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In support of the re-election of Chavez

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It will also be the occasion to demonstrate that, in spite of the limits of the government's action in favour of the workers and the poorest sectors in Venezuela, in spite of a state structure originating in bourgeois democracy, Hugo Chavez is a decisive support for the victory of the Venezuelan revolutionary process.

1. Defeat the imperialist Right

Governor of Zulia, the province with the biggest reserves of oil, close to separatist circles, anointed by all the forces of the Venezuelan Right and by the U.S. State Department, Manuel Rosales is the candidate of a Right that wants to undo everything that the revolutionary process has achieved since 1998. The democratic gains that Venezuelans have won through their struggles since 1989 - including the defeat of the coup d'état in 2002, the lock-out in the winter of 2002-2003, the many attempts at armed and economic destabilisation - would immediately be endangered in order to return to a state that would be strictly in the service of the rich.

We are not always in agreement with Hugo Chavez concerning his choices in international policy, which sometimes mix up diplomacy and internationalism. That goes for the unqualified approval that he has given to the Belarusian and Iranian governments and to the Chinese Communist Party. Provoking the

United States administration does not imply qualifying as progressive governments which conduct anti-people policies, even in the framework of an international policy which is linked to Venezuela's position as an oil producer.

However, these disagreements should not hide our support for many of the positions adopted by the Venezuelan government, which is carrying out policies that make no concessions to the United States. Its opposition to successive imperialist wars, the recall of its ambassador to Israel in protest at the war in Lebanon, its condemnation of the armed intervention military in Haiti, its unambiguous condemnation of Tony Blair's policies in the Middle East, its open support of the Latin American Left, its active diplomacy in Africa (Venezuela has become, with Cuba, the Latin American country that is most present on the African continent) and in the Middle East, have made Chavez one of the foremost figures of the anti-imperialist struggle.

A large victory for Chavez would be a call to struggle on the whole continent. It would be a further proof that it is possible, even for the President of a country, to maintain intransigent positions.

2. Towards a socialist Venezuela, act in favour of self-organisation, break with the capitalist model

In Venezuela, the situation remains marked by a revolutionary process. A battle is under way between two currents. On the one hand there are those who consider that most of what needed to be done has been done, and that now it is necessary to conduct current affairs in the best way possible for the people, but in the framework of really existing world capitalism, and to find Venezuela's place there. On the other hand there are the partisans of a speeding up, of a deepening of the process, often backed by Chavez himself and probably in a majority in the country, who consider that the democratic and social conquests are only just a first step towards the proclaimed objective, which is "the socialism of the 21st century", expressed by the UNT trade union confederation as "a socialism without bureaucrats, bosses or landowners".

The workers organised in the workplaces are playing a more and more important role in the Venezuelan process, joining up with the vanguard which has organised itself in the poor neighbourhoods to resist the police and the Right, to win improvements in its living conditions, and even to directly run the neighbourhoods.

The rebellion against the bureaucrats who are incrustated in the state apparatus, whether they come from the former state apparatus or originate within the "Bolivarian" bloc

which holds power, is coming up against a series of obstacles, but it is moving forward, in the trade union movement, in peasant communities, in poor neighbourhoods and even in the electoral battles. It is an essential element of the forward march of the Bolivarian process.

The struggles for land, the broader and broader mobilisations of the poorest sectors of the population for new and better public services, for health, education and water; the aspiration to bring power as close as possible to the people, demonstrates the depth of the revolutionary process and the continuing readiness of the Venezuelan people to mobilise.

The most militant sectors grouped around the National Union of Workers (UNT), the Ezequiel Zamora Front (the peasant confederation), the National Association of Free and Associated Community Media or political forces such as the Partido Revolucion y Socialismo (PRS), the Proyecto Nuestra America, or the student association Utopia, as well as the thousands of militants who are not collectively organised but who are essential to the process of self-organisation, have been saying it for years: in order to liberate all energies, for the revolution to continue, for it to definitively take power, it is necessary to attack the political structures of the country, to bring down the state apparatus that constantly reproduces bureaucracy, corruption and clientelism, it is necessary to take on the big landowners, the banks, the

steel industry, open the national debate that the workers in the oil industry are waiting for, on the running of their company, PDVSA, and put it under co-management with the workers.

This is the meaning of our support for these political forces and our commitment to get their struggles known and supported in our own countries, because only these struggles and ours will make it possible to move forward towards the building of a society freed from capitalism.

Once Chavez is re-elected, the workers and the poor of Venezuela will have to conduct new struggles. Every victory of the Venezuelan people will be a beacon of hope for the struggles of the workers and the peoples of the whole world.

3. What political organisation in the service of the Bolivarian Revolution?

The image of the party form of organisation has been seriously damaged by 50 years of clientelism, corruption and loyal management of the affairs of the pro-imperialist bourgeoisie. However, after 8 years of the process, the question is today sharply posed: what party has to be organised, and in what form, in order to deepen the Bolivarian Revolution?

We support all the attempts at creating a political organisation which

would enable the radicalised sectors mentioned above to come together. The alliance between the Union Popular de Venezuela, the class struggle tendency of the UNT and the PRS, or the proposition of the Socialist League to organise a Congress of Organisation of Socialists, show that important sectors are conscious of the need for a revolutionary organisation.

On a broader scale, Chavez has proposed the creation of a party that would bring together all the organisations supporting the Bolivarian process, stating that he wanted it to be "non-reformist". The proposition is interesting. However, this organisation cannot be built with the political forces that the popular organisations are fighting against in their anti-bureaucratic struggles, for the deepening of the agrarian reform or the extension of the role of workers in running the economy. The emergence of such an organisation would resolve at least two problems that confront the Bolivarian process: the centrality of the figure of Chavez, which weakens the role of the Venezuelan masses, and the confusion between diplomacy and international policy.

Consequently, this process of construction must make it possible to conduct strategic discussions on the roads that are necessary to defeat capitalism and to lay the foundations of a socialist society.

Resolution adopted by the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International at its meeting on October 21-22, 2006.

Broad Left Party Forms

24 October 2006, by International Viewpoint

IV: Eight years ago everyone on the left around the world was looking at Indonesia and was excited by that huge, apparently revolutionary upheaval that overthrew the corrupt and repressive Suharto regime. Yet now, the material benefits of democratisation seem to have been

very slight for most people, the old system of corruption continues, there's been a growth of religious conservatism, and the left looks rather isolated. So what went wrong?



DOMINGGUS: What happened with the democratic movement post-98 is that structurally and conceptually it wasn't ready to lead the people's struggle at that time. So that upheaval and the uprising were used by the traditional elite to reassert their traditional politics again. That's the

first thing. They very deliberately took the lead with a plan to channel people's consciousness back into their scheme of formal democracy, to stabilise the situation with free elections, a free press, and so forth. This was clearly shown in the 1999 elections, with 48 political parties taking part.

In fact with this new democracy the dynamic of people's struggles has been quite developed. But it is very fragmented, geographically around local issues, and organisationally, around different affiliations. This means that these popular organisations and this democratic movement cannot really give a lead or develop people's consciousness. Because it is so fragmented, they cannot present a real alternative or meet people's expectations.

ZELY: It's very dynamic, because after 1998 sectoral organisations just mushroomed all over the place. But they have no national links. So it's very dynamic but utterly fragmented. There is no national issue to bring them together or national force to lead them.

Give us a bit more idea of what these fragmented struggles are like. What kinds of things are people mobilising about, in their communities or wherever?

DOMINGGUS: You have to remember that under Suharto, the New Order regime allowed only one mass organisation for each sector. So for peasants, for example, there was just the HKTI (?), for workers just the SPSI, and so forth. So after 1998, with the 'Reformasi', the popular dissatisfaction with those traditional organisations led to people creating new organisations, especially in the workers' sector. There they could see very clearly that the SPSI, the traditional 'yellow' trade union organisation, had cheated and betrayed them, so they set up many other workers' organisations. By the year 2000, there were something like 12,000 independent workers' organisations that had appeared on the scene.

