous fetishes and escape their control. It is a long and developed problematic in the writings of his youth, but it also emerges in the celebrated chapter on the fetishism of commodities in Capital. [2]

At the heart of Marx's analysis of alienation is the idea that capitalism is a type of disenchanted "religion," where objects in the market replace divinity: "The more the worker is externalized in his labor, the more the outside, objective world, which he himself creates, becomes powerful, the more he is self-impoverished and the more his internal world becomes poor, the less he possesses that is his own. It is the same with religion. The more man invests in God, the less he is able to retain his own self." [3] The concept of fetishism reinvents the history of religions in the form of primitive idolatry which itself already contains the same principle of all religious phenomena.

It is not an accident that in their writings the theologians of liberation- Hugo Assmann, Franz Hinkelammert, Enrique Dussel-draw largely on Marx against capitalist alienation and fetishism in their denunciation of "the idolatry of the market." [4]

3) The venal quantification of social life. Capitalism, which is regulated by exchange value and the calculation of profits and the accumulation of capital, tends to dissolve and destroy all qualitative value: use value, ethical value, human relations and sentiments. Having replaces Being, and consists of mere cash payments-the "cash nexus," according to Carlyle that Marx appropriated for his own use-and the "glassy waters of egoistic calculation."

Now, the battle against quantification and Mammonism (again a term from Carlyle) is one of the principle leitmotifs of romanticism. [5] Like the romantic critiques of modern bourgeois civilization, Marx thinks that capitalism introduces, in this sense, a profound degradation of social relations and a moral regression to pre-capitalist social relations: "there came a time at last when what all that these men had looked upon as inalienable became an object of exchange, of trade, from which they would be estranged. It is the time when the same things which until then were communicated, exchanged, bartered; supplied but never sold; acquired but never bought-virtue, love, opinion, science, conscience, etc.-where everything will at last pass into commerce. It is the time of general corruption, of universal venality, or, speaking in political economic terms, the time when everything, moral or physical, having become market value, is carried to the market to be appreciated for its fair value." [6]

The power of money is one of the most brutal manifestations of capitalist quantification: through the mode of production it denatures all "natural human qualities" in submitting to the money standard. "The quantity of money becomes more and more the unique and powerful property of man; at the same time that it reduces all being to its abstraction, it is reduced by its own logic to quantitative being."

4) Irrationality. The periodic crises of overproduction that jolt the capitalist system unveil its irrationality-"absurdity" is the term used in the Manifesto: there are "too many means of subsistence," even though the majority of the population lacks necessary means of subsistence. This global irrationality is not contradictory, of course, with a partial and local rationality, at the level of production management in each factory.

5) Modern barbarism. In a certain sense, capitalism is the harbinger of historical progress, exemplified by the exponential development of productive forces, thereby creating the material conditions for a new society with solidarity and freedom. But, at the same time, it is also a force of social regression in the sense that it "makes from each economic progression a public calamity." [7] Considering certain of its manifestations-the most sinister among them being the poverty laws or the workhouses, the "Bastilles of the workers"-Marx writes in 1847 this powerful and prophetic passage which seems to presage the Frankfurt School: "barbarism reappears, but this time it is engendered in the very core of civilization and becomes an integral part of it. It is the leprous barbarism, barbarism which is the leper of civilization." [8]

All these critiques are intimately related: they are mutually exchanged, they reciprocally presuppose themselves, and they are articulated in an organized anti-capitalist vision, which is one of the distinctive traits of the reflection of Marx as a remade communist thinker.

On two other questions-which today are of the greatest relevance-the anti-capitalist critique of Marx is more ambiguous or insufficient.

6) The colonial expansion and/or imperialism of capitalism, the violent and cruel domination of colonized peoples, their submission by the preemptory force of the imperatives of capitalist production and the accumulation of capital. One observes here a certain evolution in Marx's thought: if in the Manifesto he seems to celebrate in progress the subjugation of "barbaric (sic), peasant nations" to bourgeois civilization, in his writings on British colonialization in India the somber aspect of western domination is evoked, but as a necessary evil.

