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Reflections on the Indian process

5 April 2004, by [Pierre Rousset](#)

Pierre Rousset [1] followed the process from beginning to end and gives his assessment



All of us who had the chance to participate in the 4th World Social Forum (WSF) were struck by the breadth and the highly popular character of the participation. "It's normal. It's India..." some said, as if the immensity and the vast population of this country-continent were enough to explain everything. Indeed, organizing the Forum in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) meant that many sizeable obstacles had to be overcome: nothing was settled in advance.

Obviously it is not possible to analyze this process without reference to India and some of its more complex traits. According to a well-known dictum, only those who have spent either two days or 20 years in a country can claim to be experts on it. I can never, then, be an expert on India. How, in these conditions, is it possible to approach a question like that of caste without falling into vulgar errors? This is not a formal warning. India is not easy to understand. Nothing can replace the various analyses that the Indian protagonists involved in the WSF can put forward.

Some figures

More than 70,000 people registered at the Forum, to which we should add

40,000 who participated on a daily basis, the 4,000 participants in the youth camp, the many volunteers and the inhabitants of the enormous urban conurbation who participated in the open activities. More than 130,000 people, then, took part in the WSF. Among the delegates who registered, 60,000 were Indian and 14,000 were foreigners, coming from 117 countries. More than 1,600 organizations were represented, half of these from India. 1,200 events took place in the framework of the WSF (without counting the many street activities).

A few weeks before the holding of the forum, the organizers expected the participants to number 75,000. The figures grew incessantly as the event approached, the delegations from various Indian states turning out to be much bigger than anticipated. It was a sign that a genuine dynamic had been created.

A rational wager

To leave Porto Alegre in favour of India was to make a leap in the dark. A necessary leap, but without any guarantee of success. For the first time a massive forum was going to be organized in a country where it was impossible to rely on the financial and institutional support which the movement had enjoyed in Rio Grande do Sul (in the south of Brazil), Florence (Italy) or Paris-Saint Denis (France). Two decisions of principle had been taken in January 2002:

- to begin taking the WSF out of Porto Alegre to allow the process to acquire a real world dimension;

- that India should be the first destination for the movement.

The wager on India was a rational one. Some conditions are necessary so that a social forum, in the sense that we understand it here, can take place: a living "civil society"; varied and dynamic social movements; a capacity for political independence; unitary traditions. India possessed all these. However, most of the Indian organizations concerned only learned afterwards of the decision taken by the WSF's International Council.

This in fact was one of the first obstacles that had to be overcome. Not many Indians were able to come to Porto Alegre or participate in the bodies of the WSF. The great majority of activists had only a very vague notion of what a social forum was. It was only in their lands of origin (Brazil and a part of Latin America; Europe, above all the South initially) that the social forums had become a recognized component of political life, a common reference point that was widely shared by numerous movements. Because of the prohibitive cost of travel, in a number of countries, notably Asian ones, only a thin layer of activists had been able to participate in the experience of the social forums.

The problem was aggravated in India by a kind of reciprocal ignorance. The international activity of the Indian

movements was above all orientated towards their own sub-continent, South Asia, with, in the background, the regional power game involving Washington, Beijing and Moscow. In Europe, few networks had built durable links with India. Asia is the poor relative of European solidarity.



The women's march at Mumbai

The Indian organizations had only a little time to assimilate a very specific reality - the international experience of the social forums and the nature of their "inclusive" approach. India's unitary traditions only partially relate to the specific dynamics of a social forum. Unity was above all practiced between organizations of the same type - between trade union federations, "popular movements" of Gandhian origin, NGOs, left parties. A WSF should include a broad spectrum of organizations of very diverse types, which, quite often, would not previously have collaborated with each other.

An initial regional Asian Social Forum was held in Hyderabad (the capital of Andhra Pradesh) in January 2003. This "dress rehearsal" would test the possibility of organizing the WSF in India. The test was positive.

The success of Hyderabad was all the more significant in that the unitive convergences had nothing obvious about them. The sharpness of the antagonisms between movements of different types constituted a second sizeable obstacle to overcome. Here are two examples.

The question of the NGOs

The relation between nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and "popular" (socially rooted) organizations often presents problems, in particular in the Third World. The latter believe that the former use their control of solidarity funds to occupy a political place which is disproportionate to their capacities for recruitment and social

representativity. Also, some international NGO networks have tended to replace rather than help local organizations and thus weaken national "civil society" in the name of world "civil society".

Of course, not all NGOs have the same orientation. But in India the cleavage is particularly marked between NGOs that receive "external" financing and the movements that explicitly reject it, considering that it is an essential guarantee of their independence. This question occupies an important political place. It is for example often touched on in the leaflets presented by an organization. An activist network can also exclude from its ranks any association having links with "communalism" (i.e. religious sectarianism) or receiving "foreign" financing.

"Traditional mass organizations"

Another cleavage takes on specific dimensions in India, opposing the "popular movements" to the "traditional mass organizations".

The "traditional mass organizations" are linked to the political parties. The link between trade unions and parties varies greatly according to periods and countries. In France, trade union independence is a matter of principle (even if, in reality, the leadership exercised by the parties is obvious). In Germany or in Britain, there is a recognized organic link between trade unions and social democratic parties - to the point that in Britain the Trade Union Congress finances the Labour Party.

In India (and more generally in South Asia), the link between parties and mass movements is particularly pronounced. All the parties have their own trade union federations, including the Congress Party [the main bourgeois party which governed the country for decades since independence and was identified with the independence movement] and the BJP [Hindu far-right party which is at the centre of the current government coalition]. Each party is surrounded by a spectrum of mass organizations.

This is considered normal to the point that all the functions occupied by a person are indicated on a single visiting card. It is hard to explain to Indian trade unionist friends that if they come to France, it is better to have two different visiting cards, one for trade union and the other for party activities. Not indicating a political identity appears suspect, as if there was something to hide.

The traditional mass organizations are not for all that necessarily merely "transmission belts" in the hands of a political bureau. When they acquire real social roots, a very much more dialectical relationship is established between the movements belonging to a same current. Some among them have sufficient breadth to transcend, partially at least, their political affiliation.

However, more than ever, unity must be realized between organizations (for example between various trade union federations), and not inside the same movement.

There are no sectors which are "off limits" to the traditional mass organizations. There are for example many independent trade unions, with diverse orientations, at the scale of the urban conurbations or in a specific industrial sector. Some of them coordinate inside a kind of national platform of "left independent and democratic trade unions", the NITU (New Trade Union Initiative). But most of the movements which go under the name of "All India" (which effectively means they are implanted in three or more states) and have a broad social surface belong to this category - trade union federations, women's associations, poor peasants' organizations and so on.

"Popular movements"

A whole range of "social movements" and "popular movements" have been set up more recently. Their common characteristic is not being linked to political parties and are thus often found in opposition to traditional mass organizations. They are not necessarily more (or less) radical than

these latter. Their development often reflects upheavals brought about by the contemporary evolution of capitalism in India, like the construction of huge dams, the acceleration of deforestation or the formation of an agricultural market. These movements are often, en bloc, qualified as “new” (a positive adjective), rather than “old”, a term which takes on a negative connotation (“passé”) and is associated with the Communist left.



Arundhati Roy at Mumbai

It is however often difficult to place all these “new” movements in the same category. The nature of their social base varies considerably. Resistance to deforestation is generally by the indigenous tribes, the adivasis, because the forest is their vital habitat. In the same way, the struggle against the big dams directly concerns the tribal and village communities condemned to the destruction of their homes and livelihoods. Here we are talking about particularly oppressed and exploited peoples. On the other hand, the independent peasant movements are often set up by new layers of middle and rich peasants created by capitalist development in agriculture.

Around 150 organizations are involved in the National Alliance of Popular Movements, the NAPM.

This is notably the case with the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), the most well-known among them at the international level for its struggle against the construction of a series of giant dams. But this is not always the case. The KRRS in particular, an independent peasant organization primarily implanted in the state of Karnataka, is not a member of the NAPM (the KRRS is the Indian section of Via Campesina and has led actions in Europe against Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), together with the Peasant Confederation). The NAPM ensures a coordination between very different organizations. It is based on a radical rejection of globalization, communalism and casteism [2] and advocates recourse

to methods of non-violent struggle for alternatives. Inside these movements you can find political currents with Gandhian references - social-Gandhian, anarcho-Gandhian, Marxist-Gandhian, former Maoists now Gandhians and so on. An important point to note is that these currents do not set themselves up as parties.

Two components

Each time that new types of movement are born, it has posed important problems in relations with traditional organizations. The question is not confined to India. Here, however, these tensions have taken on a particularly sharp dimension. Some “popular movements” have introduced a socio-ecological critique of the capitalist model of development whereas the Communist left was of the “scientist” tradition. The changing relations between identities of caste, class and community are particularly complex and the left parties fear that a dilution of class references will efface the strategic horizon of struggles and fragment them. On the other hand, the popular movements fear that control by the parties of mass organizations will devitalize them, or instrumentalize them. We do not make a judgement here, but we take into account a reality that is the product of a singular history. The process of social forum, in the sense that we understand it, should include a representative spectrum of the social and democratic forces of the country. Which in India should include both the traditional mass organizations and popular movements. The one does not replace the other.

Returning to the example of the “new peasant movements” reflecting the recent emergence of a layer of rich and middle peasants who cultivate the land (unlike the landed proprietors of yesteryear). They can occupy dominant positions in the village but are confronted, via the world market, with unequal competition from agro-industry and the effects of neoliberal globalization. On questions like GMOs, the price of input, the World Trade Organization (WTO), some of them can easily be found in a common international struggle with, for example, the Confédération paysanne

in France. But they don't organize and don't represent the poor peasants and the landless (indeed they can employ them). These more exploited sectors remain in essence organized by the associations and trade unions linked to the parties.

Political vocabulary

As far as I know the preparation of the WSF in Mumbai has been the only time that the question of convergence between NGOs, traditional mass organizations and popular movements has been posed on a federal scale and in relation to such an ambitious project.

In Europe also the notion of “civil society” has been opposed to a class analysis of social polarities and the “new” has been opposed to the “old”, incarnated by Marxism. But the use of political vocabulary has evolved, notably in response to unitary demands (and the entry into struggle of new generations which no longer have the same historic references as those of the 1960s and 1970s). In current usage, the terms of the social movement or social movements have become increasingly inclusive. When we are introducing a fundamental debate, words become concepts. But in everyday political life, we use them voluntarily in a broad sense, along undefined frontiers. Neither on the theoretical level (there are some decades of Marxist debates on “civil society”) nor on the political level, is there any common militant lexicon on an international scale. One of the first conditions of globalization of our links of solidarity is learning to understand how we speak to each other.

The desynchronized international evolution of the political vocabulary led to some misunderstandings in India. If we say “social movements”, some Indian comrades understand “new social movements” or “popular movements” and understand by this that we are seeking to efface class references or revolutionary parties. For sure, this example is a little caricatured, but nonetheless real enough. Many reciprocal mistrusts had to be surmounted for the Mumbai

WSF to succeed. The political situation in India has, to some extent at least, pushed the movements towards unity.

The world market and the rise of the BJP

India, relatively protected from the world market, felt the hammer blows of neoliberal globalization later than many other countries. But the basics of the political-social framework created at independence (1948) are today progressively disintegrating. The implosion of the USSR has had profound consequences for the system of international alliances. The state plays increasingly less of a role in economic development. The Congress Party, long hegemonic, has decayed and lost its initial dynamism. Social entitlements are challenged, social and regional inequalities are growing again. In India, then, the effects of neoliberal capitalist globalization are being felt relatively late and insidiously. But they contribute (with other factors) towards a more general and more structural crisis in those countries that were previously integrated into the world market. The religious forces of the far right have been able to profit from the social disarray.

Hindu fundamentalism

The Bharatya Janata Party (BJP, Indian Party of the People) has led the federal government since 1998. It employs several levels of language and seeks to present a “responsible” face, but it is the political front of the fascist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, Association of National Volunteers) and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (Universal Hindu Association). Together with the militias and a whole spectrum of mass organizations, they structure a vast Hindu fundamentalist movement that supports the concept of Hindutva, “Hinduity”. They make the Muslim and sometimes the Christian minorities scapegoats and challenge the secular

(neutral attitude to religion) character of the Indian state.

Progressive movements face convergent attacks from neoliberal counter-reform and the rise in power of a far right fundamentalist Hinduism. This is the third obstacle that I want to mention and it was one of the main arguments used by those who wanted to engage a broad unitary dynamic during the WSF, transcending the usual cleavages between NGOs and movements or popular movements and traditional mass organizations. It would be irresponsible, it was argued, not to combine our forces when a fascistic movement has been carried to power!

The Indian political situation is bad, then. Yet the ambience inside the Mumbai forum was not defeatist, much the opposite. This relates to one of the most striking aspects of the process now underway, which does not only concern India.

Conjunctures and period

Each social forum is held in a specific conjuncture. The first European Social Forum in Florence, in November 2002, met in a situation of “buoyancy”, in reaction to the arrival in power of Berlusconi and Bush’s war drive; that explains to a large extent the significance of the million-strong demonstration that ended the forum. The situation in France, a year later, during the second ESF in Paris/Saint-Denis, was rather characterized by a “slack period” in social mobilization, after the big strike movements and struggles which had not forced the government to back down. However, if the Parisian demonstration was much smaller than that in Florence (although large enough, with 100,000 participants), the two forums were numerically comparable (around 50,000) and shared the same dynamic spirit.



Mumbai, opening night

All the social forums in which I have

participated have been characterized by a positive spirit, even if they were generally held in times of difficult situations, with the pursuit of neoliberal policies, new war dynamics, electoral victories of the right and the rise of fundamentalism. This was particularly evident during the second WSF in Porto Alegre (Latin America after September 11, 2001) and the first two ESFs in Italy (after the victory of Berlusconi) then in France (after the election of a particularly reactionary national assembly). It was again the case in India (following the electoral victories of the BJP).

Certainly, profiting from the divisions between economic powers (as well as the tensions between imperialist bourgeoisies and third world bourgeois elites), the global justice movement managed to halt some neoliberal offensives (from the Multilateral Agreement on Investment negotiated inside the OECD to the Cancun conference of the WTO). That represented some real, concrete successes, which were politically very significant. We have not had successes like these for a number of years. However, neither the forums nor the many mobilizations have allowed us to reverse the relationship of forces and put an end to the anti-popular and repressive measures that accompany capitalist globalization. The period remains in this sense defensive.