What are we talking about here, local

workplace unions?

ZELY: A whole variety of forms - workplace organisations, citywide organisations, regional organisations - they just spread all over the place, and all independent, around local issues or factory issues...

So what kind of issues have these workplace and local organisations been struggling around and organising around?

DOMINGGUS: Mainly economic issues, wages and layoffs, issues around outsourcing and social security. The tendency since 1998 has been for workers to organise around local, workplace issues. But at certain moments, for example when the government talks about the national minimum wage, once a year, they can manage to come together. The same applies to the reform of the Labour Law, both this last one and the one before. In fact there have been three Labour Law reforms since 1998. So around those issues only, there has been some unity. But when it comes to bigger political issues on a national level, they usually split again.

Presumably workers in stable employment are a minority of the population in Indonesia. So what kind of links are there with territorial, community-based organisations, issues and campaigns?

DOMINGGUS: In fact there is a very loose link between workers and local communities. Their movements are usually quite separate. They know of course, especially in cases of layoffs for example, that one thing will have an impact on the other. That it will increase unemployment for example. But there is no common force to bring them together and demand more. This is partly because, after 1998, the workers' organisations were largely educated and organised by international social democracy, like the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), attached to the German SPD, and the American Centre for International Labour Solidarity (ACILS), linked to AFL-CIO. These trained them to be very sectoral and only to raise their own sectoral issues. That's the first reason.

Is there a political link here, too, to parties like the PDI-P (Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle - of former president Megawati Sukarnoputri)?

ZELY: No there's no connection.

DOMINGGUS: Some of the union organisations, like SPN, have affiliated to the big parties like PDI-P, or Golkar (former governing party under Suharto), or the PKS (Justice and Prosperity Party, a conservative Islamist party). But the mass membership know little or nothing of this.

But when you talk about sectoral organisations mushrooming all over the place, what issues are these local organisations, neighbourhood organisations for example, organising and struggling around? Is it access to public service or what?

ZELY: In fact we do not have a tradition of neighbourhood organisations, or community movement. We have the urban poor movement, we have the women's movement, we have the student movement. But we never had a community movement, demanding the paving of their street or access to running water, sanitation, and so on.

But at the pre-launch meeting in Jakarta for the new left party, PAPERNAS, most of the people there were from the Urban Poor Movement. So what are they fighting for?

ZELY: In fact we began to organise with the urban poor back in 1998 - because we realised that these urban poor could be a link between different sectors. For example in Jakarta, in Kapuk community, an industrial area, workers and the urban poor do work together. They live in the same places and they have the same basic problems, especially sanitation. So we organise the urban poor to raise issues like free health care, so this can unite workers and urban poor.

In fact three months before the PAPERNAS launch meeting, we began organising with the urban poor a campaign around health care, education and wages - it's a way of

bringing together workers and urban poor across the city of Jakarta. And we will use this kind of strategy in other places too.

So from before 1998, and since 1998, we are the force that has always been seeking strategies to overcome this situation of fragmentation. PAPERNAS is the most recent one, but before that we have had a number of initiatives to promote a united front, trying to find common issue that can solve this problem.

I'd like to come back to the question of PAPERNAS. But one of the things that most people looking on from the outside think they can see going on in Indonesia - and they may be wrong - is an important strengthening of the religious right since 1998, including conservative Islamic forces. Now that may be partly an illusion resulting from the way the media reports on Indonesia, but is there some reality behind it and if there is, why has this happened?

DOMINGGUS: Structurally, the Islamic movement already existed under Suharto. There are two kinds of Islamic movement. One kind has no real ideological basis; these movements are just instruments in the hands of the old Golkar party apparatus or the intelligence services. The other kind - and there are only a few of these - are much more clearly ideological. Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and his followers are in this category, which was repressed in Suharto's time. So if you look at the so-called "moderate" or non-ideological Islamic forces like the PKS, which is the biggest such force in parliament today, we have clear evidence that some its key leaders, like Suripto, have been trained and guided by the Indonesian intelligence service. These are part of the moderate force. They are different from Ba'asyir.

This movement really got its chance as a result of the crisis after 1998. Because this was a situation that combined liberal politics with an economic situation characterised by de-industrialisation - the destruction of Indonesia's already weak industrial base - and all the extreme social consequences of neo-liberalism. So for example you had rising unemployment

among women leading to apparently more prostitution, a growing drugs problem, crime, and so forth. And they seized on these things as a moral issue, making this their banner, arguing that we have to return to our religion, and resist this kind of moral destruction. So they got their momentum from the extreme social impact of the crisis.



At the same time, the alternative movement or force was not sufficiently prepared to make use of the situation and explain to people why this crisis was happening and what our solution would be, the scientific or political solution, not the moral one. We didn't have the momentum or the structures to take advantage of this situation. So for the time being you could say that they have won this time, they are the ones who have managed to take advantage of this situation.

How has this strengthening of conservative Islam affected poor Indonesian women?

VIVI: First, we should point out that the big conservative or moderate Islamic forces, like NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) and Muhammadiyah, have themselves organised women, but mainly middle-class women. They've organised them around religious issues, not on economic questions. This means there is a gap between the conservative religious movement and the movement of the poor. Because poor women may accept these religious arguments, but they don't really care much about them. These have nothing to do with their more pressing economic concerns.

But has this trend had an impact on their daily lives? Do women feel more constrained, less free?

VIVI: Let's put it like this. Poor women have nothing to do with the politics of conservative Islam in their day to day lives. But in some regions like Tangerang outside Jakarta, Aceh and some others, which have special sharia local laws, the women there are starting to feel this has restricted their

activities. You know most women are workers, whether in the formal sector or in the informal economy. So often they come home late at night, and these laws make it difficult for them. So there is opposition from the women in some of these regions and in Tangerang the local government has had to delay implementation of this law. But in practice, these women have no choice about coming home late at night, whether or not sharia laws "bans" this. If these are enforced, and they get arrested, then they begin to fight back.

So what form does this resistance to sharia law take?

VIVI: In Tangerang there have been demonstrations. Most of the women in Tangerang are workers and so they tend to be more political and more audacious. That's where the opposition to sharia law has been strongest. They've also taken legal action in the courts, and they've been lobbying members of parliament and so on. But in fact, we think that, paradoxically, this reinforcement of conservative policies shows that politically the Islamist forces are defeated. So they need to resort to the law to impose their moral policies. These issues, like sharia law, are being raised in parliament by the PKS and some other moderate forces because they have been losing their influence among the masses. Their preaching alone doesn't work anymore.

That's interesting, because if what you're saying is right, it suggests that for the majority of the Indonesian people there is no strengthening of conservative Islam...?

ZELY: That's right.

DOMINGGUS: Traditionally, there are two kinds of Islam in Indonesia. One is "Islam santri", which is more religious, more closely linked to the Islamic colleges or "pesantren", and the other is "Islam abangan" which more of a mix between Islam and Javanese traditions of animism, Hinduism etc. This latter is the biggest, most widespread. Also, in the national consciousness after Indonesian independence, there was a

strong national sense of identity among the people that recognised that Indonesia was not just Islamic, that there was wide variety of cultures, with a strong secular basis, so Indonesia could not become an Islamic state. And this consciousness is still strong.

Q. So you're saying that nationalism, because it has such a strong secular base, is one of the elements that means that this kind of Islamic fundamentalism is not, at present, workable in Indonesia?

DOMINGGUS: Yes, we can see that in results of the last national elections (in 2004), the only fundamentalist parties standing, the PKS and PBB (Partai Bulan Bintang), got only about 10% in all. While the nationalists like Golkar, PDI-P and PKB or National Awakening Party (the latter you could say is a religious-nationalist party, because it uses the ideas of Gus Dur or Abdurrahman Wahid, the former president), and also the Partai Demokratik, got far more votes, almost 60% in all. So we can see from that how the ideas of fundamentalist Islam are still not so strong in Indonesia. We do recognise that they have made advances, and that they can mobilise quite large numbers on the streets. But at the same time we can see that nationalism still has a secular basis and that most people still believe in that.