It is only in Capital, notably in the chapter on the primitive accumulation of capital, that one finds a truly radical critique of the horrors of colonial expansion: the enslavement or extermination of indigenous peoples, wars of conquest, and the trading of blacks. These "cruel acts and abominable atrocities,"-which, according to Marx (approvingly citing M. W. Howitt), "do not have a parallel in any other era of world history, in any other savage race, as gross, pitiless, and as shameless as it was"-are not simply converted into profits and the loss of historical progress, but are properly denounced as an "infamy." [9]

The Manifesto rejoices in the domination over nature made possible by the expansion of capitalist civilization. It is only later, specifically in Capital, that the aggression of the bourgeois mode of production against the natural environment is evoked. In one famous passage, Marx suggests a parallel between the exhaustion of labor power and that of the sun by the destructive logic of capitalism: "Each progression of capitalist agriculture is a progression not only of the art of exploiting the laborer, but also the art of depleting the earth's soil; each progression in

the art of augmenting its fertility for a time is also a progression in the ruination of its durable sources of fertility. . . . Capitalist production therefore develops the technique and the combination of the process of social production that exhausts at the same time the two sources from which are obtained all wealth: the earth and the laborer." [10] Here one sees the sketch of a vision of an immanent dialectic of progress-the ironic way the term is used is simply an expression-which signals the ecological problematic, but which was unfortunately not developed by Marx.

II

Everything else is the problematic of Max Weber. His position on capitalism is much more ambivalent and contradictory. One may say that he is torn between his bourgeois condition which is identified with the destiny of German capitalism and its imperial power, and his intellectual identity, sensitive to the arguments of the romantic, anti-capitalist Zivilizationkritik so influential on German university mandarins at the turn of the century. From this point of view he is comparable to another bourgeois intellectual of that era in Germany who was also torn-if not schizophrenically-between bourgeois and intellectual persuasions: Walter Rathenau, a Prussian and a Jew, entrepreneur capitalist and critic of mechanistic civilization.

Rejecting all socialist ideas, Weber did not hesitate occasionally to employ apologetic arguments in favor of private capital. More often he seems to be inclined toward a resigned acceptance of the inevitability of bourgeois civilization. Yet, in certain key texts, which have been among the truly great imports in the history of 20th century thought, he gives free reign to a lucid critique, pessimistic and profoundly radical, of the paradoxes of capitalist rationality. According to the sociologist Derek Sayer, "to a certain extent his critique of capitalism, like a negative life-force, is more incisive than that of Marx." [11] This judgment is somewhat excessive, but it is true that the Weberian argument touches on the very foundations of modern industrial/capitalist civilization.

It goes without saying that the themes of this critique are quite distinct from those of Marx. Weber ignores exploitation, he is not interested in crisis, has little sympathy for the struggles of the proletariat and does not call colonial expansion into question. And yet, similar to the Nietzschean or romantic Kulturpessimismus, he is aware of a profound contradiction between the unreasonableness of modern, formal rationality-of which the bureaucracy and private enterprises are the most typical incarnation-and that of the autonomy of the

active subject. Taking a distance from his relation to the rationalist tradition of the Enlightenment, he is perceptive of the contradictions and limitations of modern rationality as it manifests itself in the capitalist economy and in bureaucratic administration: its formal and instrumental character, and its tendency to produce effects that lead to the overturning of the emancipatory aspirations of modernity. Research into the calculability and efficiency of all goals leads to the bureaucratization and reification of human activities. It is this diagnosis of the crisis of modernity that will slowly return through its appropriation by the Frankfurt School (e.g., Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse). [12]

What informs Weber's pessimistic and resigned diagnosis of modernity is the refusal of the illusion of progress so powerful in European consciousness from the beginning of the 20th century. As he wrote in one of his final public interventions in 1919: "it is not the blossoming of summer for which we wait, but all at once a night which is polar, glacial, somber and harsh." [13]This pessimism is inseparable from a critical vision of the nature of capitalism and of its dynamic of rationalization and modernization.

One can distinguish two aspects, narrowly linked to one another, in Weber's critique of the substance of the capitalist system:

1) The inversion of means and ends. For the spirit of capitalism-of which Benjamin Franklin is a chemically pure ideal-typical example-to accrue money, always more money (or to accumulate capital, as Marx said), is the most supreme and ultimate objective in life: "money has been considered up to this point as something in and of itself which appears entirely transcendent and absolutely irrational under the relation of 'benefit' of the individual or the 'advantage' that one may get to try and possess. Gain has become the end man proposes for himself; it no longer governs him as a means to satisfy his material needs. This reversal of what we may call the natural state of things, so absurd from a naive point of view, is clearly one of the characteristic leitmotives of capitalism and it remains entirely foreign to all people who have not taken its breath." [14]