Faced with the violence of the attacks launched on every front in the name of the commodification of the world, the vast movement around the forums affirms itself first as the place of convergence of multiple forms of resistance of a defensive kind (“The world is not for sale”). However, there is more. Capitalist globalization demands the implementation of a new mode of domination, different from the (varied) modes of domination that prevailed in the majority of countries in the preceding period. The international bourgeoisie has shown itself incapable of stabilizing itself in terms of ideological, social or democratic legitimacy. In these conditions, rejection of the neoliberal order takes on a dimension which is not solely defensive (“Another world is possible”). Some elements of a counteroffensive oppose the generalized offensive waged by the

owners of wealth.

The forums are only one of the expressions of the global movement against capitalist, neoliberal and military globalization. They fulfil a specific function. They offer the necessary space and time to collectivize experience and reflection, to create a consensus around a common calendar of mobilizations. They progressively give form to a common alternative culture, constitute a place of convergence of multiple forms of resistance and give form to the desire for a counteroffensive. When they succeed, the forums present an image of the "people assembled". And Mumbai was the most representative forum of all, in terms of composition and expression.

Mumbai, point of penetration of globalization

Holding the WSF in Mumbai in no way guaranteed popular participation. The conurbation of Bombay is governed by the Shiv Sena ("army of Shivaji"), a particularly reactionary Hindu fundamentalist regionalist movement. Mumbai is also the commercial capital of the country, the point of entry of globalization where the established powers have been won over to neoliberal ideology. Certainly, the forum was not organized in the financial and tourist centre, but in the working class suburbs. Nonetheless, the implantation of progressive forces here remains weaker than in the other regions of India.

Mumbai offered some advantages, but it was not chosen because the left was strong there but rather for the opposite reason, because no left force is in a hegemonic position there. It was a unitary choice. For example, the bastions (Calcutta, Kerala) of the main CP in India, the CPI-Marxist, were ruled out. In Mumbai, the small components (NGOs and so on) or the popular movements could more easily find their place besides the traditional mass organizations, dalits and so on. This unitary choice had a price. The WSF is in some way held in enemy-controlled territory. This was a fourth

obstacle to overcome.

Finance and logistics

The problem was first and foremost financial. It was the first time that a "big" forum could not count on any aid from the municipality or the state. No money, no facilities, no services, no free housing. The problem was moreover bigger in that the Indian organizers of the WSF could not accept the financing traditionally accorded by the Ford Foundation for the WSFs in Porto Alegre. As noted above, there is in India a great mistrust relating to the political implications of financial aid (a problem very often underestimated elsewhere). No question then of receiving anything from a symbol of imperialist capital even if, to my knowledge, there were no political conditions attached to the donations of the Ford Foundation (which is not always the case for some aid of more "progressive" origin). The practical preparation of the WSF posed immense logistical problems. The forum was held in a disused industrial and commercial zone offering factory sheds, a vast covered space, the shade of numerous trees and verdant alleyways - a proletarian architecture surrounded by a touch of nature! This site allowed the organization of activities in a single place, which was very important for the creation of that feeling of being "among one's own" which is one of the trademarks of the forums. To a much greater extent than the campus of the Catholic University in Porto Alegre, it was able to take on a popular character. Delegations of activists took possession of the alleyways. The anonymous university cafeterias were replaced by a multitude of little stands offering cheap regional dishes - and, in a symbolic decision which was particularly remarked upon by the media, Coca-Cola and Pepsi were banned from being sold in the zone of the forum. Participants thus made the space created their own.

To achieve this, it was necessary to prepare the site so that it could host all the activities, deal with problems of translation, create space to house

delegations from all over India, with tents and toilets, negotiate with the municipal transport service to provide temporary bus services between the lodgings and the forum. To welcome initially 75,000 people, then 100,000, then 120,000, with a budget that did not expand proportionally. There were a thousand and one things that could go wrong. Logistical failure seemed certain. It was a success and the key to this was the politics. If conflicts inside the preparatory teams and technical problems (which were not lacking) had no serious consequences, it is because the Indian WSF process initiated a real dynamic which then carried it along.

The nature of the participation in the forum offered one of the most striking expressions of this dynamic. The dimensions of India and the prevalent poverty constituted a fifth obstacle. It often takes two or three days train journey to get to Mumbai from other parts of India. . How can you leave your village and job for a week, pay for transport and the costs of your stay? How could the poor attend the WSF? And yet they were there. The travel costs of certain delegations were financially supported by western NGO networks, but many others got there by their own means.

The members of a women's association in Tamil Nadu saved for months to make the trip. In their hundreds and thousands, villagers from Bihar or coalminers from Madhya Pradesh occupied trains, imposed free transport and brought with them enough bread and spices to feed them during their stay. In Mumbai, "solidarity tents" were set up to welcome the delegations from each state, at minimum cost.

Even the biggest Indian organizations are implanted in a limited number of states. To ensure the presence in the forum of significant delegations coming from all India, it was necessary to integrate regional associations in the process.

India is not only very big (the equivalent of the whole of western Europe). It includes two geographic and historic entities (the North, the Deccan to the south) and numerous linguistic regions. A strong national

sentiment is combined with very sharp regional realities. The WSF was prepared by the holding of forums in (nearly?) all of India's states, and by local or regional forums that were often organized down to the level of the panchayat, the rural municipalities, village or groups of villages. This allowed the local structures to be integrated.

The alleyways of the forum were taken over by demonstrations of every kind combined with dance, street theatre and mime. Artistic expression, political-cultural action, occupies an important place in India. It also helps to overcome linguistic barriers, as attested by a Tamil; "We cannot speak to each other, our languages are too different. But when I see them play, demonstrate, I understand the message, I recognize the common situations. We are happy to be here, together".

The political heart of the forum was in the alleyways, much more than in the lecture theatres. The most successful lectures and workshops were often those co-organized with the Indian organizations capable of expressing the condition of the people and the struggles underway. The experience of Mumbai contributed to a rethinking of the conception of the forums in terms of mode of preparation, organization of space, the role of self-organized activities, the importance accorded to the workshops and seminars, the articulation between "street" activities and meetings in rooms.

Castes and Dalits

In this process the movements of untouchables occupied a particularly visible place. Some of them organized marches for dignity, starting from the four corners of India from December 6, 2003 onwards. The various contingents covered 15,000 kilometres and organized some 250 meetings across the country, before participating very actively in the WSF. "Dalit" is the name given to these movements, meaning "the oppressed, the crushed, the broken" according to the various translations given to me.

The word "caste" (of Portuguese origin) in fact covers two different

notions - varna (the four "stations" from which untouchables are excluded) and jati (there are some thousands of these, relating to professional activities, which include the dalits).



Dalit band on the march

The traditional caste system in India reproduces social divisions while integrating them into a scale of "purity". There are three big divisions in caste, three "states" are pure. They represent the dominant classes. The Brahmins are the priests, those who know and who are represented in the human body by the mouth. Then there are the warriors (the shoulders and the arms) and the merchants (the thighs). A fourth state, already impure, is that of the servants, the people, the majority of the population - these correspond to the feet. The untouchables are situated lower still - they are the dust under the feet, so impure that they cannot be touched. .

The caste system appears immutable - everyone is born into a caste, as a function of their previous life, and cannot change before their death and subsequent reincarnation. But there is a certain collective mobility, as a caste (jati) can sometimes gain a superior status and thus achieve a change of station (varna).

Changes

In reality one obviously finds poor Brahmins and rich peasants or dalits who are university educated. Moreover, a system of positive discrimination has been set up in favour of tribals, dalits and "Other Backward Classes", OBC - the term does not carry any negative connotations. Tribals and dalits officially benefit from reserved quotas in Parliament and the civil service. All political parties seek in consequence to present dalit candidates to the elections, in order to win reserved seats, and an untouchable could even be found one day at the head of a state government.

The worst forms of "untouchability"

have disappeared in many regions. But the stigmas of exclusion have not for all that been eliminated. Even in urban areas, discrimination continues to work insidiously. In fighting for their rights, dalits too often face violent and sometimes bloody reprisals from the high castes, the Brahmins. Killings of untouchables continue.

A unity to build

The unification of the dalits' struggle is not spontaneous. They are divided into multiple social-professional jati. The social framework of the dalits is itself structured by an internal hierarchical system of sub-castes. They speak different languages. The response to their situation of oppression has been diversified. Many have converted to religions that recognize their humanity, like Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. But others set themselves the goal of acquiring a higher status inside Hinduism by adopting modes of life proper to the higher castes (like vegetarianism). As to the political representation of dalits, via the parliamentary system, it is fragmented and often co-opted.

The demands raised by the march of dalits on Mumbai illustrate the interaction of political and social themes. The dalit movements demand protection from the physical aggression of "superior" castes, defence of their social rights in the face of capitalist globalization and neoliberal policies, recognition of the dignity of women, denied by patriarchy and the market, the right to a future for their children. They also denounce communalist sectarianism, religious fundamentalism, "casteism" and patriarchy, the chauvinist nationalism characteristic of the Brahmin caste.

A dalit is not only a victim of the system of castes inherited from Hinduism, but also a woman, a rural worker, a domestic, a precarious worker. The fight for emancipation should integrate all these dimensions. But caste and class relationships do not coincide exactly and class and caste identities are not constituted in the same way. How can they be

articulated?

The traditional position of left forces in India is to build class organizations, on the basis that to build caste organizations is to submit to a "feudal" order (the caste system) that one is opposed to. But the weakening of the parties of the left and their mass organizations has left the field free, in a good number of places, to the development of caste identities around specific demands. Taking account of the situation that prevails today, what functions should be given to movements of classes and castes, at what moment, in what place? To what extent can these modes of organization be complementary or competitive? These seem to be the fundamental questions that can explain some of the political cleavages in India.

Multiple identities

The question does not only concern relations between the struggle of oppressed castes and exploited classes. Indian society is organized around multiple identities of gender, class, caste, aboriginality, religious community, historic and linguistic regions, states, socio-political networks. The cleavages are multiple and complex. Linguistic cleavages, for example, do not operate only between those who speak Hindi, Tamil and so on. The Indian Constitution officially recognizes the existence of 18 languages, without counting some 1,600 other languages and dialects! A cleavage operates also in each linguistic region between those who speak (uniquely or primarily) the vernacular language and those who speak English.



JosÃ© BovÃ©

If it is difficult to build pan-Indian organizations on the federal scale, it is then not only because of the dimensions of the country and the population (which is more than a billion). Diversity is wealth. But it is also an obstacle to overcome, the sixth we have mentioned in this report. To develop geographically and genuinely

represent a social sector, every organization has to integrate members and cadres belonging to several linguistic regions and numerous castes (jati). Some "new" movements only exist in one region, around a linguistic identity and rooted in a caste (jati), or a group of "related" jati which can occupy a dominant position locally even if they belong to an inferior "station" (varna).

The period following independence favoured the expression of "unifying" identities (politics, class). The system of quotas for castes and tribals and the policy of positive discrimination for the OBCs was established at the beginning of the 1990s and as an (unforeseen) consequence caste and adivasi status became elements in the political game. With economic liberalization and deregulation, India began to suffer the impact of capitalist globalization. As elsewhere, this leads to identity-based tensions. The rise of far right Hindu fundamentalism challenges the secular state and plunges religious minorities into insecurity. The main threat is to the Muslim community which, despite partition in 1947 (with the independence of Pakistan), is some 120 million strong (around 12% of the population). It is subject to provocations (like the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya in 1992) and massacres (the worst being in Gujarat in March 2002).

In my view the Muslim community has only been marginally integrated into the process of the social forum. On the other hand, the Christian networks (Indian, Asian and international) were very much more present. The Christian minority is also subject to the threats of the fundamentalists who wish to reconvert by force Indians who opted for Christianity. Priests have been killed, women have had their hair shaved (patriarchal violence decidedly takes the same forms in the East as in the West!), and villages have been burnt. Historically, the Church has won political influence through its schools and universities. The churches have ensured the education of the elite, but also of dalits and adivasis who were traditionally deprived of it (without attacking the caste system which persists in the Christian milieu as in

the rest of society).



Mumbai march in support of Palestine

The religious minorities are today transformed into scapegoats to facilitate the rise and maintenance of power of a Hindu far right. The lower castes question the caste system inherited from the past. The adivasis (aborigines) defend their right to existence faced with the destruction of their natural and cultural environment. In the present context forms of resistance emerge in very varied forms and sectors. They can converge. But this movement of convergence is different from what happened during the rise of struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, with an initial centrality of the workers' movement or armed struggle. The forums offer a space where this convergence can take place. This function seems to take on a particular dimension in India.

Visibility of invisibles

The social forums present an image, it has been said, of the "people assembled". However, this people is not homogeneous. Inside it, visibility tends spontaneously to be monopolized by the wage earning layers and movements who have best mastered communication, who are more able to participate in preparatory meetings and travel, who benefit from a more favourable relationship of forces in society. It is one of the main criticisms that can be made of the WSFs in Porto Alegre. Despite a certain number of efforts and the presence, among the Brazilian organizers, of movements like that of the landless (the MST) the marginalized within society (black people and Indians, those in insecure employment and so on) have remained too marginal in the space of the forum. The composition of the forums has not always escaped the "star system", to the point of sometimes giving a very conformist image, amplified by the media; the personalities hog the cameras, the

intellectuals and academics think, the sociologists and political analysts explain this new subject of study. And the activists? Well, they act and organize. But do they think for themselves? A serious question.

New measures have been taken in the European process of the social forum to give more visibility to the "invisibles", to movements which are geographically (Eastern Europe) or socially (the "voiceless") marginalized. During the second ESF, those in insecure employment imposed their visibility.

That also happened in Mumbai, on a much superior scale. The axis of the two first WSFs in Porto Alegre was the denunciation of the social consequences of neoliberal globalization. The axis of the third (also in Porto Alegre) became the fight against war and the Bush doctrine. The axis of the fourth (Bombay) was the struggle against oppression and insecure employment.

The Indian organizers of the WSF decided to give a predominant place to the themes of "casteism" ("racism" in the relations between castes), "communalism" (sectarian violence between religious communities) and patriarchy. That gave substance to the fight for equality and against the generalized social insecurity engendered by the neoliberal model. But the political success of these thematic choices stemmed in large part from the movement "from below" which gave them a genuinely popular content.