Let's take specifically the case of the Anti-Pornography Bill. Just describe how this proposal came about and what its implications would be for women in particular.

VIVI: This Pornography Bill is still in draft form. It was first raised by the PDI-P government of Megawati Sukarnoputri. It's strange, but true that it was Megawati's Ministry of Religious Affairs that first came up with the idea. But it didn't go anywhere. Of course, as Dominggus said, the conservative Islamic parties like PKS and PBB always raise the issue of Indonesia becoming an Islamic state whenever they get the chance.

So it was the PKS that seized again on this Anti-Pornography Bill during the present SBY government (of President

Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono). They had two reasons for doing that. The first argument they use is the whole liberalisation of social life, things like the more revealing style of clothes used by many Indonesian women, which they of course reject on moral grounds.

But secondly, and they have explicitly admitted this in talks they've had with us, this proposal was aimed at boosting their support ahead of the 2009 elections. Because they realise they have been losing support because of their backing for the current SBY government, including their eventual backing of last year's fuel price hikes, as well as others of SBY's liberal economic policies. So they believed this proposal could win them back some of the popular support they had lost.

So what impact would this bill have on women?

VIVI: Before getting to that, I should point out that apart from PKS, most of the parties in parliament currently support this bill, including the PDI-P. The main target of this bill is women, because there are some articles in the draft that effectively criminalise women.

There is one article in particular that states that women should be banned from revealing the "sensual parts of their bodies", by which they mean legs, breasts, belly. So, as some people put it, it seems this government is more concerned with managing people's bodies than with managing the economy!

The second main impact will be on women who work at night, which includes not only prostitutes but also any women working in bars or clubs or whatever. And it's very much targeted personally at women as such - so for example in the modelling industry it's the individual women models who would be at risk of prosecution, not the industry that puts them in that position.

ZELY: So in fact it's very much a middle-class issue.

Why so? Doesn't it affect working

class women's bodies just as much?

VIVI: The point is that it is mostly middle-class women who respond to this kind of issue because they are the ones who have a greater awareness of their rights as women to manage their bodies, while poor women have never cared so much about that.

But in practice the government is going to get itself in a big muddle if it tries to implement this law. Because in practice many poor women live in very open situations. For example their bedrooms are not fully enclosed, they take a shower in the yard or they bathe in the river, maybe naked, and that's not a problem, there is no harassment or abuse. So this law will in fact be impossible to implement. You would have to arrest vast numbers of women! The government also realises that lives of poor women in the neighbourhoods is "immoral", in those terms, for economic reasons.

So the real impact of the law is likely to be felt among women who work at night, in clubs and so on. And that is something mainly middle-class women are prepared to mobilise around. In fact opposition to the bill on these grounds - of the democratic right to manage our own bodies, has decreased recently. The main opposition now is based more on arguments of cultural diversity, like the argument that we have so many different ethnic and cultural groups in Indonesia, like Papuan women, some of whom don't cover themselves with clothes, and so forth.

So you're saying there's been a kind of ideological retreat by the force opposing the anti-pornography laws?

VIVI: It's become a question of tactics. Basically the women's movement will use any means to block or at least postpone the passing of this law. And the argument of diversity is more widely acceptable. Because they are not capable of taking on directly a battle with Islamic forces. And this question of the democratisation of the body is a very sensitive issue.

You mean it's easier to defend Papuan tribal customs ?

ZELY: That's right. In fact there are

two fronts fighting this. The first is still on the question of the democratisation of our bodies, and the second is the issue of cultural diversity. And on the basis of this second argument it's possible to win rejection of the bill in, say, Bali, which is mainly Hindu, also in Manado, North Sulawesi, where Islam is in a minority compared with Christianity, and in Papua and in other secular or mainly Christian provinces. So it's going to be very difficult for them to implement this.

So what is Perempuan Mahardhika's strategy for dealing with this?

VIVI: Of course we reject this Anti-Pornography Bill. But in practice our strategy is not to prioritise this issue. Our strategy is to push forward both existing fronts we just described that are opposing this bill. The broad campaign is now around the cultural diversity question, but within this we fight to always raise the real issue, which is about democracy. And we campaign specifically around how this anti-pornography law will have an impact on poor women, for example on women who work at night. For example, we just organised a demonstration of poor women around health issues. And within this, we sought to raise the question of the anti-pornography bill, and the situation of women night-workers actually bridges these two issues.

Basically this law will have an impact on women of all sectors, especially poor women. But as we said, it's very hard to make a movement of poor women to oppose this law. So it's become a responsibility of middle-class women to spread their understanding of the issue and raise people's consciousness.

Poor women will spontaneously reject the law in so far as it adds more problems to the economic difficulties they already face. But they simply have more pressing bread-and-butter needs to address so they will not easily organise around the question of the anti-pornography bill. In fact it's quite confusing, and it's very, very difficult to build a broad movement of women around this, because poor women do reject the proposal, but on the other hand they really don't care

enough to mobilise around it. I'm sure they will be very annoyed if it is passed. And they simply aren't going to wear veils or whatever. So they don't see it as an issue.

DOMINGGUS: In fact if you go into the poor neighbourhoods, you'll see women's life is quite 'liberal'. They wear shorts and T-shirts and smoke... So they simply won't accept this law. In fact maybe this is a kind of tradition in Indonesia. They pass a law but it's just a law - nobody expects it to be really implemented.

I hear what you're saying but surely there were maybe one million people in the street on the demonstration the PKS mobilised in favour of these anti-pornography laws. And surely most of them were working-class or poor, and many of them were women, some from them peasant women?

ZELY: Not really, no.

DOMINGGUS: In fact not. These are mostly middle-class women, students, white-collar workers, wives of...

ZELY: They're not poor. Maybe middle-class housewives... they don't even come from rural villages. The PKS and the Islamic movement is mainly based in the urban middle class.

Let me move it on a bit. Am I right in thinking that the founding platform for PAPERNAS, the new left party that you are launching, does not mention the anti-pornography laws. Is that because you think it's too difficult, that there is too much disagreement among the different strands of the popular movement on this issue? Or is it because you think nobody cares about this issue? Or why?

DOMINGGUS: Actually this is something we've become quite concerned about this. In fact we are trying to explain to people the real problems they face, all the issues linked to neo-liberal economic policies and so forth - privatisation, the foreign debt, de-industrialization... So we are trying to insist on this to show people that the problems we face are not moral or religious questions, but economic and political ones.

These are the basic things facing people's lives. But we also see that this Islamic movement is the result of the lack of alternative in this situation. And they are able to grow so fast because for most people there is no visible alternative that offers any solutions to their fundamental problems. So these forces campaign on the basis that Islam is the alternative, the solution. And we just have to explain to people that no, that the alternative lies with the anti-neoliberal movement and the fight for a government that will free us from neo-liberal globalisation. But we don't have any specific campaign on the subject of fundamentalism. This is a sensitive issue. Because you have to remember that after the 1965 massacres there is deep stigma in Indonesia connecting anti-religion sentiments and communism.

So what is the main political platform of this new broad party, PAPERNAS, that you are involved in launching?

KATARINA: Our main programme is what we call the three banners of unity - repudiation of the foreign debt, nationalisation of the oil, energy and mining industries, which is a basic question of national sovereignty, and a programme of national industrialisation that we believe will create jobs.

What are the different forces involved in setting up PAPERNAS?

KATARINA: At the national level there are three trade union bodies coming together, the FNPBI which is my organisation, the SPB (Workers's Solidarity Union) and the Automotive Workers' Union, from the car industry. There is one progressive party, the PRD, as well as national student organisations, like the Buddhist Students Organisation and the LNMD (National Students' League for Democracy), and the Urban Poor Movement (SRMK).

But the founding organisations are not only national. We have a number of local organisations, peasant unions, local trade union bodies and student organisations that are independent of the national organisations. So we are trying to organise local launch

conferences of PAPERNAS around the country too, to bring together as many local organisations as possible into one movement.

So why now?