A supreme expression of modern rationality in view of an end- Zweckrationalität or, according to the Frankfurt School, instrumental rationality-the capitalist economy reveals itself, from the point of view of the material needs of human individuals, or simply from their benefit, as "absolutely irrational." Weber often returns to this theme in the Protestant Ethic, insisting constantly upon the irrationality (his emphasis) of the logic of capitalist

accumulation: "considering the point of view of personal welfare, it expresses how irrational is this direction where man exists for the purpose of his enterprise and not the reverse." [15]

Just as the treatment of the "naive" point of view that cannot perceive the absurdity of the system-without accounting for its formidable economic rationality-his remarks put the spirit of capitalism profoundly into question. From all the evidence, two types of rationality are in conflict here: that which is purely formal and instrumental (Zweckrationalität), which has as its sole objective production for the sake of production, accumulation for accumulation's sake, money for money's sake, and that, more substantial, which corresponds to the "natural state of things," and related to values (Wertrationalität): that which deals with human welfare and the satisfaction of their material needs.

This definition of the irrationality of capitalism is not without certain similarities with the ideas of Marx. The subordination of an end, the human being, to a means-enterprise, money, the market-is a theme that is endlessly discussed in the Marxian problematic of alienation. Weber was conscious of this, one can observe, in his conference in 1918 on socialism: "all of this (the impersonal functioning of capital) is therefore that which socialism defines as 'the domination of things by human beings,' that is to say: of the means over the objective (the satisfaction of needs)." [16] It is no accident that Lukács's theory of reification in History and Class Consciousness is supported as much by Weber as by Marx.

2) The submission to an all-powerful mechanism and imprisonment by that system that we have created ourselves. This theme is intimately tied to the previous one, but it places emphasis on the loss of liberty, the decline of individual autonomy. The locus classicus of this critique is in the final paragraphs of The Protestant Ethic, without doubt the most celebrated passage and the most influential in Weber's oeuvre-and one of the rare moments where he dares to assign the meaning of "value and time judgments." All at once Weber proves, with a resigned nostalgia, that with the triumph of the spirit of modern capitalism we are obliged to give up the "Faustian universality of man." Awareness of the bourgeois era's arrival, according to Goethe, brings "a sense of departure; of a renouncement of an age of opulence, and human good."

In another sense, capitalist rationality creates a context that is increasingly restrictive: "the puritan wanted to be a person of needs-we are forced to be." The modern economic order, tied to the technical conditions of

mechanistic production "determines, with an irresistible force, the lifestyle of the ensemble of individuals born in this mechanism-and not only those things that directly concern economic acquisition." Weber compares this constraint to a kind of prison where the system of rational production of goods imprisons individuals: "according to the view of Baxter, the appearance of material wealth should wear like a light coat on the shoulders of saints which at any moment can be shrugged off. But fate has transformed this coat into a steel cage."

The image has made good. It is striking for its tragic resignation, but also for its critical dimension. Many interpretations and translations of the expression "iron cage" (stahlhartes Gehäuse) exist: For some, it has been likened to a "prison cell," whereas for others it has been more like a shell (carapace) weighing one down as if he were a snail. Yet it is more probable that Weber borrowed the image from the "iron cage of despair" from the English Puritan poet Bunyan. [17] In any case, the Protestant Ethic seems to describe the reified structures of the capitalist economy as a shell or prison, cold and implacable as steel.

Weber's pessimism makes him fear the end of all vision and all idealism, and the succession, under the aegis of modern capitalism, of a "mechanical petrifaction, adorned by a kind of convulsive vanity." [18]

It is a question of the progress of reification which extends itself, out of the economic sphere to the various other domains of social activity: the state, rights and culture. [19] Well before the Frankfurt School, Karl Löwith was aware, as in his brilliant essay of 1932 on Weber and Marx, that the "dialectic of reason" was evidence for the Weberian critique of capitalism and its affinity with the Marxian problematic:

Weber himself declared that here lies the real problem of culture-rationalization toward the irrational-and that he and Marx agreed in the definition of his problem but differed in his evaluation. . . . This paradoxical inversion . . . becomes most clearly evident when it occurs in exactly the type of activity whose innermost intention is that it be specifically rational, namely, in economically rational activity. And precisely here it becomes plainly apparent that, and how, behavior which is purely purposive-rational in intention turns inexorably into its own opposite in the process of its rationalization. [20]

III

In conclusion, what Weber, in contrast to Marx, did not know was the domination of exchange value over human activity. The

mechanisms of valorization and automation inscribed in market exchanges leads to the monetarization of social relations and a "depoeticization" of the world-that is to say, as the market becomes a prosaic aspect of life there is a withering of experience and of "poiesis." [21] The Heidelberg school of sociology may not have conceived the possibility of replacing the autocratic logic that was selfvalorizing with a democratic form of production. [22]

More that Marx and Weber part on the idea of the substantial irrationality of capitalism-that it is not contradictory with respect to its formal or partial rationality. Both make reference to religion in order to attempt to come to terms with this irrationality.