The informal sector and women

The trade unions played a very important role in political preparation, the practical organization of the forum and leading seminars and lectures. But the presence at the forum of dalits and adivasis ensured the participation of workers in the informal sector (the unions organize primarily the wage earners of the formal sector). It is not often that the workers of these two key sectors of the economy are involved in a major initiative. The informal sector is marked by a state of

great poverty and by the heritage of castes. In the formal sector, the state has framed the development of private industry and has developed a public sector where employment was relatively protected. Today, the deregulation of the private sector is virtually finished and attacks on the public sector multiply.

Women's associations and feminist movements were also very active in the WSF in Mumbai. Patriarchy weighs heavily in India, where social inequality at the birth between boy and girl accentuates until marriage. The dowry system weighs like a veritable curse (having only girl children can lead straight to bankruptcy!). This system is officially condemned, but contemporary capitalist ideology, for which profit is the measure of everything, favours its maintenance. Some women have been killed for defaulting on their payments.

Indian patriarchy does not however involve a state of generalized subordination. A woman can accede to the highest positions, like Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister. Her daughter in law, Sonia Gandhi, at the head of the Congress Party, imposed a statutory quota of 33% of leaders. Women appear very present, very active in the struggles. This is not only true of the educated elite. The local activist core is mainly female. As to the number of women leaders in the national process of preparation of the WSF, it was not lower than it is in Europe (the Indian organizing committee for the forum was nearly 40% female).

The first forums in Porto Alegre had shown that the voice of the marginalized sectors of society could be diluted to the point of becoming inaudible, in forums characterized by a massive participation. The ESF in Paris- Saint Denis then, above all, the WSF in Mumbai have on the other hand shown that, if a critical threshold of visibility was crossed, the forums could serve as amplifiers of the expression of these movements.

Limits and contradictions

There were of course limits to the spectrum of initiatives taken during the fourth WSF. The youth camp never knew the internal vitality of those in Porto Alegre. The final demonstration went through the centre of Bombay in a dispersed fashion. The international bodies of the WSF remained too distant during the preparation of the forum.

A certain number of movements which should have been able to participate in the process of the WSF were not able to or did not want to. Some alternative initiatives were taken, the most important being

"Mumbai Resistance 2004". A sort of counter-summit was held at Bombay, on the same dates as the WSF and in the same neighbourhood (on the other side of the road!). MR 2004 had a very radical profile, denouncing the WSF as an "NGO festival" cut off from the struggles. In reality, it assembled a fairly heterogeneous spectrum of organizations, not all of them particularly radical, including some of the much-maligned NGOs. Among the more representative organizations that participated in MR 2004 were some independent peasant movements. It was probably illusory to believe that unity could have been total as there are many cleavages to overcome. Some problems probably relate more to regional conflicts and to clashes of personality than to great political disagreements. "Mumbai Resistance 2004" was supported by a part of the Indian far left (which is mainly of Maoist tradition), in particular the "People's War" wing of the Communist Parties (Marxist-Leninist). These parties are not too concerned with details. To believe them, 130,000 agents of the CIA met in Mumbai, inside the WSF! But the Indian far left was often (very) critical without being totally hostile.

The Communist Party of the Philippines poses, here, a specific problem. It was the only force to have organized a very difficult struggle against the Marcos dictatorship and this is to its credit. But in a different

political context, it underwent a crisis which ended, in the early 1990s, by expulsions and splits. Since then it has undergone a very worrying evolution, which has led it to threaten (and sometimes assassinate) its former comrades. With the International League of People's Struggle, the "political bloc" linked to the PCP played an important role in the international organization of MR 2004. It contributed to giving it a very sectarian profile. Thus, the president-founder of this party, Jose Maria Sison, who lives in Holland, sent a message of solidarity to the opening of MR 2004, turned entirely against the WSF, which was presented as a "reformist and counterrevolutionary" enterprise whose objective was "to perpetuate the world capitalist system", an "imperialist project that seeks to channel critiques towards proposals for "reform" and cosmetic makeovers of imperialism". [3]

Pole of attraction

The Indian organizing committee of the WSF chose to take a very open attitude to MR 2004 and other parallel initiatives, judging that they all expressed opposition to the policies of war, imperialism and capitalist globalization. Some people participated in the debates of both gatherings. The Assembly of Social Movements invited the movements which were not in the WSF (without success). Unhappily, until the end, the most hostile wing of "Mumbai Resistance 2004" spoke alone in the name of all the varied components meeting in this initiative. One can however hope that some links of collaboration will be pursued or renewed in the coming period in India.



Shirin Ebadi, Iranian lawyer and human rights activist

It is interesting to note that the critics of the WSF, from the most virulent to the most moderate, came to Mumbai in order to organize their own initiatives there. To come to Mumbai was, even on the part of the "opponents", a homage, perhaps involuntary, rendered to the success

of the social forum. The pole of attraction was very much the WSF, which confirms the importance of the dynamic of mobilisation that it has initiated. The holding of parallel initiatives has never posed a problem during the forums of Porto Alegre or Paris, inasmuch as they participate in the same movement of global resistance to neoliberal globalization and the policy of war. The danger in Mumbai was that this would take a turn towards sharp confrontation. Finally, the success of the WSF was such that things went rather well.

Pluralism and open processes

The process of social forums is very "integratory". In India, beyond political factors (reduced sectarianism on the left, a sense of urgency in the face of the Hinduist far right), it probably reflects the pluralism specific to Indian society. If my reference books are to be believed, [4] Hinduism is a representation of the world which encompasses differences without denying them. There is a tradition of tolerance that contrasts with the violence of sectarian confrontation (partition, the Pakistan-India confrontation, the rise to power of the BJP and so on). Such a tradition of tolerance is a democratic ingredient, but it does not necessarily impel the unification of struggles. Difference is legitimate, but its recognition could lead to a sense of "everybody for themselves". The pluralism of Indian society appears here both as a gain to be preserved and an obstacle to be surmounted in order to build resistance and common alternatives.

An "open" framework of preparation

The process of preparation of the Indian WSF took forms closer to those that exist in Europe than in Brazil. The "Brazilian model" is very specific. The Brazilian organizing committee of the WSF (now the international secretariat) includes eight

components only. It takes its authority from the equilibrium constituted inside it between diverse movements. But there is more. The MST and the CUT trade union federation are not the only forces involved but they benefit from a barely contested authority. It goes without saying that in the political background there is the Workers' Party (PT) which, without being the only left formation, occupies a particular place. This model cannot be exported to countries like France where no trade union can represent the trade union movement as a whole in this way. A problem which is exacerbated by the number and unprecedented variety of organizations involved in the process. One understands also the role played in Europe or India by the big preparatory assemblies and the open character of the organizing committees.

Of course in India, as in Europe and Brazil, there is no perfect equality between organizations, in terms of implantation or finance. One must criticize the persisting inequalities that manifest themselves inside our movement but keeping a sense of proportion. I have been active since 1965 and I have never before seen a process which succeeded in associating so many and such diverse organizations as that we have today.

Dynamics

Some on the Indian far left see the forums as places where people are content to speak (at great cost!) without acting. According to the rhetoric of the most critical wing, there is on the one hand the real anti-imperialists who built Seattle and the anti-war demonstrations and on the other the pallid reformists who hold seminars. Here we can make two comments. The first is that many of the organizations that have ensured the success of the forums also play a very significant role in the militant mobilizations; there is no separation between those who "chatter" and those who struggle. The second is that the forums are not merely an irreplaceable site for collective exchange, but also a formidable catalyst for action.



Since 2001, one of the elements of continuity in the international process of the forums has been the dynamic link created between forums, the networks of militant campaigns and the assemblies of movements (social, then women and anti-war). The forum ensures an open framework of convergence that allows any organization to participate on the sole condition that it respects the charter of principles (a charter, remember, that contains a firm opposition to capitalist globalization); which makes the forum a real space of liberty and initiative. The forums also offer a framework inside of which activist organizations working on the same terrain can get to know each other and meet to discuss their campaigns and where the assemblies of the movements can prepare a common calendar of international actions. The most striking example in this area remains the extraordinary world day of mobilization against the war of February 15, 2003, responding to an appeal launched in Europe at the Florence forum and then, on the world scale, at the forum in Porto Alegre.

The social forums adopt no declaration and no declaration is adopted in their names, or in the name of all the participants. The appeals, decisions and resolutions adopted by the networks of campaigns, by the assembly of women or by the movements commit only the organizations that sign them. But if the forums no longer helped to continentalize and globalize struggles, they would lose much of their meaning. So as to facilitate this link between space of freedom and action, in the framework of the WSF at Mumbai, some "activist tents" were placed at the disposal of the networks so they could meet. The women's organizations met, as well as the Global Assembly of the anti-war movement (preparation of the action on March 20, 2004). The Assembly of Movements was, as before, the occasion for a synthesis of common activities.

The Charter and the political parties

The political parties that supported the WSF in India respected its charter of principles but the latter was not exempt from debate. The nature of the document has not always been understood. Some have seen it as a programme of which they sought (in vain) the leadership. But, with the rise of the resistance to capitalist globalization, a movement of movements was born, with each having its own orientation and terrains of action; it was not a new current, specific and homogeneous.

The Charter excluded the participation of armed organizations in the forums. It did not deny the right to self-defence of populations affected by repression. It did not exclude the movements that believed that an armed liberation struggle could be legitimate. It did not reduce the political spectrum of the forces that could be found in a forum. In excluding military organizations properly so-called, it protects the democratic space of the forums from state repression. It is not a question to be taken lightly today.

The Charter also excludes political parties, whereas it accepts members of governments (a real internal contradiction). This point has opened a more substantial debate. The basis of the affair seems to me political and it is normal that the question is posed in different way according to countries and periods. France, for example, is one of the countries where the relations between movements and parties is the most problematic. There are old reasons (Stalinist practices...) and recent ones (the betrayals of left parties in government). Seen from France, the exclusion of parties is rather a theme of the left (defiance of social democracy), supported by the most radical movements. Seen from India, it appears as a right wing measure, aimed at the various Communist parties.

To debate this question, we need to recognize the variability of the

situations and discuss on the basis of realities, not myths. It has, for example, been said that the Italians had "introduced" parties in the process at the first ESF in November 2002. The reality is that one party, the PT, was very much present in the Brazilian process from 2001, much more than other parties in Italy.

The Indian experience does not seem to me unequivocal. The fact that the political parties were not co-organizers of the WSF in the same way as other organizations seems to me to have facilitated unity between the traditional mass organizations and popular movements. There are two distinct questions.

The first concerns the presence of parties. If the forums were the equivalent of an inter-trade union conference, the question would not be posed. The parties would be absent. But the forums are open to all "civil society" and the whole range of struggles. The parties (in particular activist parties) are, then, naturally present. It is then better to define spaces inside the forums where they can be represented, debates in which they can participate as such, without challenging the overall dynamic. The practice of the forums has already evolved in this area, in Porto Alegre, Europe and India.

The second concerns the status of the parties - should they be co-organizers of the forums like the other organizations? In the current context, would that help or complicate the construction of unitary convergences? The question is concrete. Maybe because I come from France, I tend to think that this would rather complicate things, at least at the international level. And the "leftist" critics should not forget that it is first and foremost social democracy who would benefit from this new status, quite simply because it has unparalleled organizational and institutional means at the international level.



Here again, things look different in India. Indian social democracy is

divided. Several socialist or socialistic parties participated in the World Parliamentary Forum in Mumbai. However, the only current systematically involved in the preparation of the social Forum was that of the social-Gandhians, inside the NAPM, who are not a party. Nonetheless, the socialist trade union federation, Hind Mazdoor Sangh (HMS), was effectively integrated in the process of the WSF.

The Indian left is primarily Communist, including at the electoral level. The Communist Party of India (CPI, formerly pro-Moscow) is in decline although its trade union confederation, the AITUC (All India Trade Union Congress), remains important. The Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPI-M, which split from the CPI in 1964 with a line of "neither Moscow nor Peking") occupies a key position. At the federal level, it has the biggest parliamentary left group. The trade union confederation to which it is linked is the CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Unions). The various mass organizations of these two parties were involved in the WSF process.

Around 90% of the revolutionary left in India is of Maoist origin. The Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) emerged from a split in the CPI-M. It has since then divided. To simplify, the ML parties which belong to the "People's War" wing are opposed to the WSF and that those who identify with the "Mass Line" wing are linked to it, more or less actively. Trade union federations belonging to these currents have contributed to the organization of the WSF, like the AIFTU (All India Federation of Trade Unions) and the AICCTU (All India Central Council of Trade Unions).

Who leads then?

Who has led the Indian process of the WSF? The NGOs, some say. The CPI-M, say others. Or an NGO/CPIM alliance? These replies are not very convincing. Far from being a simple "NGO festival", the WSF in Mumbai was a great popular rally. And Bombay was chosen particularly because the CPI-M was weak there.

The question seems to me badly posed. A social forum of great breadth is not prepared under a single leadership, but by a combination of movements, with each leaving its imprint on the overall process. In the Indian case, the main actors included the "popular movements" of the NAPM, the traditional mass organizations (of the CPI-M, but others also), the NGOs, the dalit (and to a lesser extent adivasi) movements, the women's movements (with a specific dynamic), Christian networks and the regional associations.

Asian dynamics

To Western eyes, Asia seems to form a whole. Seen from inside, the region fragments between South Asia, the Southeast, the Northeast and so on. No bloc of countries constitutes the "centre" of the Asian whole. Important delegations came to Mumbai from South Korea (400 delegates) and Japan (450, plus the hundreds of passengers on the Peace Boat which anchored in Bombay at the beginning of the forum) in particular. The Philippines were also well represented, as well as the Tibetans in exile.

But for the WSF to genuinely root itself in Asia as a whole, it must also meet in Southeast and Northeast Asia.

Pakistan

For the WSF in Mumbai, the key question was Pakistan. For a half-century, Pakistan and India have endured a cold war punctuated by military confrontations. The conflict has taken on a new dimension with each protagonist possessing operational nuclear weapons. So it was very important that Pakistanis could participate in the Forum, but far from obvious it would happen in a country governed by the BJP and in a conurbation led by the Shiv Sena, where the danger of provocation is constant. Indian-Pakistani tensions were a seventh obstacle to overcome, and not the least.