KATARINA: The key thing is uniting the movement to make it stronger. People have been resisiting neoliberalism in all sorts of ways, but in a very fragmented fashion. We never managed to come together as a stringer force to show that there really is an alternative.

So how does all of this fit into the wider situation of the anti-neoliberal movement in Asia? I recall someone saying a few years back that the Global Justice movement had transformed the political situation for the left in Europe and in different ways in North America and in Latin America. But that it would never really change the international situation until it sunk deep roots in Asia...?

ZELY: It's a different situation from Latin America. They have a longer history of confronting neoliberalism. Most of Latin America was the first laboratory for this neo-liberal agenda, the Washington Concensus agenda as it's become known. For us it's a relatively new experience. Actually this is a hugely valuable opportunity for the movement in Indonesia, and in the rest of Asia, as people become more aware of the impact of neoliberalism, as they understand that privatisation is a threat to their jobs and their wages, that trade liberalisation is a threat to the peasants, and at the same time we see there are campaigns putting forward alternatives outside Asia, around 'another world is possible', and there's also the developments in Latin America.

So we have the momentum to start talking about alternatives. But the situation is not yet ripe because, we have only had six or seven years

to campaigning in focussed way on these issues of neoliberalism. So that's why we have to find the right strategy. And this initiative of PAPERNAS is our attempt to find the right strategy for confronting neoliberalism and developing a real alternative. But still the situation in Asia is very different from that elsewhere, espeically in Latin America. Because I think at a certain level there has been a defeat of the democratic movements after the period of dictatorship. Most of the parties or main organisations who led the politcal campaigns under the dictatorship have suffered a big loss of cadre.

So there is a big gap between the era of dictatorship and the democratic period. That is true here in Indonesia and in the Philippines too. So it's a question of 're-forming' the left to face up to the neoliberal agenda. So that's the subjective situation... It's too bad for Asia!

"It's never too late to love or rebel"

21 October 2006, by **Michael Löwy**



A researcher in physics, educated in the German Democratic Republic, a member of the Cuban Communist Party, Celia Hart is the daughter of two historic figures of the Cuban Revolution: Armando Hart, former Minister of Education and Haydée Santamaria, leader of the July 26 Movement and later director of the Casa de las Americas (she killed herself in 1980). This slim but enthralling work brings together some of her speeches or interviews - some of which appeared in the newspaper "Rouge" - over the last four years.

A free and courageous spirit, CH discovered through reading Trotsky the explanation of the crisis and collapse of the so-called "socialist bloc". It is thanks to him, the founder

of the Left Opposition, she writes, that I have understood that social justice and individual freedom are not contradictory: we are not condemned to choose between the two.

The fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the USSR do not mean the end of socialism: socialist society, which can only exist on a planetary scale, belongs to the future, not the past. And if today Russia, in the hands of a capitalist/bureaucratic Mafia, has renounced its revolutionary past, the red flag with the hammer and sickle still flies on tomb of Lev Davidovitch, in Coyoacan. Ramon Mercader, the Stalinist killer - whose presence in Cuba in the 1960s remains a fact unbearable for her - was able to liquidate a man, but not his ideas: internationalism, permanent revolution.

These ideas have found their place in

the history of Cuban communism: CH recalls that Julio Antonio Mella, the founder of the Cuban Communist Party in the 1920s - he was assassinated in Mexico in 1930 - was close to the Left Opposition. While Ernesto Che Guevara understood better than anybody the dynamic of permanent revolution of the Cuban process and the struggle in Latin America: "either a socialist revolution or a caricature of revolution". If his interest in Trotsky only manifested itself in his latter years - we know that he brought with him to Bolivia The History of the Russian Revolution - Che found his way, through his own efforts, to some of the most important ideas of the founder of the Red Army. It was Che Guevara who made me a Trotskyist, she writes.

If CH regrets the silence on Trotsky which reigns in Cuba, she nonetheless

manifests her enthusiastic support for the Cuban Revolution, as well as the Bolivarian process unleashed by Chavez in Venezuela. There is no, and can be no, "socialism in once country" but we have, in the course of the 20th century, seen authentic socialist revolutions, of which the Cuban is one of the most striking.

She also sees the dangers which threaten its future: the

interpenetration of the bureaucracy with the market can give birth to a bourgeoisie ready to restore capitalism. In this case, Cuba would experience the same destiny as the GDR. She thinks, however, that the Cuban revolution has the possibility of correcting its own errors, thanks to an internationalist perspective.

A charismatic personality, animated

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Evismo - Reform? Revolution? Counter-Revolution?

21 October 2006, by Jeffery R Webber



In addition to the open arms extended to Goldberg by Choquehuanca, Minister of Government Alicia Muñoz emphasized on the occasion of Goldberg's arrival that the Bolivian government under Evo Morales is unswervingly devoted to a politics of "zero narco-trafficking" and urges the cooperation of the US in this valiant struggle [1].

All this could be dismissed as merely routine diplomacy. However, only a day prior to Goldberg's arrival the Bolivian government had boldly and bloodily conveyed its commitment to the "war on drugs" in deed in Parque Carrasco, approximately 258 kilometres from the city of Cochabamba. On the morning of September 29, the Fuerza de Tarea Conjunta (Joint Task Force, FTC), made up of Bolivian anti-narcotic police and military forces trained and funded by the US, killed cocaleros (coca growers) Celestino Ricaldo (23) and Rember Guzmán (24) during a coca eradication mission. Minister of Government Muñoz claimed that the two dead were "narco-traffickers" and illegal "colonizers" of a national park in which the production of coca is illegal.

Furthermore, the coca eradication forces were said to have been "ambushed" by the cocaleros and therefore responded in defence. Minister of Defence, Wálker San Miguel, concurred with this general depiction, denouncing the ambush of the FTC by "narco-traffickers," and announcing that the government would persist with its coca eradication work in Parque Carrasco where they say the production of coca is illegal according to Law 1008. In fact he went further, claiming that the FTC had been attacked by over 200 armed persons who opened fire on the FTC and set off charges of dynamite.

Against this official portrait of the day's events, cocalero leaders argue that the zone of Yungas de Vandiola, where the deaths occurred, is recognized by Law 1008 as a legal site for the growth of coca for traditional purposes. Moreover, the cocaleros deny resisting the FTC with anything other than wooden clubs. The President of the Bolivian Permanent Assembly of Human Rights, Guillermo Vilela, responded to concerns expressed by the cocaleros by writing a letter to Muñoz demanding that there be an investigation into the causes of the deaths and a determination of culpability concerning the forces involved. His letter reads: "This is to avoid the

continuation of this type of situation that has resulted in the impunity of previous governments." [2]

To contextualize the Morales government's position it is useful to remind ourselves of the origins of Law 1008 and some basic facts of the US "drug war" in the Bolivian theatre. Seasoned analysts of coca production and US foreign policy in Bolivia, Linda Farthing and Kathryn Ledebur, remark, "In 1988, the Bolivian government passed Law 1008, a draconian anti-drug law developed by the U.S. government." They describe the basic human targets invoked by the law: "The implementation of the law has been especially harmful to coca growing families and those occupying the lower rungs of the cocaine industry, while having little lasting impact on high-level trafficking. Security forces often direct their actions at the easily accessible plots of vulnerable coca growing families, resulting in human rights abuses and harassment." Between 1998 and 2004 alone 33 cocaleros have been killed by the state, and 570 injured.

What's the US connection? Farthing and Ledebur note, "In the Chapare, the U.S. government trains, equips and funds all anti-drug units, providing even the salary bonuses for

anti-narcotics police, military eradication officials and prosecutors. Since the implementation of Plan Dignidad, the U.S. government has paid for and supervised the construction and expansion of military and police installations throughout the region, despite an October 2000 agreement between the Bolivian government and coca growers prohibiting the building of new bases. U.S. government agencies, such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) of the embassy, share a base with local anti-drug forces in Chimore and closely supervise the Bolivian units' operations. Control is so tight that Bolivian eradication commanders must obtain embassy permission for each flight in helicopters donated and fuelled by the U.S. government." [3]

In an astonishing and reprehensible development, this particular node of the US imperial network in Bolivia is being reawakened with a new boldness 8 months into the administration of Evo Morales. And the Morales government is deeply complicit. Despite the fact that the ruling party, the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism, MAS), has its origins in the heroic anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal cocalero movement of the 1990s (Evo Morales in fact remains the leader of the federation of cocalero peasant unions in the Chapare region in which the recent conflict took place!), the government is solidly behind the armed apparatus of the state when it comes to the killing of two cocaleros.