For Weber, it is the origin of this irrationalism, of this "reversal of that which we call the natural state of things" that we need to explain, and he proposes to make reference to "a series of intimate sentiments tied to certain religious representations": the Protestant ethic. [23]

For Marx the origin of capitalism does not return us to a religious ethic of thrift, but rather to the brutal process of expropriation and pillage that he designates by the term primitive accumulation of capital. The reference to religion nevertheless plays an important role for understanding the logic of capitalism as "inversion." But, we saw above, for him it is a matter less of a causal determinant as in Weber that of a structural affinity: irrationality is an intrinsic characteristic, immanent and essential of the capitalism mode of production as an alienated process similar in its structure to religious alienation. In both cases humans are dominated by their own products- money under capitalism, God under religion.

It is in exploring the elective affinities between the Weberian and Marxian critiques of capitalism, and in the amalgamation in an original step that Lukács produced the theory of reification and Adorno and Horkheimer the critique of instrumental rationality-both among the most important and radical theoretical innovations of 20th century Marxian thought. [24]

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NOTES

[1] L. Goldmann, "Le marxisme est-il une sociologie?" in Recherches Dialectiques, Paris: Gallimard, 1955.

[2] It is true that one may observe, as has been remarked by Ernest Mandel, an evolution between the 1844 Manuscripts and the economic writings of his maturity: the passage of an anthropological conception to a historical conception of alienation. Cf. E. Mandel, The Formation of Karl Marx's Economic Thought, 1967.

[3] K. Marx, 1844 Manuscripts.

[4] H. Assmann, F. Hinkelammert, A idoloatria do mercado: Ensaio sobre Economia e teologia, S. Paulo, Ed. Vozes, 1989. Also see on this subject the fascinating text of the young Walter Benjamin-largely inspired by Weber- "Kapitalismus als Religion," Gesammelte Schriften, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991, volume VI, pp. 100-103.

[5] Cf. M. Löwy and R. Sayre, Révolte et Mélancolie. Le romatisme a contre-courant de la modernité, Paris, Payot, 1992.

[6] Poverty of Philosophy, p. 33.

[7] K. Marx, Capital, vol. 1 pg. 350 New York: Vintage.

[8] K. Marx, "Arbeitslohn," 1847, Kleine Ökonomische Schriften, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1955, pg. 245.

[9] K. Marx, Capital, vol. 1, pp. 557-558, 563.

[10] Ibid. pg. 363.

[11] D. Sayer, Capitalism and Modernity: An Excurses on Marx and Weber, pg. 4, London: Routledge, 1991.

[12] See the important book on this subject by Philippe Raynaud, Weber et les dilemmes de la raison moderne, Paris, PUF, 1987 also the article "Figures du marxisme wébérien," Actuel Marx, 1992.

[13] M. Weber, Le savant et le politique (1919), Paris, C. Bourgois, 1990, p. 184.

[14] M. Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

[15] Ibid, pg. 73. Cf. also pg. 80.

[16] M. Weber, "Der Sozialismus," in Schriften zur Sozialgeschichte und Politik, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1997, pg.246.

[17] Derek Sayer, Capitalism and Modernity, pg. 144 speaks of a "shell," whereas the Bunyan hypothesis has been argued by E. Tiryakian, "The Sociological Import of a Metaphor: Tracking the Source of Max Weber's 'Iron Cage'," in P. Hamilton (ed.), Max Weber: Critical Assessments, London, Routledge, 1991, vol. I, 2, pp. 109-120.

[18] All above citations The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, pp. 222-225.

[19] Cf. Pierre Bouretz, Les promesses du monde, pg. 367.

[20] K. Lowith, Max Weber and Karl Marx, p. 48.

[21] The term, poiØsiV, in Greek means "to make" as well as "to do" and has cultural and aesthetic overtones. (Translator's note)

[22] I refer here in my use of terms such as "depoeticization of the world" to those advanced by Jean-Marie Vincent in his recent work, Max Weber ou la démocratie inachévée, Paris: Editions du Félin, 1998, pp. 141, 160-161.

[23] Protestant Ethic, pg. 50. Cf. also pp. 73, 80.

[24] M. Löwy, "Figures du marxisme wébérien," Actuel Marx, no. 11, 1992.