The WSF finally met in a favourable political conjuncture, with the resumption of preliminary talks

between New Delhi and Islamabad. But the frontier would not have been open without an impressive mobilization in Pakistan, with the holding of a Pakistani Social Forum (5,000 participants, 3,000 among them saying they wanted to go to Bombay, 1,200 to 1,500 actually demanding visas to go to Bombay, around 450 to 650 getting them). A large delegation of parliamentarians also came to meet their Indian colleagues.

East-West Perspectives

With Mumbai, a new step was made in the internationalization of social forums. A step which should allow the rooting of the process in Asia, but also the integration of Asian realities in the WSF. There was a renewal of themes like poverty, precarity and oppression, as well as the introduction of the nuclear question in the antiwar problematic.

There was not the "Latin" proximity that in Europe, facilitates identification with Porto Alegre but in India we encountered a very rich political tradition. During the seminars and the various meetings activist contacts were considerably broadened between organizations of West and East. Unions made links, working together on questions like privatization and the defence of public services. Women's networks were consolidated or enlarged. The anti-war movements of several continents met. All this gives life to a new internationalism.

The ball is now in the court of the Europeans, Latin Americans and WSF bodies. It is up to them to ensure that the West-East meeting which took place in Mumbai is prolonged and that the themes raised and the Asian organizations can find their place in the international process of the WSF, in the coordination of resistance to capitalist globalization.

Footnotes

[1] Pierre Rousset, active from the start in the social forums, was

involved in the preparation of the Mumbai WSF and in this context visited India six times between the Regional Social Forum in Hyderabad in January 2003 and the WSF in Mumbai in January 2004. This article is a shortened version of a longer report. There is much discussion within the Indian far left about the WSF but this addresses itself rather to activists from outside India and to comparison of Mumbai with the

social forums of Porto Alegre or in Europe. The full report is available (in French) and can be obtained from INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT.

[2] See later in the article for the meaning attached to these words.

[3] Reported in *Le Monde*, February 20, 2004.

[4] I base myself mainly on two

books, Max-Jean Zins, "Inde, Un destin démocratique", "Asie plurielle", La documentation française, Paris 1999 (a short general introduction, 200 pages) and the collective work edited by Christophe Jaffrelot, "L'Inde contemporaine, De 1950 À nos jours", Fayard, Paris 1997 (generally of great interest, although with a sizeable blind spot on the Communist movement. 742 pages).

Meeting of the radical anticapitalist left in Mumbai

5 April 2004, by [Pierre Rousset](#)

Organizations from 25 different countries and all continents met. As an initial stage they adopted a [joint statement](#) and agreed to meet next year at the 5th World Social Forum.

An international meeting of parties of the radical, anti-capitalist left took place on January 20, 2004 in Mumbai (Bombay) in the Andheri district - thus within the World Social Forum. It was a real success in both the atmosphere and warm solidarity in which it took place and the political breadth and number of organizations represented: 48 from 25 different countries (5 others involved in planning this initiative were not in the end able to come to Mumbai).

The meeting of a World Social Forum is always an exceptional occasion for many organizations to meet. This is obviously true for the organizations that prepare the forums. It is also true for those that support them and participate in their activities. This WSF was special in that it was meeting in Asia for the first time. There are many associations, movements and trade unions, the relations are a lot more tenuous between the two extremities of the Asian continent than between Europe and Latin America for example.

The opportunity offered by the World Social Forum's move to India was therefore particularly precious. In this

context, 18 radical, anti-capitalist parties from Europe and Asia launched on December 5, 2003 an invitation to a meeting in Mumbai. For the Asia-Pacific region there were three Marxist-Leninist Communist Parties from India (CPI-ML Liberation, CPI-ML, CPI-ML Red Flag) and two Pakistani organizations (Labour Party LPP, and PKMP), the New Left Front (Sri Lanka), the DSP (Democratic Socialist Perspectives) from Australia, two movements from South Korea (Power to the Working Class and All together) and the Filipino parties: the Marxist Leninist party of the Philippines (MLPP), the Philippine Workers' Party (PMP) and the Revolutionary Workers' Party-Mindanao (RMP-M). The invitation was signed in Europe by the Left Bloc (Portugal), the United and Alternative left (Cataluña), the Revolutionary Communist League (France), the Scottish Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers' Party (Britain) and SolidaritéS (Switzerland).

Despite the lateness of the call the response was very positive. Participation broadened to Latin America although unequally, with three Brazilian components including Democracia Socialista (DS of the PT), the United States (the International Socialist Organization (ISO), and Solidarity, Canada and Quebec (including the Union of Progressive

Forces from Quebec); and to the African continent with South Africa and for Niger the Revolutionary Organization for New Democracy (ORDN). We should also note for Europe and Asia the presence of Communist Refoundation (Italy), the Alternatifs (France), Akbayan!! and other Filipino movements, and organizations from the Spanish state, Japan, Egypt...

The organizations present were very different in their social implantation and size. Important movements and currents were still absent. But the meeting was nevertheless representative of what the revolutionary and anti-capitalist left is, what the radical parties are. There were many different ideological roots: different currents of Maoists, Trotskyists and many components who could not be categorized as an "ism" (a form of categorization moreover which is increasingly dubious today).

If the meeting was a success it is because it responded to a need, to a desire. Today, in the era of imperialist globalization - on both the military and economic fronts - the lack of any framework for international collaboration between anti-capitalist parties is particularly strongly felt. There is an increasing sense of urgency. Most of the organizations concerned broke several years ago with the worst sectarian traditions

that tended to dominate in the 1970s. Mutual solidarity relations have been forged, going beyond the differences in historical and programmatic references. Regional networks have been formed such the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EACL), and the Asia-Pacific International Solidarity Conference (APISC, started in Sydney). The development of movements against globalization has created a new space for political action, which is both very broad and from the outset international. Thanks to this - and this is essential - it has

become possible to act together, to help the mobilizations succeed, and not simply to exchange experiences and alliances. Given the major developments underway the radical parties have to take both political and practical responsibilities.

This dual sentiment of new possibilities and responsibilities dominated the Mumbai meeting. A first step was taken in forming an international framework for collaboration between radical parties. It is no more than an initial step, and

without any formal links. It was clear for the participating organizations that time would be necessary to consolidate such an initiative. Many of the organizations present did not know each other at all - or hardly - before meeting in Mumbai! And everybody was thinking about what this international link could become: how should it be different from previous experiences of Internationals? There are obviously many more questions than answers on this topic. But a start has been made. The processes can develop.

International Meeting of Radical Anti-Capitalist Parties

5 April 2004

48 organizations met at this occasion, 5 others parties willing to participate eventually could not come to Mumbai. Thus, in total, 53 organizations from some 25 states answered positively to this initiative. Most of the participants came from Asia-Pacific and Europe, but Africa, Latin America and Middle East were also represented. The concerned parties have different origins, histories and strength; often, they even did not know one another before the Mumbai meeting which proved to be a unique occasion to tie new links between organizations from different continents and various ideological trends.

Participating parties share an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist outlook, and are engaged in the ongoing mass mobilizations against military and corporate globalization. They are willing to engage in dialog, assert mutual solidarity, act together internationally, and thus contribute to give a new concrete content to internationalism, to the strengthening of people's struggles world-wide and to the elaboration of real alternatives

to the present imperialist world order.

In a very warm atmosphere, the meeting allowed a general exchange of view on many aspects of today's struggles: against militarism and war, for the rights of the working class and the oppressed, for national liberation, gender equality and equal access to health, on environment, to name only some. A common feeling emerged that imperialism, in all its manifestations and on every level, must be fought, challenged and overthrown.

The Mumbai meeting of radical parties gave its full support to the call, initiated by the anti-war movements in the United States and by the antiwar co-ordination that met at the occasion of the World Social Forum, for a world-wide day of mobilization March 20, 2004. All organizations will do their best to help to the success of this initiative for peace and against the occupation of Iraq, in solidarity with the Palestinians and other people facing occupation and military intervention.

A facilitating committee has been chosen to co-ordinate and continue the process that was started at the meeting. The facilitators are presently from Australia, Brazil, France, Great Britain, India, Italy and United States.

A second meeting of radical parties will take place in one year's time, in Porto Alegre, Brazil. It will be prepared by political exchanges through an e-mail list and at the occasion of international gatherings, the coming months, to which our organizations will participate. Preparatory discussions will focus, among others themes, on two key issues: our shared responsibilities in relation to the world-wide growth of the movements against military and corporate globalization, and how international co-operation between radical parties can shape today, in a different way than in the past.

The international meeting of radical parties is open to new organizations that could not be integrated in the process before the Mumbai event.

The Philippines prepare for elections

5 April 2004, by Harry Tubongbanwa



Gloria Arroyo became president in 2001 after an impeachment trial of her predecessor Joseph Estrada. [1] Her main rival is a leading Filipino film star. Concerns for the well-being of the Philippine population seem remote from the manoeuvring of these figures meanwhile grass roots forces who have a limited access to electoral representation are also preparing for the elections, not knowing whether at the last moment president Arroyo, scenting defeat, will implement the NOEL (no elections) scenario.

Brief Introduction

The country has shifted to election mode since last year. Nothing has been spared by this "politicking" from the judicial, legislative but most especially the executive from all levels of government functionaries from the barangay (village) up to Malacanang (the Presidential Palace).

This passion for politics by public officials has been so intense that its success is gauged by the extent of the damage it has inflicted on its opponents. The incumbent officials have the "built in" advantage of having all resources of the government at their disposal while the opposition has to employ other means to withstand and counter the attacks made against them by the ruling party. One of these, which the latter has really maximized, is popularity. There have never been in the country's history elections where so many actors and actresses or TV personalities have run for government offices in all levels.

Meanwhile, more than fifty percent (50%) of the Philippine population lives below the threshold of poverty. Social Services are almost nil. If there are services like education and health they have been created as publicity for the incumbent and not really for

answering the basic needs and welfare of the population. They are even timed to be launched during elections.

And as the election fever has intensified, there has been growing restiveness among the rank and file of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Two attempts at coups have been launched by the junior officers from the (AFP) in the last eight months. They have common issues such as protesting the use of the AFP for election purposes and using them to implement the Anti-Terrorisms hysteria in places like Mindanao.

These political developments have directly affected the economy of the country. Among its Asian neighbours it has the lowest rate of Gross Domestic Products (GDP). The Philippine currency (Peso) has been devalued many times in the last two months alone and now it has reached its lowest value in history vis-À-vis the US dollar. For a country, which is import dependent, and export oriented such a currency situation is very alarming.

Meanwhile, the progressive and the revolutionary parties and groups have been trying to maximize the situation in their own advantage. The extreme left - that is the Maoist and Stalinist Communist Party of Philippines - has been intensifying its armed offensives while other revolutionary parties have been engaged in the electoral process trying to gain a wider and stronger presence in the bourgeois electoral machine.

The Revolutionary Workers' Party-Mindanao has been strengthening its capacities in different arenas of struggle: parliamentary, electoral, international mass movements, peace and the armed struggle. It has been preparing its membership and apparatuses for effective political leadership in these fast-unfolding events in country.

The 2004 elections

The May 2004 elections are both national and local selections of candidates for the next three to six years. The people are going to put into office more than fifty thousand officials from the President down to the municipal Mayors.

The ruling class of the country will try to consolidate their ranks and will try to undo and outmanoeuvre each other on who is supposed to be in place for a period of time. The manner of campaigning has been termed as unparalleled in Philippine politics. It is worse than the pre Martial Law period. Candidates now are campaigning on the basis of popularity not programmes, cash not credibility.



Gloria Arroyo...

The candidates (presidential) have tried their best to present themselves as the most effective to implement the neoliberal project of globalization in the country and the more they are acceptable to their US imperialist masters the more they think they become likely to win.

Some political analysts would say that these elections are still a choice between the Arroyo government and the ousted President Estrada.

There are six qualified candidates for the President; one has just been disqualified as a nuisance candidate. But at present there are strong signs that the contest has been narrowed down to President Arroyo and the popular actor and closest friend of Estrada - Fernando Poe Junior. The incumbent government has been trying its best to disqualify Mr. Poe by raising the issue of citizenship and his being a high school drop out and so on. As we write the Supreme Court has made a decision in favour of Mr. Fernando Poe Junior. That means he is a natural born Filipino citizen.

The petition for his disqualification has boomeranged on its authors (identified with the ruling party) because it has generated much publicity for the opposition's presidential candidate.



... and opponent

Mr. Fernando Poe Junior is the most popular actor in the Philippines today. He is even more popular than his closest friend and the ousted President Estrada. That is why, since he formally declared his candidacy, the camp of President Arroyo has been preparing for the worst scenario. Right now, President Arroyo has appointed two new commissioners in the Commission on Elections (in charge of counting and proclaiming the winners of elections) and retired two Estrada-appointed commissioners one year earlier than scheduled. For financial back up, the Arroyo government has just successfully moved through the Lower House that the 2004 budget will not be approved by the Congress, thus automatically re-enacting the 2003 National budget. This means that since there is a big amount of money budgeted for projects already implemented, the President through her discretionary power has the right to re-allocate and realign the budget, which will surely be used for electoral purposes.

Government insiders have been saying that, if the difference between the President and Poe's votes is around two million, they (Arroyo's supporters) can still manage to manipulate the results in their favour. But if the difference is between three to five million then it will be almost impossible. So another tactic will be employed. And this is possible by creating the NOEL scenario.

This is a "no election" situation. This would be justified by creating a war or exploding bombs, most likely in Mindanao with Abu Sayyaf and the Al-Qaeda activities or a coup d'état by disgruntled military officers or both. Already in the past, some retired and active military officers identified with former President Ramos who openly supports Arroyo's presidency,

demanded that a constitutional change should first take place before the election.

Whatever the outcome in elections or no elections, the AFP will have a decisive role. And it is very important to note that right now, even the AFP has been divided for instance thirty percent (30%) of the officers coming from the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) have been identified with Senator. Panfilo Lacson (former military general and one of the six presidential candidates). The Revolutionary Nationalist Alliance or RAM (an organization of commissioned and non-commissioned officers) has been supporting Mr. Poe's candidacy through Senator Gringo Honasan.

Senator Lacson has also been considered as a strong presidential candidate because of his image as a no nonsense crime buster, and his anti-graft and corruption campaign slogans. Aside from the military he has strong backers from the Chinese communities in the country. He still maintains good relations with Mr. Poe's camp (both are identified with the former president Estrada) from which some would surmise that Lacson is a reserve just in case Mr. Poe is disqualified and of course no civil wars and NOEL scenario occur.