Recent statements by Minister of Defence, San Miguel, illustrate the cold rationale of this realpolitik. According to an article in the mainstream daily La Razón, San Miguel stated that the initiation of the eradication of coca in Parque Carrasco, which provoked the two deaths, opened up a path for the improvement of relations with the United States, which had deteriorated since the installation of the Morales government in January 2006. San Miguel stated clearly, "Without a doubt we have passed from words to actions; to speak of zero narco-trafficking of zero cocaine...

necessarily implies actions... and this is a very definitive action," referring to Parque Carrasco [4].

In an apparent nod to the Bolivian government's "goodwill" gesture, the US has only just now openly suggested that the two governments restart material cooperation in military training, in particular of the Bolivian Air Force (FAB), which was temporarily postponed due to the Bolivian government's recognition of article 98 of the International Penal Code which allows for the trial of American military personnel in the case of human rights abuses committed by them. Now, seemingly, the Bolivian government will enjoy the "benefits" of a select group of 20 countries who have not ratified article 98, recognizing the US state's inherent right to stand above international law.

The above discussion of US imperialism and the latest developments in the Bolivian front of the "war on drugs" is an appropriate window into the larger discussion I hope to begin in the remainder of this article. Is there a revolution afoot in Bolivia, as many seem to believe? If so, are the leaders of this revolution to be found in the MAS government? How, then, do we explain "anomalies" such as the killing of two cocaleros? Or are the deaths less anomalies than the logical outcome of capitulation to imperialist demands? What contradictions exist on the ground in Bolivia today, and what are the relevant signals of hope and, conversely, of danger that the Left ought to identify? What are the social forces that might contribute to a revolution from below that is both socialist and indigenous-liberationist?

The complexities of the Bolivian situation under the MAS government of Evo Morales have long outpaced facile celebrations and denunciations emanating from different sectors of the Bolivian, Latin American, and international Left, broadly conceived. The close of September, however, marked the end of 8 months of MAS rule and while the panorama of political and social life in the country undoubtedly remains complex, certain early characterizations of the MAS as a revolutionary party are now

straightforwardly untenable, if they ever had any credibility. In September, the resignation of Hydrocarbons Minister Andrés Soliz Rada gave pause to some early radical supporters of Morales, signalling as it did the continuous weakening of the position of the Bolivian government in relation to the interests of transnational petroleum companies, after MAS announced the "nationalization" of the industry on May 1, 2006 [5].

The following points of intervention attempt to clarify the terrain and character of the shifting balance of forces in the country in the present context, the weaknesses of some of the predominant theoretical positions now available from various intellectual figures on the Left, the current immobility of previously radicalized social movements, and at the same time the hopeful (if fragile) signs of new struggles from below. The story begins with the Constituent Assembly, which since the beginning of July has framed much of the battlefield between popular and reactionary forces, both within state institutions and, more importantly, in the streets.

The Staging Ground for the Constituent Assembly

The short-term origins of the demand for a Constituent Assembly - to remake the Bolivian state in a way that would undo internal colonialism, challenge liberal democratic forms of representation, and fundamentally transform the economic and social foundations of the country's institutional framework - date back to the 1990 Indigenous March for Territory and Dignity, led by the indigenous peoples of the department of Beni, in the Northern Amazon.

The movement for a revolutionary Constituent Assembly gained important impetus, however, during the Cochabamba Water War of 2000 when the Coordinadora - the main social movement organization leading the rebellion - took up the cause. The Water War initiated a revolutionary cycle which from 2000 until 2005 saw near-continuous mobilizations, road blocks, street battles, strikes, marches, and so forth by left-

indigenous movements throughout much of the country, leading to the overthrow of neoliberal presidents Gonzalo (Goni) Sánchez de Lozada and Carlos Mesa in October 2003 and June 2005 respectively.

Returning to the Constituent Assembly, a former shoe-factory worker, and the most prominent leader of the Water War, Oscar Olivera, put it this way: "The Constituent Assembly thus should be understood as a great sovereign meeting of citizen representatives elected by their neighbourhood organizations, their urban or rural associations, their unions, their communes. These citizen representatives would bring with them ideas and projects concerning how to organize the political life of the country. They would seek to define the best way of organizing and managing the common good, the institutions of society, and the means that could unite the different individual interests in order to form a great collective and national interest. They would decide upon the modes of political representation, social control, and self-government that we should give ourselves for the ensuing decades. And all of these agreed decisions would immediately be implemented.... Let us be clear: Neither the executive branch nor the legislative branch, not even the political parties, can convoke the Constituent Assembly. These institutions and their members all stand discredited for having plunged the country into disaster." [6]

While the MAS government carried through on its promise to hold a Constituent Assembly, its form has been a distant cry from the sort of process envisioned by popular and indigenous forces [7]. Rather than an organic fluorescence of popular power from below, organized through the unions, neighbourhood assemblies, and indigenous organizations that led the insurrections between 2000 and 2005, the procedures established for the Constituent Assembly ensured the exclusive participation of recognized political parties and "citizen groups," none of which were the groups that led the vast movements at the centre of the political stage in recent years. Participation through the MAS became - was designed to become -

essentially the only viable channel through which popular organizations could participate in the assembly as constituents.

Complicating matters further, procedures for the Constituent Assembly elections on July 2, 2006 were designed in such a way that revolutionary change would be nearly impossible as protection of "minorities" (read the capitalist class primarily based in the eastern part of the country, and especially in the department of Santa Cruz) was enshrined in the process. On this note, an important document published by Dunia Mokrani and Raquel Gutiérrez warrants quoting at some length:

"... the electoral terms established in the 'Law to Convoke the Constituent Assembly' last March stipulated that the assembly will be made up of 255 constituent deputies: 210 directly elected (the three top candidates for each of the 70 electoral districts) and 45 proportional representatives elected by relative majority (plurinomial) - five from each of the nine departments [provinces or states]. However, in each electoral district the party or organization that comprised the relative majority could only send two representatives, according to a curious 'minority protection' rule included in the Law to Convoke the Constituent Assembly. In accordance with this resolution, even if a party secures over 75% of the votes in its district, as long as one of the minority parties receives more than 5%, this latter party will get the 'third' minority representative. This clause assured not so much the 'plurality' proclaimed at the time, as a means to assure representation for a small minority of ad hoc right-wing organizations with some local clout. Without this clause, these groups would not attain representation in the Assembly." [8]

The rules stipulated that after the July 2 constituent elections the assembly would then convene on August 6, 2006 in Sucre, for no less than six months and no more than one year. The new constitution arising from the Sucre process would require the support of two thirds of the 255 elected constituents. After this, it was

stipulated that the constitution would face a referendum within the general Bolivian population, requiring 51% approval to pass. What is important to note with regard to the "minority protection" rule is that in practice it meant that even in the essentially impossible event that the MAS won a majority in every contested district it would come away with only 158 of the constituent representatives in the assembly, well short of the 170 needed for two-thirds control of the process over the right wing minority bloc.

July 2nd Constituent Assembly Results and the Polarization of the Country

In their detailed dissection of the Constituent Assembly electoral results Mokrani and Gutiérrez suggest that what most obviously jumps off the page is "the electoral disaster suffered by Bolivia's right wing, although it was not completely wiped out as a political force.... The years of massive indigenous and popular organization in Bolivia between 2000 and 2005 managed to topple the monopoly over party and institutional representation held by economic and political elites."