Another presidential candidate is Mr. Raul Roco, a former Senator and Education Minister of the Arroyo government. He had consistently topped the surveys in the past (but lately, he has been consistently third in the surveys after Arroyo and Poe) but he does not have the electoral machinery and resources to go through with the campaign. He has been campaigning for an alternative government where the welfare of the people will be addressed first but these are so far general statements. They do not have a clear programme against the neo-liberal programme of globalization in the country. He, just like the others, has been very careful on this matter because he might be treading on dangerous and deadly grounds and the neo-liberal gods might be angry.

Effects on the economy

When Fernando Poe Junior formally announced his candidacy for the President, the value of the peso plunged compared to the dollar. Since then it has not recovered and it even reached PhP56fi30 to 1 US dollar, the lowest in Philippine history. The Arroyo government has been quick to put the blame for such devaluation of the peso on Poe's candidacy and the latter's consistently topping of the surveys.

And to really make a point that Poe's presidency will bring worse for the economy, a survey was conducted among the members of the Makati Business Club (MBC), the country's business elite where they voted zero for Poe and gave highest score to President Arroyo. But to the ordinary masses this picture informs them that the economy, under Mrs Arroyo's government, is very unstable, because the mere prospect of her replacement is already very devastating to the country's economy. It simply means that the economic fundamentals, if indeed there are, of the country under the present government do not stand on firm ground. But the economy of the country is inseparable from Mrs Arroyo: as her campaign slogan tells us, "President Arroyo still our best hope".

Another indicator of the bad shape of the economy is the budget deficit. Last year the budget deficit was 211b or more than 25% of the national budget for the year. Now with the re-enactment of 2003 budget for 2004, it is expected that government spending will be more than it will earn from the collection of taxes. The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) targeted to collect taxes in February 2004 to PhP30fi43b but it got only PhP28fi83b, a short of 5fi3%. Even the annual remittances of the Overseas Filipino workers (OFWS), which have reached almost \$7b or PhP500b (nearly fifty percent of the National budget), cannot cope with the government deficit. This will become worse with the coming elections where money will flow to buy votes or influence the voters.

“The material basis for intensification of revolutionary work is becoming more fertile”

The country's foreign debt has also been increasing because of the need to borrow money in order to fill the deficit gap, but even more because 70% of the country's foreign debt is in dollars - therefore every time there is a devaluation of peso, the foreign debt is directly affected. And the national budget has an automatic allocation of more than 40% to the payment of interest on the foreign debt. So practically nothing is left for basic social services and the welfare of the people. With election money flooding the country, the prices of goods will definitely increase, while the wages of workers and employees have stagnated for a very long time. Such a situation will continue long after the elections.

Worse, the unemployment rate has been steadily increasing. In January 2004 it reached 11%, compared to 10% in October 2003, and peaked at almost 13% in July 2003. In the National Capital Region (NCR), one in five workers is unemployed. This confirms the miserable failure of President Arroyo's employment programme.

The “wait and see” attitude of the business sector (both local and foreign) has added to almost zero growth in the economic life of the country. Even the Banko Sentral ng Pilipinas (Central Bank of the Philippines) mentioned that the Portfolio Investment this month (March 2004) hit a low of \$80 billion compared to \$67.5 billion in March last year. This means that both local and foreign investors have seen the uncertainties in these coming elections.

The attitude of the church, mass media and the middle forces

As the election date draws nearer, the choice for the people has narrowed to two candidates: the incumbent President Gloria M Arroyo or Fernando Poe Junior. Arroyo's campaign line is to continue her policies of the last three years (the period left by the ousted President Estrada). And that is nothing to boast about, as far as the basic masses are concerned: the social services are impoverished, the unemployment rate has increased, peace and order remain very unstable, graft and corruption have intensified - involving even the president's family etc... Fernando Poe Junior (known as the King of the Philippine Movies, and whose only qualification is that all his movies are mega hits) believes now that he should act as President of the Philippines because he has to repay his movie fans. According to him, this is the greatest performance of his life. Recently, he announced that, if elected, he would try to request a restructuring of the country's debt. Immediately trading in the market nose-dived. And his announcement was also quickly recanted by the opposition. He had stepped into dangerous political and economic minefields, and his advisers were not happy.

Both candidates are indicating their intention to continue the neo-liberal project of globalization in the country, given that Fernando Poe's economic advisers are those who advised former and deposed President Estrada.

Within this limited option, the church has to maintain its independence and call on its followers to vote according to their consciences. The retired Cardinal Sin of Manila has indirectly endorsed Raul Roco, but this does not carry much weight anymore. Like the business sector, the church has to maintain a wait and see attitude; otherwise, if they endorse an unsuccessful candidate, there might be difficult consequences for their

properties and business interests. There is one presidential candidate - Brother Eddie Villanueva - who is founder of the Jesus Is Lord movement, but even the churches are showing no sign of supporting him.

The mass media, as in any other election, have been very active and obviously partisan. The big politicians have been paying large sums of money for lobbying, and to ensure publication of polls they have commissioned to claim a trend that they are ahead of other candidates. The issue of the Vice Presidency has been very decisive, since the EDSA People Power II where, by direct intervention of the people in a symbolic place like EDSA, they can change the leadership in the country. It is a sign of weak democratic institutions and an act that can be challenged constitutionally; but they can also use the Constitution to push their interest on the issue of succession.

It is in this context that the ABS-CBN - the biggest television network in the country and whose owner also controls the country's Electricity and Waterworks - has supported its own former talents for the Vice Presidency. The two Vice Presidential candidates of Arroyo and Poe are from the ABS-CBN. Talking of a win-win situation, this is a classic example from a media giant like ABS-CBN, which has other interests in vital industries in the country, including electricity, water, and real estate construction.

The middle forces have been divided. Those who want change because they are the hardest hit by the neoliberal economic policies of President Arroyo, have to choose between Poe, with no coherent economic program thus far; Raul Roco, who has at least a blueprint of his economic programme as embodied in his slogan “Alliance of Hope”, but who lacks resources and machinery and certainly will not make it to the presidency; and Lacson, the retired general and currently a Senator of the Republic, who promises concrete changes in solving crime, graft and corruption, but whose background says the opposite of what he is exposing. A difficult choice indeed.

The attitude of progressive and revolutionary parties

The initial victories of some parties in the 2001 election struggles have made them strive for more positions and seats this coming election.

There are some progressive groups and parties which have given more focus to electoral reforms than others vis-a-vis the social movements; while there are others which make maximum use of electoral struggle for propaganda and resource generation.

Even the Maoist and Stalinist party - the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) - has intensified its electoral movement and created six more electoral parties. Aside from using the election as a fundraising occasion, by collecting Permit to Campaign

Fees from politicians of both the ruling party and the opposition, one can see their cadres and militants putting up political posters for their candidates. It should be noted that in the last election they entered into terms and conditions with the newly installed President Arroyo, because of their participation in EDSA II, which catapulted Arroyo into the Presidency. They were able to gather more than enough votes to get three seats in the Congress. Obviously, much of this effort in terms of recovery, expansion and consolidation came from the electoral energies they got from the 2001 election. Now they want another boost.

“Genuine workers’ parties will not let this opportune moment pass without pushing

through the hastening of steps for the fulfilment of the socialist project in the country”

All other underground political parties (except for one) have put up their own electoral parties and candidates. (The Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines or MLPP is not participating)

It is clear that everybody has been awoken to the importance of participating in bourgeois elections, after coming from very Maoist and Stalinist traditions which consider elections as derailing the path of revolutions. This situation is a new phenomenon. The perks and privileges of an elected office can help in the expansion, consolidation and even recovery of these parties. The danger of being eaten up by the reactionary system has been eclipsed by these advantages. It can even be observed that the one or two parties coming from the national democratic tradition have been focusing their political energies on the electoral struggle alone. Thus the social mass movements have often been subordinated to the electoral struggles.

It is obvious that these parties have all adopted the principle of “participate to win” at the expense of making political propaganda. Given the profiles of the presidential candidates, with their programmes and electability, nobody from the progressive and revolutionary groups and parties has been openly endorsing campaigning for any candidate. Lately, however, it is becoming clear that the CPP-NPA related political parties have endorsed in a very subtle manner the candidacy of Fernando Poe and his Vice Presidential candidate Loren Legarda. The reason is obvious: aside from weakening the state through a weak President, they will have access to the inner circle of the Poe Presidency, and through Legarda for the resumption of peace

talks; and they can claim the bulk of the human rights victims’ indemnification money from the Marcos wealth.

Everybody in these groups and parties has been aware of and preparing for the NOEL scenario. The sitting President and her government, not withstanding her influence and control over the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), and even the Supreme Court, is consolidating her power in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) which is clearly divided. Since last year she has been conducting loyalty checks among her Generals on the basis of loyalty assignments, and reorganizations are carried out regularly.

The threat of “terrorists”, especially in vote-rich Mindanao, has been regularly claimed as the context for the NOEL scenario and the control of vote counting. Areas will be declared as hot spots, and the counting of ballots will be done in the military camps.

Even the peace talks with different revolutionary groups (CPP-NPA, MILF-BIAF, RPMM-RPA, etc) have occasionally been revived for additional positive electoral points for the incumbent President. The bourgeoisie’s traditional method for settling their conflicts and consolidating their ranks is no longer their sole domain. The revolutionary groups and parties are, with varying objectives and orientations, preparing themselves to participate and win in this election.

Whatever the outcome of the election, the basic flaw in the neo-liberal economic policies of globalization for the country will be more exposed. The material basis for intensification of revolutionary work is becoming more fertile. Genuine workers’ parties will not let this opportune moment pass without pushing to hasten steps towards fulfilment of the socialist project in the country.

Footnotes

[1] For an explanation of the events around the Estrada

A new political cycle

5 April 2004, by [Jaime Pastor](#)



Zapatero, smelling of roses

In the end, the deaths were followed by a defeat of the right wing Partido Popular (PP) government, something recognized internationally as a triumph for those opposed to the Iraq war, a rejection of the lies of outgoing prime minister Aznar and a desire for political change which for more than a year has been expressed in many mobilizations. The possibility of a real change in the policies followed for at least the last four years is attenuated by the fact that this new cycle will develop under the hegemony of the social democratic PSOE party, which aspires to a "centrist" policy and with the left wing United Left (Izquierda Unida - IU) weakened electorally and socially. In these conditions it will be necessary to do a lot of work so that alternative policies and another left are possible.

The commotion provoked by the slaughter of more than two hundred people, the majority of them workers and young people, with among these many immigrants, created a new situation in which indignation and solidarity in reaction to the massacre were accompanied by doubts as to the perpetrators of such a terrible attack; doubts which grew in the face of the conscious manipulation of information by a government which sought at all costs to attribute responsibility to the Basque separatist group ETA, since this was the hypothesis that was most favourable to their electoral interests.

Not content with this, Aznar called on citizens to demonstrate "in defence of the Constitution" and "for the defeat of terrorism", hoping thus to channel solidarity with the victims into support for his own objectives. But in many of the demonstrations of Friday March 12 shouts of "Who did it?" and "No to

War" were taken up by the participants. The same was true on Saturday March 13, to the surprise of the party apparatuses, including that of the IU, as self-organized street protests before the offices of the PP gained in strength to the extent that the conviction grew that Al Qaeda was behind the massacre and the government had lied. The cry "The deaths are ours, the war is yours" was perhaps the one that best expressed the popular indignation.

Thus the PP's "anti-terrorism" ended up becoming a weapon against that party, reminding people of the opposition to the Iraq war and the lies about weapons of mass destruction told by Aznar and his friends Bush and Blair. The result was a remarkable increase in electoral participation, especially among youth, and the concentration of vote behind PSOE leader Zapatero, who had announced that he would only form a government if he obtained more votes than Rajoy, the candidate of the PP.

The political formation hardest hit by the pressure for a "useful vote" was the IU (whose parliamentary representation fell from nine to five deputies, two of these courtesy of its Catalan ally), already affected by an electoral system that meant that the third biggest electoral force (more than 1.2 million votes) had less representation than the Catalan nationalist forces of the right (Convergència i Unió) and left (ERC, Esquerra Republicana Catalana, which increased its representation from one to eight deputies) and the Basque Nationalist Party.



The rise of the ERC is undoubtedly significant and seems to express a vote of solidarity in reaction to the

attempts at criminalization of dialogue and Catalan nationalism (the ERC leader had opened a dialogue with ETA) than positive support for a still indefinite project. The seat gained by the Nafarroa Bai [1] coalition in Navarre is also significant, while in the Basque country Aralar-Zutik, [2] in spite of not obtaining parliamentary representation, obtained a good results that should make Batasuna (who called for abstention) think about its future in case ETA does not decide to declare an indefinite truce throughout the Spanish state.

A new stage has opened, then, in which the PSOE is the winner but without an absolute majority (it was 12 deputies short) and is forced to count on the support of other left and nationalist parties to pursue a new policy. Because it is obvious that most of those who voted for the PSOE are demanding and will demand a radical turn in relation to the policies followed by the PP for at least the last four years. They want an end to authoritarianism and the manipulation of the public media, an end to the alliance with Bush's strategy of "global and permanent war", the immediate withdrawal of the Spanish forces occupying Iraq, an end to the neoliberal offensive against basic public services and social rights, a commitment to recognizing the plurinational reality of the Spanish State and the opening of a dialogue leading to respect for Euskadi and Catalan self-determination, the defence of a socio-ecological conception of "security" against the xenophobic vision that predominates not only in the Spanish state but also in the EU and the West.

Neither the program nor the foreseeable composition of the new PSOE government nor, above all, the pressures of the Spanish, European and US "powers that be" indicate that Zapatero is going to fulfil those

expectations. For that reason it will be necessary to continue the social mobilization and the effort to build a “left of the left”. This latter task will necessitate a reorientation and self-reform of the IU (difficult, but not impossible). The recent mobilizations show us that there is enough “alternative social capital” to advance in this direction.

There is no doubt that the IU’s electoral results were affected by the pressure for a “useful vote” and the competition in some Autonomous Communities from other forces of the nationalistic left, although Ezker Batua’s [3] vote held up well and they almost won a seat. But many think that the type of discourse developed by the IU leadership, before and during the campaign and particularly in its final days, did not resist the tactics adopted by the PSOE leadership.