We can define the following political forces who ran in the Constituent Assembly elections, in descending order of importance, as the right: PODEMOS, Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR), National Unity (UN), Autonomies for Bolivia (APB), AYRA, Leftist Revolutionary Movement (MIR - which in spite its name is a right-wing party), and the Alliance Andrés Bóez (AAI). By this measure, according to Mokrani and Gutiérrez, "the right's political representation in the Assembly comes to 99 seats out of the 255 total, or 39% of the Assembly. This percentage is not enough to pass an article proposed for the new constitution, which requires two-thirds majority, but it is sufficient to veto the changes proposed by other factions, which requires only 33% of the vote."

MAS won 50.7% of the popular vote in the July 2 elections, confirming their status as the most successful national party. However, another important facet of the results that stands out is the regional polarization of the

right/left divide. The MAS won large majorities in the departments of Chuquisaca, La Paz, Cochabamba, Oruro, Potosí, all of which are located in the centre, western, and south-western zones of the country. Meanwhile, MAS lost in the more prosperous and resource-rich departments of Tarija and Santa Cruz, as well as in the Amazonian departments of Beni and Pando. These four departments are known popularly as “media luna,” or “half moon,” because their geographical positioning resembles a half moon shape, beginning in the north-western tip of the Pando and arching around east before returning to the south-centrally located Tarija. A situation of vicious right-wing populism and weak popular and indigenous forces abound in these provinces, as articulated in their collective fight for more “autonomy” - and even “separation” at times - for their departments in relation to the central Bolivian state; that is, more autonomous control of the Bolivian capitalist class over key natural resources such as natural gas deposits and arable land which are most heavily abundant in Tarija and Santa Cruz.

This regionalization of right/left forces, while hardly new, was reinforced on 2 July. Apart from the assembly elections that day, voters were asked to respond “yes” or “no” to an obscurely rendered referendum question on autonomy, or a process of decentralizing power to the nine departments that make up Bolivia. At the national level, “no” won with 57.6% of the votes overall, but “yes” won handily in the “media luna” departments.

Mokrani and Gutiérrez worry that, “Although the majority of the citizens voted not to install a department-level autonomy regime in the country, votes in favour were high numbers in certain departments and provide a powerful weapon to regional elites to fight for their political proposal in the Assembly, backing themselves up with the defense of the ‘will of the people.’ It can be expected that the representatives of the right in the four states where ‘yes’ won, the petroleum producers Santa Cruz and Tarija, and the Amazon states of Beni and Pando, will demand a measure of

autonomy for their regions, where their desire to secede has already been made known.”

In light of these electoral conclusions and the lingering, unfulfilled expectations of the popular indigenous majority since the electoral victory of the MAS, political tensions have mounted precipitously throughout the country, taking on newly vivid shades in the month of September, and are expressing themselves to a large degree in relation to the Constituent Assembly process.

The polarization began anew with a decision of MAS to enact an internal rule for the conduction of the assembly according to which the “two-thirds” rule would only have bearing over the final text of the new constitution, and therefore all procedural decisions as well as decisions concerning each specific article of the constitution as the process developed would be determined by simple majority. Obviously, MAS holds a simple majority in the assembly, and has been busily building allies with other parties in the assembly to construct an ever-larger front against the far right.

This move predictably galvanized a strong reaction by the far-right in the departments of the “media luna,” with proclamations coming forth daily regarding the anti-democratic nature of MAS governance and the hoax that is the Constituent Assembly. Many commentators have noted the similarities between the right’s charges of “authoritarianism” regarding the government, with the Venezuelan right’s strategies leading up to the 2002 failed coup attempt against Chávez. Of course, the Bolivian right wing discourse also mirrors precisely the “democracy promotion” agenda of the Bush administration in the US, with its most recent nuanced spin introduced by Condoleezza Rice: that democratically-elected governments had better start governing democratically. Or else! Rice’s thinly veiled targets include, among others, Hamas in Palestine, Chávez in Venezuela, and Morales in Bolivia. No doubt the parallels between Bolivia’s right wing discourse and the rhetoric of the US state are well understood by the Bolivian right.

When left-indigenous forces occupied the streets and were repeatedly beaten down and shot to death by the coercive forces of the state over the last six years, the traditional Bolivian right trotted out a multitude of charges daily in the mainstream press concerning the “undemocratic” propensity toward insurrection on the part of the dangerous classes, not to mention the uppity Indians. Of course, now, unhappy with their loss of direct control of the central government by liberal democratic means, the right quickly tossed aside their antiquated repugnance toward “extra-parliamentary” means of doing politics.

Beginning as early as mid-August, within and outside the assembly process, the right formed a regional bloc consisting of bourgeois forces in Santa Cruz, Tarija, Pando and Beni to confront the “hegemonic plan of the MAS.” On August 21, the Pro Santa Cruz Civic Committee - the peak political expression of reactionary forces in that department - declared itself in a “state of emergency” in response to MAS plans to end the two-thirds rule for every simple decision in the Constituent Assembly. They also opposed the basic conception of the Constituent Assembly process as one that could “re-found” the Bolivian constitution; rather, they preferred one that would only be permitted to enact small reforms to the existing constitution.

On August 24, the rhetoric of the right had escalated such that PODEMOS accused MAS of orchestrating an “autogolpe,” or a self-inflicted coup, a coup orchestrated against the democratic institutions through which one’s own government came to power. “Autogolpe” in Latin America immediately brings to the foreground of peoples’ minds the actions of right wing authoritarian Fujimori in Perú⁹ during the 1990s.

PODEMOS boycotted the assembly process, which consequently went into an indefinite recess, and on September 8, there was a large 24 hour right wing strike in the “media luna” departments against the constituent assembly, with apparently significant popular backing in that part of the country.

The reaction on the part of the government was mixed. On the one hand, MAS called for mass mobilizations to defend the revolutionary process. Vice-president Garc a Linera, likely fearing military action by the right, called on the Bolivian masses to take up arms if necessary in defence of MAS, although he quickly back-tracked on these statements, apologizing profusely and uncharacteristically to the press.

Alicia M  oz, Minister of Government, publicly denounced the right wing prefects of the "media luna" departments for organizing against the democratically elected MAS government. She signalled out the prefect of Pando, Leopoldo Fern  ndez, who she charged was attempting to destabilize the country by forming paramilitary groups in his department.

The increasing temperature of the positions on all sides concerned the neighbouring Argentine government so much that the Argentine embassy in La Paz solicited a report on the Bolivian situation from the Grupo de Apoyo a las Colectividades Extranjeras. The report, published in the last half of September, argued that there was a 56% probability of imminent civil war in the country [9]. Of course, the statistical number is ludicrous, but the fact that the study was done, and that it argued that war was more likely than not, sheds a certain amount of light on the depth of the political uncertainty in the Bolivia at the present time.

The Morales government has been willing to call on the masses to mobilize when necessary, but under the strict parameters set by MAS. At the same time, popular and indigenous forces are undoubtedly willing and capable of confronting and mobilizing against the right, but the extent to which they are guided by the parameters of the government is difficult to gauge at this point. On September 30, 2006, for example, over thirty organizations gathered for an "assembly of social movements" in Cochabamba in response to a direct appeal of MAS. Garc a Linera and Morales were in attendance. Vice-minister of agriculture, Alejandro Almaraz, excitedly declared to the

roughly 5,000 people gathered that the way forward was through mobilization. Yet, a representative of indigenous peasants of the department of Santa Cruz who had collectively and autonomously mobilized against the actions of the right wing Pro Santa Cruz Civic Committee the week before only to have vice-president Garc a Linera insist that they demobilize, asked Almaraz from the crowd: "What kind of mobilizations do they [MAS] want? They should speak clearly." His intervention was met with applause from the floor.

Similarly, while some organizations in attendance are evidently deeply incorporated into MAS, others such as the Federaci  n de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto (Federation of United Neighbourhood Councils of El Alto, FEJUVE-El Alto) attended the gathering to defend the gains and demands of the October Agenda [10] - an authentic nationalization of gas, a transformative constituent assembly, and a trial of responsibilities for ex-president Gonzalo S  nchez de Loazada - against right wing assault. The extent to which their demands and motivations can be contained by MAS limitations is still being tested as the dynamic unfolds.