For a long time the IU has wished to appear as a force ready to govern with the PSOE not only at the municipal and autonomous community level but at the state level. The increasing inclination in this direction to appear as “trustworthy” in relation to a PSOE that did not hide its political moderation, especially in terms of fiscal and economic policy, had the following effects:

- lukewarm and depoliticized slogans
- a consciously ambiguous presentation of important aspects of the IU programme, such as the timid defence of pluri-nationality
- most particularly, the performance after the massacre of March 11, when IU leader Llamazares did not cast any

doubt on the government’s attribution of responsibility to ETA and supported their call for demonstrations, even on the Saturday when the hypothesis that Al Qaeda was responsible was already recognized. Many IU leaders disapproved of the protests before the PP offices, considering them a provocation.

In our view, the aspiration to be a complementary force to the PSOE predominated throughout the campaign, reinforcing an image of subordination. This could explain, at least partially, why some potential IU voters preferred to vote directly for the PSOE and not for an IU which was barely differentiated from it.

There were also other, more internal factors, primarily the progressive transformation of IU into a party with an increasingly weak internal political life, subordinated to electoral and institutional policy and with an increasingly autonomous leadership team that has acted and made decisions on many occasions without reference to the relevant bodies.

A refoundation of IU is needed so that it can play a role in the new political cycle, putting at the centre of its activity its reconstruction as an active and repoliticized organization at the service of the mobilization of citizens and in particular for the transformation of the “movement of movements” into a force which can bring about a left turn on the Spanish, European and global scale.

The first challenge that faces us, in addition to confronting the new stage while avoiding the stumbling blocks of tailism and sectarianism in relation to the new government, is to approach

the coming elections to the European Parliament without hiding the truth on the neoliberal and militaristic content of the draft European Constitution and expressing a full rejection of it, surpassing the ambiguities shown lately on the type of left that needs to be built not just in the Spanish state but also within the European framework.

Footnotes

[1] Nafarroa Bai is an electoral coalition formed in Navarre by the Partido Basque Nacionalista (PNV), Eusko Alkartasuna (EA), Aralar (a split from Batasuna) and Batzarre (an organization promoted by Zutik and independent sectors of social movements). The central subject of its campaign was the defence of a new relationship with Euskadi that would allow an advance towards some type of future convergence in a common framework of respectful coexistence of different identities.

[2] As already it has been indicated, Aralar is a split from Batasuna and Zutik is a product of the fusion of two old organizations of the radical left, the MC and the LCR.

[3] Ezker Batua-IU has tried to maintain its autonomy within the IU set and it is likely that it will try to reinforce it in the new stage; this could allow an approach to Aralar and Zutik that would undoubtedly help the process of reconstruction of a Basque radical left freed from political dependence on ETA.

Kyoto: climate of fear

5 April 2004, by Daniel Tanuro



Floods reach the upper Elbe,
August 2002

Even George W Bush does not dare to

argue the point: “There is a natural greenhouse effect that contributes to warming. Greenhouse gases trap heat, and thus warm the earth because they prevent a significant proportion of infrared radiation from escaping into space. Concentrations of greenhouse

gases, especially CO2, have increased substantially since the beginning of the industrial revolution. And the National Academy of Sciences indicate that the increase is due in large part to human activity.” [1] For two centuries, deforestation, industry and

transport have led to the accumulation in the atmosphere of gases that admit sunlight to the earth but prevent the earth's infrared rays from reaching space. The result is that, as in a greenhouse, the atmosphere heats up. Average temperatures increased by 0.6°C in the 20th century - a growth unprecedented for nearly 10,000 years - bringing about an increase in ocean levels of 10 to 25 cm. The process is accelerating and if nothing changes, the Inter-government Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts a global warming of between 1.4 and 5.8°C by 2100, leading to a rise in water levels of 9 to 88 cm. [2] Global warming caused by human activity has certainly begun, and it is irreversible. It affects not only the atmosphere, but also gigantic masses of oceanic waters; since the inertia of these latter is considerable, the process will make its effects felt for at least a thousand years.

The social, economic and environmental consequences are incalculable. Detailing them is not the aim of this article. Nonetheless, let us recall the strong words of John Houghton, former chief executive of the British Meteorological Office and co-president of the "Scientific Evaluation" Working Group of the IPCC: "Global warming is now a weapon of mass destruction. It kills more people than terrorism, yet Blair and Bush do nothing". [3] Humanity must try to bring about stabilization at a new point of equilibrium. It is in this context that the Kyoto Protocol - concluded in 1997 in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - signified the resolve of the developed countries to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases by 5.2% on average over the period 2008-2012, the year 1990 serving as a benchmark. The European Union set itself the objective of an 8% reduction. [4]

Six years after its negotiation in Japan, and in spite of its signature by 119 countries, the Protocol is stymied. In order to be applied, it should be ratified by 55 states accounting for more than 55% of emissions. However, the main world producer of greenhouse gases withdrew in 2001 - the USA refused to sign any agreement that did not impose

commitments on the big developing countries like China and India. Washington was also opposed to what it saw as a weakening of the competitiveness of a highly polluting US energy sector largely built on oil and coal. [5] In this context, ratification by Moscow became indispensable. [6] But Vladimir Putin used the situation to raise the stakes in relation to Europe and Japan, who were partisans of an agreement. Andrei Illarionov, the President's main economic adviser, declared recently that the Protocol went against Russia's national interests. [7] In this arm wrestling match, the key point is the price of a tonne of carbon. Depending on the latter, the gains that Russia and the Ukraine could make in selling their emission credits would vary between 20 and 170 billion dollars in five years. Indeed the price would be higher if the US signed the agreement, for it is that country that faces the most difficulty in conforming to Kyoto. [8] While a pure and simple abandonment is not to be ruled out, it is probable that Kyoto will survive this game of poker. But it will be a still more neutered Kyoto, since the Protocol is being undermined from the inside by forces which use Russia's reticence and US rejection as pretexts to reduce their demands, indeed to conceal their inability to meet them. [9]

What will be the future without the Protocol? Some experts are reassuring: "The treaty has already changed the world in small but significant ways that will be hard to reverse", says the "New York Times". "From Europe to Japan and the United States, just the prospect of the treaty has resulted in legislation and new government and industry policies curbing emissions." [10] This optimism is misplaced, for four reasons.

The limitations of the Protocol

First, whatever its neoliberal inspiration, Kyoto has the advantage of posing a double constraint: figures for objectives of reduction, and a timetable. These aspects are in the firing line of certain industrial lobbies

and their political spokespersons: "If global warming turns out to be a problem, which I doubt, it won't be solved by making ourselves poorer through energy rationing. It will be solved through building resiliency and capability into society and through long-term technological innovation and transformation" according to Myron Ebell, climatic specialist with the Competitive Enterprise Institute. Former assistant secretary of State and Kyoto specialist in the Clinton administration, David B. Sandalow, says, "The standard of success isn't whether the first treaty out of the box sails through. The standard is whether this puts the world on a path to solving a long-term problem. Other multilateral regimes dealing with huge complex problems, like the World Trade Organization, have taken 45 or 50 years to get established". [11]

Secondly, whether the Protocol is amended or abandoned, the measures taken will be much less than the initial objectives - and the latter were already completely insufficient. According to the IPCC, by 2050 emissions should be lowered not by 5.2% but by 60% in order that average warming does not exceed 2°C in relation to the pre-industrial era. As for the timetable, if it is true that climatic change is a very long-term process, it does not follow from that that humanity can wait 50 years in order for industry to adapt its capacity without reducing its profits. On the contrary, the more the measures are delayed and limited, the longer any return to a point of equilibrium will take, the higher this point of equilibrium will be and the more serious will be the consequences. [12] The climate constitutes what mathematicians call a "complex chaotic system" - limited changes can make it cross qualitative thresholds leading to rapid upheavals. [13]



The projections on temperature and water levels give an indication of urgency. The IPCC estimates that the former could climb from 1.4 to 5.8°C by 2100. On both sides of these planetary averages, there are - by definition - extremes. Above

Greenland, for example, warming is one to three times the world average. Even on the lowest prediction of the experts, it is then possible that this region would gain 2 to 3°C in 50-80 years. An increase of this magnitude would be enough to melt the Greenland icecap in a few centuries, which would lead to a rise in sea levels of 6 metres. [14]

Thirdly, the USA wants the big developing countries to carry a part of the climatic burden - a demand which appears unjust to the countries of the South. The figures speak for themselves: "To stabilize levels of greenhouse gases at a level twice those at the time of the industrial revolution, global emissions would have to be reduced from the current one tonne of carbon per person per year to an average of 0.4 tonnes", says Larry Lohman. "The US emits 13 times this amount per head, or 5.2 tonnes, and Japan and Western European nations five to twelve times this amount per head, or two to five tonnes. More than 50 Southern countries including India, by contrast, emit less than half the maximum level, or 0.2 tonnes per person". [15] Certainly, all countries should adopt a responsible attitude in relation to the climate. But it is in the developed world that it is necessary to start, unilaterally, while massive technological aid should be provided to the countries of the South. The US demand amounts to saying that the dominated nations should pay for the climatic changes of which their populations are the first victims; these changes have been caused above all by 200 years of capitalist development in the North, at the price of the pillage and non-development of the rest of the planet.

Fourthly, the small step taken at Kyoto implies perverse effects, often little known. These relate to two types of problematic, that of "carbon sinks", on the one hand, and the commodity logic of "flexible mechanisms" on the other. With or without the Protocol, these categories will play a growing role as alternatives to the "energy rationing" mentioned by Mr. Ebell. These questions should then be subjected to a broad public debate.

Carbon sinks

Culprit number one for the growth of the greenhouse effect is carbon dioxide gas, which plays a major role in the carbon cycle. Schematically, the process is as follows:

1. CO₂ is absorbed by green plants which, thanks to chlorophyll and sunlight, transform it into cellulose;
2. this transformation is known as photosynthesis;
3. the closing of the cycle takes place through respiration and the decomposition of dead organisms, which liberate the carbon contained in organic matter (in the form of CO₂ or methane).

However, there is carbon dioxide gas and carbon dioxide gas. The burning of heating oil, coal or natural gas brings new quantities of carbon into the cycle and as plants (and soils and oceans) cannot absorb it completely, a part of this carbon accumulates in the atmosphere (mainly in the form of CO₂), increasing the greenhouse effect. [16]

From the viewpoint of the struggle against climatic change, it is then vital to distinguish between two very different processes. On the one hand, reduction at source of emissions originating from the use of fossil fuels and on the other the reduction of the concentration of atmospheric CO₂ due to absorption by green plants (we speak in this case of the "capture" of carbon in "sinks"). The first aspect is strategically decisive. The IPCC tells us that it is practically certain that emissions of CO₂ due to the burning of fossil fuels will remain the determinant factor in the evolution of the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere during the 21st century. [17] Carbon sinks will only allow an attenuation of climatic change. [18]

However, this hierarchy between the "determinant factor" and the

"attenuating factors" is not found in the Kyoto Protocol. On the contrary, the Protocol amalgamates reduction of emissions and increase of absorptions, and invites the states to balance the two processes. [19] In other words, planting enough trees, or cultivating without tillage, would allow the burning of oil to continue. It is a short-term logic, whose perverse effect is obvious - the problem is put off to future generations, while continuing to get worse. It is also a wrong headed logic, because it is difficult to measure exactly the net quantity of CO₂ absorbed by the ecosystems, or to predict the evolution of this absorption in relation to global warming and the growing concentration of CO₂. [20]

The commodity logic of "flexible mechanisms"

Three different mechanisms are embodied in the Protocol - "joint implementation", "clean development" and "tradeable emission". All three have as their goal the lightening of the economic cost of the commitments made at Kyoto.

"Joint implementation" allows the developed countries that have signed the protocol to attain their objectives of reduction of emissions through common investment. In Europe, for example, companies from the West who make investments in the East to increase energy efficiency can make proportional adaptations to their own emission levels. It is enough for them to "prove" that emissions would have been more significant if the investment had not been made. In this respect, the substitution of natural gas for coal as the source of electricity production opens vast possibilities to foreign companies and governments. Research consultancies are specializing in the identification of these opportunities. Thus the Norwegian group Point Carbon puts Romania at the top of its hit parade - no country is better placed to welcome joint implementation projects, it chortles. [21] The perverse effect is that these investments in the East (which would have taken place anyway, in the context of the buying

up of the “New Europe” by western capital) allow the big industrial groups in the West to drag their feet on more complicated and costly modern installations and technological adaptations which are indispensable to the struggle against the greenhouse effect.



Greenpeace demonstration

The “clean development mechanism” allows a developed state to make an investment in a country in the South that reduces emissions (or increases absorptions), and to correspondingly adapt its own levels of emission. In this framework, the EU is multiplying its efforts to sell clean technologies to the countries of the South. Better still, some polluting enterprises buy land in the Third World, plant rapid growth trees and thus acquire carbon credit corresponding to the CO₂ that they create by burning fossil fuels in the North. Inside the EU, Holland is the champion of this neo-colonial practice, followed by Finland, Austria and Sweden. [22] But US big business is not far behind and, with or without Kyoto, companies are conscious of the ineluctability of measures against climatic change. They want to position themselves for future climate negotiations, to take their share of the market and improve their brand image among consumers. In this respect, what better than to participate in projects of reforestation in the Third World? It suffices to hide the negative effects, which are numerous - these “industrial plantations of trees” (they are not “forests”!) accelerate the rural exodus and the decline of food-producing cultures, accentuating dependence on exports and re-colonization, and damaging ecosystems and biodiversity (see box on the Plantar project in Brazil). And do not forget that the “clean development mechanism” does not reduce pollution in the North - on the contrary, it allows it to continue, with its attendant consequences for health and the environment.

The spectre of air privatization

Tradeable emissions are the cornerstone of the “flexible mechanisms”. Each signatory country is given emission quotas. The developed states divide up these quotas among the companies established on their territory. Those which remain below their objective can sell “rights to pollute” to others. Whether Kyoto is ratified or not, all the big polluting companies are involved in these exchanges - in the US credits are sold on the Chicago Climate Exchange. [23] According to some economists, at the price of \$14 per tonnes of carbon, the “emission rights” created in the framework of Kyoto would lead to a carbon trade corresponding to the abstract creation of 2,345 billion dollars, or the biggest creation of monetary capital through an international treaty in history. [24] A system of exchange has already been set up inside the EU, whereby from 2005 onwards “clean” enterprises, can sell their pollution credits to “dirty” companies (5,000 big companies are already involved at the first stage). Here also, as in the case of “joint implementation” the East constitutes a veritable reservoir of carbon. Big consumers of energy before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the economies of the former “Soviet bloc” subsequently collapsed. Owing to the reference date for their objectives within the framework of Kyoto, these countries dispose of “carbon credits” that other signatories can acquire, thus avoiding reductions in their own emissions.

From the viewpoint of the market economy it is not absurd to manage the reduction of the production of greenhouse gases in this way. The system of emission rights has functioned in the USA to reduce the rates of SO₂ in the air, and thus acid rain. The ecological efficacy of the system depends on political will, which is expressed in the establishment of quotas and the rhythm of their decline. However, recourse to this kind of mechanism requires a broad debate within society, for the commodification of the emission rights could take humanity

towards an outcome which is at first blush unthinkable: the privatization of the air. Some argue that “selling the wind” is and will remain impossible. But doesn’t buying the “right to pollute” affirm ownership over the thing polluted? In the precise case of carbon dioxide gas, the question is not absurd given that, once discharged in the atmosphere, [25] CO₂ is indissociable from the other components of air - nitrogen, oxygen and so on. To be the owner of millions of tonnes of “waste CO₂” is certainly equivalent to being the “owner” of polluted atmospheric masses. Certainly, air cannot be materially enclosed. However, its legal enclosure is perfectly possible. The countries of the North and their companies that are awarded emission quotas will be inclined to consider these as semi-permanent ownership rights. The dividing up of these rights, the result of 200 years of imperialist development, will tend to be considered as the “natural” proportion of shares of the atmosphere attributed to different countries and groups of countries. In the developed countries, legal arrangements could rapidly be imposed on citizens to make them pay for the “services” of the atmosphere or, at least, for the cost of its depollution. The maintenance of these services will be entrusted to the private sector and, in the name of the environment, the true cost will be imposed on consumers (as in the water sector), while the companies will benefit from competitive prices. As for the countries of the South, they would be victims of a kind of “climatic neo-colonialism”. If they wish to increase their emission quotas, they will be accused of irresponsibility; to develop, they will be forced to buy clean technologies from Northern companies. Moreover, they will be confronted with the fact that these companies, thanks to the Clean Development Mechanism, will have snapped up the “carbon sinks” and other cost-effective means of compensating for their emissions. [26]

Sorcerers’ apprentices



Progress towards ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, as of 1 January 2003

If the negotiations around the Kyoto Protocol are so arduous, it is because everyone knows henceforth that climatic changes are a reality that will necessitate very considerable adaptations. Such measures will interfere in the US-EU-Japan relationship of forces, to the point that climatic change becomes a major geo-strategic issue. The neoliberal offensive around “flexible mechanisms” and “sinks” takes place in this context. Its function is of course to weaken and indeed head off an indispensable and urgent reduction in the source of emissions of greenhouse gases, with the goal of protecting the rate of profit of the big companies. But the offensive also seeks, more broadly, to make the struggle against climatic change a profitable business (see below), an instrument of domination of the South and a new frontier in the capitalist drive to appropriate natural resources.

We have to note that this offensive is gaining ground and at the Conferences of Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention discussions on “flexible mechanisms” increasingly take precedence over the reduction in emissions originating from the use of fossil carbon. At the COP-9 in Milan in December 2003 amendments presented by Norway, seeking to ban monocultures and GMOs, were rejected. While climatic change becomes increasingly palpable and menacing, the crazy logic of capitalist accumulation draws humanity more and more towards a major catastrophe.

The market in non-polluting forms of

energy is a theatre of ferocious economic competition. This clarifies the role of the main protagonists in the climatic negotiations, the US and the EU

Deprived of significant sources of oil and cheap natural gas, confronted with US domination of the Middle East and traumatized by Chernobyl, the EU is developing an energy policy based on the diversification of supplies, growing energy efficiency and the development of renewable energies. Currently, 6% of the energy used in the EU comes from renewable sources, [27] and the objective is to reach 12% in 2010. [28]

Indeed, such a strategy necessitates big public investments, in the form of aid for research, economic incentives and public sector orders, the goal being to support companies in the initial stage.

Given globalization and the opening up of new markets, these efforts are only sustainable if the relative prices of energy originating from renewable sources become competitive in relation to those of energy produced from fossil fuels, if use of the latter is restrained, and if a world market in “clean” technologies is opened (the three conditions being linked). Kyoto involves a response at different levels. With the Kyoto protocol in place, the world market in clean technologies should prosper, according to a document of the Commission. [29] The stakes are significant. The world market in the eco-industry is estimated at 550 billion euros. The experts count on its enlargement in the five coming years, above all in the emergent countries, with growth rates of 5 to 8%. [30]

The EU is well placed to play an important role. Its companies are in world leading positions in the sector of renewable energies, notably in the construction of windmills (75% of the planet’s current capacity). It is easy to understand why the EU, far from being shaken by the clash with the US during the negotiations at the Hague in November 2000, held out until the agreements of Marrakech and Kyoto, then launched a “Coalition for Renewable Energy” - “the OPEC of Renewables”, according to the Commissioner for the Environment - which now involves eighty countries.

The US approach is less monolithic than the European press has tended to imply. The powerful environmentalist lobby has some influence on the Republican Party, to the extent that the adoption of norms for emissions of greenhouse gases figured in Bush’s electoral programme in 2000! [31] More fundamentally, the world of business is divided. “The prospect of other countries moving ahead with limits on greenhouse gases while the US sticks its head in the sand worries many American companies. With the evidence that human activities are causing global warming getting ever more convincing, emissions curbs in many countries are inevitable, execs believe”

“Economies will have to adjust to that,” says Tom Jacob, manager for international and industry affairs at DuPont. “It would be a mistake if the US economy is insulated from those pressures. When the reality comes, the US will have a bigger game of catch-up—and our competitors will be ahead of us in developing and using climate-friendly technologies.” [32] On either side of the Atlantic, then, ecological concerns do not weigh too heavily on the “climatic” strategies which are being followed.

The Plantar project [33] in

Minas Gerais (Brazil) is a good example of the ravages of the kind of “reforestation” carried out in the framework of Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM).

Developed under the auspices of the World Bank, Plantar is an industrial plantation of eucalyptus in monoculture (23,100 hectares) destined for the production of charcoal for the steel industry. It is also the first “carbon sinks” project to seek to register with the CDM Executive Board, the international body which is responsible in this area.

According to the documentation provided by Plantar, the project will allow the production of 3.8 million tonnes of steel products in 21 years as well as the creation of 3,000 jobs. But Plantar has met violent opposition, for social reasons (low wages, insecure jobs) and ecological reasons (massive use of the herbicide glyphosate, exhaustion and contamination of water resources, killing of fish, significant reduction of biodiversity).

Eucalyptus grows very quickly, and Plantar has committed itself to maintaining its “carbon sinks” for 42 years. If the status of CDM is accorded to it, the enterprise will serve as “compensation” for the emission into the atmosphere of millions of tonnes of CO₂ which will certainly not disappear as quickly as the trees.

Through the Prototype Carbon Fund of the World Bank, Plantar benefits from the support of three European governments (Sweden, Holland and Finland), Gaz de France and the Belgian company Electrabel.

Footnotes

[1] Concentrations of CO₂, CH₄ (methane) and N₂O (nitrous oxide), three of the main greenhouse gases, have increased respectively by 30%, 145% and 15% from 1750.

[2] The IPCC was set up in 1988 by the UN Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization. Its scientific analyses have authority. See the history by Nicolas Chevassus-au-Louis, “La Recherche”, number 370, December 2003.

[3] “The Guardian”, July 28, 2003. The parallel with terrorism has been taken up by David King, scientific adviser to Tony Blair.

[4] “Developing” countries have no objectives within the framework of the first period 2008-2012.

[5] Around 50% of US electricity power stations are fuelled by coal, and four fifths of the generation capacity that the country will need in 2010 was already installed in 2000.

[6] The US and Russia occupy first and fourth place respectively in the league table of countries responsible for emissions of greenhouse gases. The US, with 5% of the world population, uses 25 % of the world’s energy resources.

[7] “New York Times”, December 3, 2003.

[8] See David Victor, “The collapse of the Kyoto protocol and the struggle to slow global warming” Princeton University Press, 2001.

[9] Inside the EU the policies followed by the member states will lead to a reduction of emissions in Europe by 0.5% in 2010 in relation to 1990. Taking into account measures planned but not yet applied, the reduction will be at most 7.2 % and more probably

5.1% (EEA, “Greenhouse gas emission trends and projections in Europe” 2003. “Environment Issue Report 36”).

[10] “New York Times”, December 4, 2003.

[11] Idem.

[12] IPCC, Third evaluation report, report of Working Group I, technical summary.

[13] The Sahara is undoubtedly the result of a crossing of the threshold of this kind. We know now that its formation 5,000 years ago took only a few centuries.

[14] Even without massive melting ocean levels are rising because of expansion of water masses. According to the IPCC’s third assessment report, several tens of millions of people will be displaced by 2100. With a rise of one metre, nearly 25% of the population of Vietnam would have to be evacuated. The melting of the Arctic ice has begun. Melting in the Antarctic does not seem significant - happily, because the disappearance of the Southern icecap would raise sea levels by around 63 metres!

[15] Larry Lohman, “[Democracy or Carbocracy? Intellectual corruption and the future of the climate debate](#)”. Corner House Briefing number 24.

[16] In addition to fossil fuels, permanently frozen areas of land are big reservoirs of carbon that are at the moment removed from the cycle. This carbon could be freed if there was a defreezing, which is an example of the kind of “retrospective effect” possible in the climatic system.

[17] Third evaluation report, report of Working Group I, technical summary, pp. 60-61.

[18] Third evaluation report, report of Working Group III, technical summary, p. 40. This

rate would only be reached if all the surfaces deforested for two centuries were reforested by 2100, which is very unlikely.

[19] Kyoto Protocol, article 3, ¶3.

[20] Some studies indicate that the “sinks” could be transformed into “sources”. In the tropical forests, for example, the increase in the rate of CO₂ would favour the proliferation of creepers in such quantity that the weakened ecosystem would emit CO₂ instead of capturing it.

[21] “Financial Times”, June 25, 2003.

[22] “Greenhouse gas emission trends and projections in Europe 2003”. EEA, “Environment Issue Report” 36.

[23] “VOA News”, October 22, 2003.

[24] David Victor, “The collapse of the Kyoto Protocol and the Struggle to Slow Global Warming”, Princeton University Press, 2001.

[25] Rather than reducing emissions, some technocrats are trying to perfect systems for deep burial of CO₂. Read “Putting Carbon in its Place”, “Business Week”, October 29, 2003.

[26] This perverse effect of the CDM on the possibilities of development of the countries of the South is called the “low hanging fruits” effect.

[27] The proportion in the USA is only 2%.

[28] Eurostat and COM (2002) 162 final. “Décision du Parlement et du Conseil: Une énergie intelligente pour l’Europe”.

[29] See [Commission document](#).

[30] Analysis of the EU ecoindustries, their employment and export potential: [Commission document](#).

[31] “Global Warming: Bush’s Double Blunder”. “Business Week”, April 9, 2001.

[32] “Global Warming: Has Bush on the Hot Seat”. “Business Week”, op. cit.

[33] An in-depth analysis of Plantar can be found on the website of FERN at www.fern.org.

Return of the right

5 April 2004, by [Andreas Sartzekis](#)



The New Democracy (ND) increased the gap, with around 45.4% of the votes and 165 seats (42.7% in 2000), but this was far from the right wing landslide predicted by some. Moreover, the reasonably respectable score of the far right (2.2% for the bunch of fascists and nostalgics known as LAOS) remains sufficiently low to show that the ND has continued to attract a whole section of the far right, from royalists to orthodox fundamentalists symbolised by the figure of Papathemelis, a nationalist leader of PASOK who went over to the ND on the eve of the elections. The coexistence in the ND of such sectors with the ultra neoliberals has allowed a clear electoral victory, but that could pose problems in everyday management and we can see this already with the balance of the new government.

It has to be generally noted that eight years of the Simitis government have

changed the face of Greece. It should be stressed that the modernization of public transport, the development of road structures, the construction of new hospitals and schools, the new school and hospital buildings, the establishment of services to help the public cope with what remains an administrative jungle, all help to explain the relative resilience of PASOK’s vote. But this modernization, carried out in the framework of an economy increasingly subjected to neoliberal laws, has had a heavy cost for the masses, with unemployment (around 10%) and price increases (some everyday products are as expensive or more than in the other countries, while wages are much lower). Poverty is spreading, as shown by the number of homeless people on the streets of Athens and 23% of the population is at or near to the poverty threshold. The Olympic Games are to be held in Athens this year; this is reflected in a policy of big public works, but also by overspending at the rate of double or triple the initial budget. This will reinforce

pauperization, on the basis of a growing racism. It is this social situation, more than the anger against the PASOK bureaucracy, which explains the defeat. For more than a year, the polls indicated a difference of 7 to 8% in favour of the ND, and since autumn, with the announcement of pre-electoral measures, notably favouring peasants, the gap has been reduced a little.

Another factor explains the proportions of the defeat. With Kostas Simitis, the populist dimension of the PASOK of Andreas Papandreou has been replaced by a discourse and technocratic project conforming to that of European social democracy. PASOK’s governmental image is nearly the same as that of the right, and that is clear from the electoral programmes of PASOK and the ND. But a supplementary step was crossed at the beginning of 2004, with the minister of foreign affairs, Georges Papandreou - son of Andreas - becoming PASOK’s official candidate. Many saw this as a desperate gesture intended to reverse the prevailing

winds and hang on to the privileges of power. In fact, the operation was to some degree successful, the gap being reduced to 2% at 2 weeks before the elections, and we saw Papandreou multiply his promises (such as free transport for the unemployed!). But the real reason seems more profound; the project seems rather to have been to reduce the gap to the maximum, and to build on this relative victory to reorganise PASOK as a catch-all party enjoying more autonomy in relation to its base: PASOK would become the pole of a 'Democratic Regroupment' with some right wing allies (two leaders of the ultra neoliberal right) and others coming from the left (Maria Damanaki, recent leader of Synaspismos). All this has been orchestrated in spectacular fashion. The election for the presidency of PASOK involved a referendum open to sympathisers, in which one million voters participated, although Georges Papandreou was the only candidate!