Subsequent to the hostilities of early- and mid-September, MAS repositioned itself in relation to the procedural question, offering instead of its simple majority rule for all but the final text, a "mixed voting system" whereby difficult, foundational issues of import addressed along the way will also warrant application of the "two-thirds" rule. All parties have agreed to this except PODEMOS, the largest of the right wing forces inside the assembly process. The extra-parliamentary right of the media-luna, however, remains unsatisfied and searching for other ways to definitively defeat MAS and the popular aims of the poor indigenous majority that have for the past six years in fact far exceeded the reformism of the governing party [11].

While polling results should always be reviewed with a skeptical eye, keenly skeptical given an outrageous history of polling in Bolivia, recent figures published by the polling firm Apoyo, Opini  n y Mercado indicate that

Morales' popularity has reached its nadir, after four consecutive months of decline. From a high of 80% popular support in June after the "nationalization" of gas in May, support for Morales currently rests at 52%. Support for the vice-president has also dropped. Fuelling the uncertainty of the conjuncture as well is the fact that popular support for the Constituent Assembly has also plummeted from a high of 69% in August to 45% in September [12].

Autonomism, Reformism, and Revolution

Debate over the significance, depth, and character of the struggles over the last six years has elicited a number of different theoretical interventions by organic intellectuals of different left currents across Latin America and on into the international left. Here I care to deal only briefly with a certain string of autonomist critiques of the MAS, on the one hand, and reformist apologies for the Morales government on the other. I then offer a few words on revolutionary alternatives.

Perhaps the most eloquent defender of autonomism in the Bolivian context is, in fact, a Mexican: Raquel Guti  rrez. Guti  rrez has an intimate connection with Bolivian popular movements. She moved to Bolivia in the mid-1980s and became, later in that decade, a leading figure in the indigenist/Marxist guerrilla group, Ej  rcito Guerrillero T  paj Katari (Tupaj Katari Guerrilla Army, EGTK), alongside current vice-president   lvaro Garc a Linera and leading Aymara indigenous radical Felipe Quispe, known as el mallku. She was captured by the Bolivian state and spent five years in jail (1992-1997), without charges being laid. Garc a Linera and Quispe suffered similar fates. After her release from prison, Guti  rrez returned to Mexico. Recently, however, she returned to visit Bolivia and has begun again commenting on the character of the current conjuncture.

In a revealing interview with Ver  nica Gago in late September of this year, Guti  rrez developed a series of incisive criticisms of the MAS administration [13]. In the interview

she argues that in the current environment the MAS government is not taking the social movements, which are responsible for Morales' rise to electoral power, into consideration as serious interlocutors, but rather is subordinating them to the interests of the party, or, when this is impossible, trying to isolate and weaken them. Fundamentally, there is a closing off of autonomous space for the continuing development of popular power from below.

Gutiérrez argues that there is a terrible seduction facing formerly robust social movements to enter into asymmetrical relations with the central government. Petty fighting erupts over tidbit handouts from the state. The Constituent Assembly has, in her view, become a mere replica of parliament rather than a sphere of revolutionary politics. The fundamental debate in the assembly is a procedural one, a technical debate, and a debate moreover which increasingly mirrors old battles between the traditional parties of the neoliberal period. What is so lamentable about the present scene, from Gutiérrez's perspective, is how the popular and indigenous movements between 2000 and 2005 had fundamentally ruptured the capacity of the liberal capitalist state to set the parameters of political activity and social action.

During these massive struggles, Gutiérrez, citing the work of Aymara sociologist Pablo Mamani, stresses the tremendous strengths of the self-activity of the oppressed and exploited popular classes and indigenous nations, referencing, for example, the inspiring ambition of the "micro-governments" of the neighbourhood councils to self-govern, and self-regulate the proletariat, mainly Aymara indigenous mega-slum of El Alto during the mass insurrection of October 2003 (the "Gas War"). Finally, she abhors the vice-president's development of the concept of "evismo," which she argues reverses the logic of the wave of popular movements in the last years; rather than Evo Morales' mandate being conceived as emanating from the social forces from below - that he should govern by obeying - Gutiérrez contends that the idea of "evismo"

elevates Morales to the status of grand leader, in which he, rather than the movements, is the agent of revolutionary transformation.

While weak on specific empirical references, and assuming an intimate knowledge of the Bolivian situation, the interview with Gutiérrez is an important document, making in many ways a compelling case against features of the MAS administration, and relationship between the party and social movement and union bases. Nonetheless, there are limitations to her critique, limitations which have been subjected to attack by reformist supporters of the MAS administration in a quite wrong-headed fashion, to bolster their own cause.

The writings of Hervé Do Alto and Pablo Stefanoni are representative of such a stance. Recently, they've taken to the pejorative use of quotation marks to mock left critics of the MAS; thus, the latter are the "radical" left who exaggerate the "radical" nature of the social movements of the last six years. First, they charge autonomist critiques of MAS, such as those of Gutiérrez and Uruguayan Raúl Zibechi with ignoring the fact that John Holloway's famous theory of "changing the world without taking power," never held sway at any time among social movements in Bolivia.

They are undoubtedly correct in a straightforward, limited sense, but they then leap to the radically unsubstantiated conclusion that, therefore, the alternative (the only one) was the creation of the reformist MAS to "take power" through elections. In the conclusion to their most recent essay, they argue that because MAS won the elections on December 18, 2005 with an ample majority on a reformist platform - to reclaim national sovereignty, reconstruct the state, and put an end to internal colonialism - failure or success of the current processes of change must be evaluated against these parameters! [14] These are the barriers set by realpolitik, be damned your socialist and indigenous-liberationist aspirations! [15]

This brings us to alternatives. My sense is that Do Alto and Stefanoni commit two egregious errors. First,

they gravely underestimate the radical, revolutionary potential of mass mobilization between 2000 and 2005 in Bolivia. As evidence of their position that social movements were always reformist, they note how the "radical" (their quotation marks) movements in El Alto supported constitutional exits to the October 2003 and May-June 2005 crises, as well as voting for MAS on a reformist platform in December 2005 [16]. This is quintessentially tautological theorizing.

We are meant to believe that the crisis situations of October 2003 and May-June 2005 were reformist, whatever misleading appearances, because they ended in reformist exits to the crises. What - if not five years of massive, near-continuous, left-indigenous mobilizations, road blocks, marches, riots, street clashes, tropical cocalero resistance, general strikes, and the toppling in succession of two neoliberal presidents - would a "radical" situation look like? Do all revolutionary situations end in revolutions, or is it conceivable that these revolutionary situations were diverted into reformist paths of change? That revolutionary potential was in the air seems to me a sustainable position; that a revolutionary exit to the situation obviously was not inevitable is indicated today by the current MAS administration. But it might have been different, and we therefore need not submit to the parameters of "failure" and "success" provided to us by Do Alto and Stefanoni.

Do Alto and Stefanoni persuasively argue that the autonomists are unable to account for the limitations of the multifarious social movements, as well as the increasing aspirations of popular and indigenous forces to transcend localized autonomy and build on past gains, to conquer power. David McNally, referring to a more general discussion of anti-capitalist strategizing, puts it nicely: "Success inevitably creates new challenges... especially for radical mass movements. Not only does the ruling class learn from its setbacks but, in addition, the movement's supporters expand their hopes and expectations. Consequently, the question of how to shift from the defensive - simply trying

to block what the other side is doing - to the offensive - where we organize to construct a different kind of future - cannot be avoided. Moreover, those two stances, the defensive and the offensive, are integrally connected: where we would like to go decisively shapes the sort of movement-building strategies we ought to employ. [17]"

So, I concur with Do Alto and Stefanoni's critique of autonomist failure to contend effectively with power and the construction of a real alternative. Again, where they go desperately wrong, from my perspective, is in portraying MAS as that alternative (even while recognizing that it is reformist). Phil Hearse recently argues that, "The need for a strategy of conquering power, linked to that of class independence, is shown by the events ... in Argentina. Here a mass uprising overthrew the de la Rúa government in December 2001, unleashing a political crisis which saw huge sections of the poor and the middle classes mobilised in self-organised action committees and *piqateros* for more than a year.... But eventually this pre-revolutionary movement just petered out, precisely because there was no mass militant socialist party, capable of melding the rebellious forces in a coherent revolutionary national direction. [18]" The result was Kirchner, and not because the masses in the streets of Buenos Aires in December were incapable of imagining something better than Kirchner. Such was the situation in Bolivia in October 2003 and May-June 2005; in fact, prospects for revolutionary change were even deeper in the Bolivian case given the greater depth and breadth of self-organization.