In fact PASOK's evolution towards an American-style party and the overtures to leaders of the right led to disquiet among the rank and file which was visible at the Athens rally on March 5, where Papandreou's banalities were politely applauded, but without the militant enthusiasm evoked by some of the media. It may be that the disaffection of a part of the PASOK electorate is also linked to this project of neutralization of the historic PASOK. Also, the final scale of the defeat on the evening of March 7, which constitutes a relative setback for Papandreou, will render this project more difficult and it will be a factor in tensions and perhaps of crises inside PASOK, above all if social struggles develop. There could have been grounds for hope if there had been a large transfer of votes to the left of PASOK, towards the left reformist or indeed the radical lists. Instead, at the national level, it is the right which has benefited. That cannot be explained only by the integral support of the Greek employers for ND. More decisive, but also more serious after 20 years of PASOK government (1981-89, then 1993-2004) was the almost complete incapacity of the forces to the left of PASOK to offer credible responses.

The Greek left (reformist and

revolutionary) has for a long time been marked by a sectarianism which should be inconceivable in this new millennium, and this sectarianism explains to a great degree the inability to win over the workers influenced by PASOK during the past 20 years. Worse: the dominant vision is that PASOK and the right are the same thing, and that Greek society is profoundly rightist! So, with almost 9 voters out of 10 voting for the right, there is nothing more comfortable than to retreat into one's own little world. To listen to some, the striking fact of these elections would be the increase of 0.4% in the vote of the KKE (the Greek Communist Party) or the 0.15% won by the KKE-ML instead of the 0.11% in 2000, or again the stagnation at 3% of Synaspismos.

The results clearly show 3 things:

1. Over the period from 1981 to 2004, the resilience of PASOK which, except in 1990 (38.6%), has always won more than 40% of the votes. Add to that the continuing strength of its trade union current, which in spring 2001 led the secretary of the GSEE (Confederation of Workers of Greece) to lead a big mobilisation in defence of pensions against the government of his party, and the fact that young people (those aged 18-35) voted in their majority for PASOK at these elections; it is clear that this party despite all, retains the confidence of the majority of workers.
2. It is then necessary to stress that it is the left, all tendencies together, which remains in the majority in Greece, with nearly 52% of the votes! And PASOK has only

itself to blame if the right won a big victory in terms of seats; its rejection of proportional representation has rebounded against it, but that should not stop a popularization of these figures, all the more so in that nearly one in three ND voters said they had voted thus not for the party's ideas but to punish PASOK. However, the popularization of the fact that the right is in the minority will involve a tough political battle!

3. We should be clear, with all the nuances that this demands, that the overall result is that of a setback for the left of PASOK, and this setback reflects numerous years of inability to build the least idea of alternative. The KKE, despite a good campaign, only won 5.9% of the vote (5.6% in 1996, 5.5% in 2000), with significant progress in the working class suburbs. This party remains perceived as being faithful to the Stalinist, sectarian past (it proposes unity to the left of PASOK... without Synaspismos and DIKKI, which won 1.8%), and has deeply nationalist tendencies (the only alliance that it practices is with nationalist individuals, like the deputy L. Kaneli in Athens!). The far left presented at least 5 lists and won around 0.5% of the vote (between 35,000

and 40,000 votes). The risk is then great that each will continue as before, building their different fronts instead of working in unity.



What remains is to consider the case of Synaspismos or rather the Synaspismoses (coalition), given that this party has succeeded in drawing in its wake a part of the radical left. Initially, the Synaspismos of 1989 united the Stalinist and critical left against PASOK scoring 13% of the vote (the founding act of Synaspismos was a government with the right to kick PASOK out of power. This still has an impact since none of the two wings of this government has drawn any serious balance sheet!). After 1990 (10.2%), there was a split between the KKE and the critical left, heir of the Eurocommunism of the 1970s. After winning 2.9% in 1993, then 5.1% in 1996, it scored 3.2% in 2000 and 3.26% this year. The end result this year was the formation of an electoral regroupment, with its proclaimed objective being to open perspectives on the left. It is self-evident that this process, even if it was contemptuously rejected by the sectarian groups, has interested OKDE-Spartakos, Greek section of the Fourth International. Even if we are far from sharing the uncritical vision of the leftwards evolution of Synaspismos of our friend and comrade Georges Mitralias, the possibility of an electoral regroupment, even with a reformist force like the rest of Synaspismos, could be a significant moment forward for the radical left. That depends on the conditions but what appeared to be the case and what has been subsequently confirmed is that the weight of the radical left was insufficient to change either the logic of the apparatuses whose main

concern was parliamentary survival or the traditional perception of Synaspismos.

The Synaspismos apparatus has kept control over this operation from the beginning. This began with the name of the regroupment; the Coalition of Left and Progress became the Coalition of the Radical Left, though for everybody it remained Synaspismos, even if its acronym became SYRIZA. Moreover, the media focus remained centred on the reformist leader Nikos Konstantopoulos, and it was impossible for the workers and youth to know that the list included radical forces. Such conditions led KOE, one of the two revolutionary groups involved, to leave the regroupment, while still giving it critical support, while veteran militant Manolis Glezos was critical of the attitudes of hegemonism of some elements. But the most serious question is the dominant discourse of the regroupment; whereas an appeal to mobilization around anti-capitalist demands might have been expected, the anti-neoliberal tone remained very vague with the accent on condemnation of bipartyism and governability. The result of all this was not the 5% minimum which might have been expected, but a struggle to reach the 3% necessary for the electoral survival of the parliamentary group. It seems that half of the 240,000 Synaspismos voters (up by 21,000 in relation to 2000) are new (the former half having gone to the right or to PASOK) and came from PASOK, or the radical and even anarchist left! If such was the case, it is a positive point, even if the electoral rallies do not seem to have attracted the crowds (in Athens, it was of the same order as in 2000). On the contrary, the geography of the votes shows worrying limitations. The strongest progress (between + 0.50% and 1.3%) was in Athens (6.3%, a gain of 0.5%, concentrated in areas populated by students and tertiary

workers), Phocide and in Messenia, a right wing region. However, SYRIZA lost votes in the big working class suburb of Piraeus, which remains the most significant working class concentration in Greece (4%, a loss of 0.5%). Beyond that, none of the six deputies chosen by the electors of SYRIZA belongs to the radical current. Given the paucity of this revolt, it would perhaps have been worth the trouble to fight a prior battle for a regroupment of revolutionaries, which would have been able then to discuss an alliance with Synaspismos to form a radical left bloc. To the best of its abilities, OKDE tried to do this, although in Greece it is still the case that this is less easy than top-level discussions with Synaspismos!

Drawing a balance sheet with the forces of SYRIZA is all the more necessary in that we work with them inside the Greek Social Forum and it is important to revive a structure which has been unhappily put to sleep in a period where it could have played a significant role and grown. Hard battles are ahead, against privatization, the many concessions being made to the bosses, for social security and pensions, without forgetting the context of the Olympic Games (work accidents, strengthening of the police). We need to battle for unity in action of the left (taking into account PASOK activists) and the unions (with perhaps a battle for the preservation of trade union unity, faced with the risk of a split by the KKE in the GSEE). If the Greek Social Forum is to serve as pole for proposals for unitary action, it should not be instrumentalized nor replace the development of the debate which has begun on the formation of an anti-capitalist left, a debate which will only advance insofar as it includes henceforth the greatest number of revolutionary forces, with the perspectives of an action programme. The European elections could be the occasion to prepare, finally, a radical pole, in the light of the experience of the parliamentary elections.

Common action and anti-capitalist recomposition

5 April 2004, by [Panagiotis Sifogiorgakis](#)



The GSF was in the forefront of the movement against the imperialist war in Iraq, which was particularly large in Greece. It also played a decisive role in the mobilizations organized during the six months of the Greek presidency of the European Union. The GSF constitutes the most representative attempt at unity in recent years inside the Greek social movement: however, the traditions of the Greek left are far from being overcome. The Greek Communist Party (KKE) and most of the forces of the far left have refused to participate in the GSF and have chosen various other forms of intervention in the anti-globalization movement. But overall it certainly seems that the experience of these mobilizations, above all through that of the GSF, has created a dynamic that is greater by far than the credibility of the left parties and organizations. It's also true in Greece as elsewhere that there is considerable mistrust of the traditional left organizations and that workers and youth are seeking new forms of collective action.

Nevertheless, if one is to believe the predictions, they will not vote left in order to express their condemnation of the social liberal policy of the PASOK government. It seems rather that the votes lost by PASOK will go to the right. Thus, after a decade of attacks on the working class by social democracy, which have dissipated the illusion held by the social layers which supported PASOK, the left is not only incapable of capitalising on a part of the social despair, it is even being put under pressure by social democracy! And this in a period of relative progression of mobilizations.

Forces on the Greek left

Let's attempt a brief summary of the forces on the Greek left.

The KKE is undoubtedly the biggest mass pole. The party recruits, its members are active and it has refounded a youth organization following its serious crisis in this area in the 1990s. It is implanted in sectors of the working class. Its principal asset is that it presents itself as a party opposed to compromise and the dominant political system. It has clear and firm positions on imperialism, the European Union and NATO. In its discourse, it refers to the class struggle. Our criticism of the KKE is that it is sectarian, that it divides the mass movement with nationalist positions. Its monolithic leadership smothers any internal dispute. But to best understand what the KKE represents in Greek society, it should be understood that it is generally seen as a party of the past, sidelined for ever, a representative of the era of "socialism in one country" and the bureaucratic regimes of eastern Europe. Moreover, the KKE appears as an autarkic body. Nothing shows this more than the recent statement by its leadership claiming that the KKE is well protected from the influence on the left of the candidacy of Giorgos Papandreou because its forces are "entrenched"!

Only a little while ago, Synaspismos had the profile of a moderate left, which favoured the EU and centre-left governmental coalitions. It had adopted the same phraseology as the social democratic leadership, for whom the notion of "modernization" is a key element. Presenting itself as an open and democratic party, it can appear as an alternative to those who reject the KKE. At the same time, however, although there was within it an anti-neoliberal wing originating to

a large degree from the KKE, it offered no class-based theory and did not succeed in recruiting a mass activist base. Above all, it was seen as a force complementary to social democracy. However, this party has become conscious of the significance of the anti-globalization movement and quickly became active in its initiatives and its construction, which substantially strengthened the anti-neoliberal wing and led to a break with the known cadres of its right wing. Certainly, this evolution was positive, but that does not mean that Synaspismos has become an anti-capitalist party:

- While an anti-capitalist dynamic is widespread at a rank and file level, no distinguishable current organizes this in terms of theses, platform or orientation;
- Unlike the KKE, it is not a party with a militant base intervening in workers' struggles;
- The participation of Synaspismos in the GSF did not prevent it collaborating with PASOK in several areas during the last regional elections;
- Synaspismos participates fully in the Party of the European Left (with the PCF and other CPs);
- The fundamental concern of the apparatus is the electoral survival of the party.

Its electoral mobility can be explained by the fact that its electoral alliances are occasional, founded on practical sense. Its electoral appeal is the result of a compromise established to win electoral support from the forces of the far left which have cooperated with it in the foundation of the GSF, with the objective of reaching the threshold of 3% necessary to gain representation in Parliament.

Dispersal of the far left

The far left represents a real and combative force in Greece, but it is organizationally very fragmented and not credible electorally. At the elections on March 7, 2004 two far left lists were presented.

The first was that of the Radical Left Front, in which the main force was the NAR (New Left Current, originating from a split in the Communist Youth in the early 1990s). This list has no electoral dynamic and this results from the sectarian conception of the organizations that constitute it. The list did not even succeed in grouping the organized far left forces which work with the NAR in the anti-globalization movement inside Fighting Initiative, a regroupment which claims to be to the left of the GSF and which had a successful profile at the mobilizations against the European summit in Thessalonica in June 2003.

A second list was organized by the Anti-Capitalist Alliance, a front for the SEK (Socialist Workers' Organization, sister group of the British SWP). Like the NAR among the biggest organisations on the far left, the SEK has organized successive regroupments which are merely extensions around it and which have nothing to do with unitary efforts at regroupment like the GSF. This Alliance is one such regroupment, invented for the elections and

representing nobody other than the SEK.

Finally, another small part of the extra-parliamentary left cooperated with Synaspismos at these elections. The description given by comrade François Vercammen in IV 356 is only a partial account. [1] Because in comparison with the last elections, the only addition to the Synaspismos alliance is a group of cadres expelled from the KKE as well as the DEA (Workers' Internationalist Left, a recent split from the SEK). The KOE (of Maoist origin), the biggest of the extra-parliamentary left organizations inside the GSF, finally decided not to participate. Thus, it is inexact to say that the electoral regroupment around Synaspismos constitutes something new and promising. This initiative corresponds more to the hopes for a common left action that have developed during recent mobilizations. And the alliance also includes forces that have successfully cooperated inside the GSF with OKDE-Spartakos, the Greek section of the Fourth International. But whatever, the electoral alliance around Synaspismos has not expressed the social dynamic that the GSF represents.

The indispensable anti-capitalist regroupment

For our part, we work then for the formation of a force "to the left of the

left", politically independent of social liberal social democracy. What seems to us indispensable is that a credible alternative to the left of Synaspismos is built. It is this that would allow us to influence its base in the case (the most probable in our view, if we look at the path of the "left turn" of the PRC in Italy) of the emergence of a plural left "Greek style". In this perspective what is indispensable is a process of recomposition of the anti-capitalist left which breaks down the barriers separating the biggest forces of the Greek far left.

On this front, there is some work to do. For example, the DEA wants neither a broad party of the left (of the PRC type, an enlarged Synaspismos), nor unity with the main organizations of the anti-capitalist left. Its action consists of propaganda at the base of Synaspismos for its own separate organizational construction. What we need to build, through a patient process of convergence and recomposition, is quite simply a new left, anti-capitalist, pluralist, feminist, ecologist, at the side of the workers' struggles and the radical combats of youth. And our current role is to constitute a "bridge" between the main forces of the anti-capitalist left.

This article has been collectively discussed inside OKDE-Spartakos.

Footnotes

[1] See François Vercammen, "Preparing for Battle", IV 356, February 2004.