Hearse argues persuasively that, "For the Left, the decisive issue is how to integrate all these questions - of democracy, land reform, the destruction of the oligarchy, an end to economic robbery of the elite and imperialism, the basics of life for the urban poor and liberation for indigenous people and women - into a coherent overarching strategy for the popular masses to conquer power." Two radical currents from below that may give some direction to such a coherent overarching strategy for the

popular masses in Bolivia are the subject of the next two sections.

Aymara Nationalism

While hardly exhausting the potential sources of resurgence in the dynamics of self-activity within popular and indigenous sectors of Bolivian society, I want to flag two areas of radicalism that have been side-lined from much of the discussion taking place on the left: (i) Aymara nationalism in the altiplano, or high plateau, with its epicentre in the community of Achacachi in the department of La Paz, but extending, as we've seen in the recent past, into the surrounding countryside as well as the urban slum areas of El Alto and working class neighbourhoods in La Paz; and (ii) a renewed intensity of conflict in the mines, especially in Huanuni.

As an anecdotal foray into the subject of Aymara nationalism, I'll review two recent interviews by prominent figures in the movement: Felipe Quispe (or *el mallku*) and Eugenio Rojas Apaza [19]. While the Cochabamba Water War of 2000 is internationally renowned (as it should be), it is often forgotten that during the same year an Aymara indigenous peasant revolt shut down most of the Western part of the country for over three weeks with a list of 72 demands, anti-capitalist and indigenous-liberationist in character. Led by *el mallku*, and organized through an eclectic mix of traditional *ayllu* indigenous community governance structures at the base level and union structures at the highest echelons of the central peasant union federation (CSUTCB) - which Quispe had led since 1998 shortly after his release from prison - this movement was the largest peasant revolt in Bolivia since the 1979 struggle for democracy. After 2000, these same indigenous peasants played an instrumental part in the revolts that led to the ousting of presidents Goni and Mesa. The extent to which the MAS government will be able to subordinate this movement to the party's interests is deeply questionable.

In the Quispe interview, the peasant leader lays out his understanding of the principal reasons for the struggle

of recent years, which he reminds us, is a struggle linked to the traditions of the past, the traditions of massive anti-colonial, indigenous insurrections against the Spanish in the eighteenth century. For Quispe the ruling powers in the territory, beginning in the colonial era and continuing after the foundation of the Bolivian republic in 1825, have always been constituted by a tiny minority elite who have stolen natural resources and transferred wealth and power to transnational corporations, all the while building institutional, social, and cultural foundations of virulent racism against the majority indigenous population. Ideologically, there has been no acknowledgment of indigenous nations; rather, they are seen as simply a part of Bolivia. Racial discrimination, class struggle, and the struggle of asymmetrical nations within the Bolivian state are denied in official mythology.

These factors, in coalescence with neoliberal economic restructuring during the 1980s and 1990s, were the backdrop to the wave of insurrections in the 2000s according to Quispe. Lamentably, for the indigenous activist, despite the fact that MAS played a marginal role in the mass movements - choosing instead to work closely with liberal non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and going so far as to support the neoliberal government of Carlos Mesa in 2004 and part of 2005 - the MAS party was nonetheless able to harness the energy and creative capacities of the masses and channel those spirits into electoral, institutional politics.

In a fascinating passage on his relationship with the current vice-president Álvaro GarcÃa Linera, Quispe tears into the vice-president for having abandoned the revolutionary cause to which they had devoted so much of their lives. He described first meeting GarcÃa Linera in 1984 after GarcÃa Linera had returned as a young man from studying mathematics at the Universidad de México, UNAM. Quispe describes the GarcÃa Linera of that moment as "super revolutionary," coming to the indigenous communities of the western highlands, eating what the people ate, and living how the people lived. Apparently, GarcÃa

Linera arrived with a US \$100 pair of shoes which he wore for the next three or four years, wearing the same dirty and rugged clothes, and rarely washing. He expressed a desire to work in the mines, prevented from doing so only because of the crash of the tin mining sector and the privatization of most of the sector in 1985.

The movement that Quispe and Garc a Linera were helping to build had two wings, according to Quispe, one left-wing Marxist and the other t pajkatarista, or indigenous liberationist, in the tradition of the anti-colonial hero of the 1781 insurrection against the Spaniards, T paj Katari. Garc a Linera was in the Marxist wing, while Quispe located himself in that of the t pajkataristas. In 1988, the group released a political communiqu  and ideological document proposing to move forward with an armed struggle in the form of the EGTK. According to Quispe, they believed, this was the only way forward in the struggle, effectively and definitively, against the "capitalist, colonialist, racist and imperialist system." The EGTK, never more than 200 members strong, started its activities in 1988.

Both Garc a Linera and Quispe were eventually imprisoned in 1992 and spent the following five years in jail. When they got out, Garc a Linera asked Quispe if he would continue with him in the struggle. According to Quispe, "I was very pleased to accept, because I suffer more from discrimination, I'm poorer than him. He is white, he could move freely in society.  lvvaro was already working as a lecturer at UMSA [the main public university in La Paz]."

According to Quispe, they maintained EGTK clandestinely up until August 2005, keeping a public face in politics through the electoral political party Movimiento Ind gena Pachakuti (Pachakuti Indigenous Movement, MIP), and the rural union institutional structures of the CSUTCB in the western part of the country. Quispe and the movement asked Garc a Linera on several occasions to run for president as MIP's candidate, or at least for Congress, but he declined all such invitations. Thus, when Garc a

Linera accepted MAS's invitation to run as their vice-presidential candidate in the December 2005 elections without consulting the bases of the movement from which he was departing Quispe rejected him then, and continues to do so, as a traitor.

For Quispe, "They [MAS] are social democrats. MAS is not a revolutionary party... above all, they're reformists. Today, we have an indigenous president, but we are not receiving what we've waited for from our brother." For Quispe, there is the liberal "democratic" path, and there is the revolutionary path. Describing the latter he says, "There's another more honest, more revolutionary path. That is the communitarian path of struggle, the path chosen by our grand men and women like Tupaj Katari, Bartolina Sisa, Tupaj Amaru and others. They, already in their times, were proposing the overthrow of the colonial system." While it's important to maintain a democratic arm of the struggle, for Quispe, there will always be another arm under their ponchos.

Describing the current conjuncture, Quispe argues that this is hardly the time for mobilization. The MAS, in his words, has "mined" the leaders from all the relevant popular bases, in the indigenous organizations, the factories, the mines, the construction unions, and other unionist federations. "They are MAS militants," Quispe declares, "and as militants they are not able to rebel against their political boss. Therefore no mobilization is going to be successful."

For Quispe, it's time for the movement to return to the bases, and to build again for a longer struggle. "I don't think Morales is going to change anything," he says, "and therefore it is upon us to struggle for total transformation, so that there are no longer rich and poor in this country, so that we share equal living conditions, so that the people are happy and content. Because all of us have to receive equally, as we live in our communities.... That is the communitarian ayllu. That is the communitarian system, and that is what must be the model that we introduce in our country."

Quispe himself, however, says he's

retiring from politics, having returned to his community near Achacachi to work the land. Whether or not his ostensible retreat from politics turns out to be real, in some ways at least, Eugenio Rojas Apaza, the mayor of Achacachi, is beginning to make an appearance as a new, prominent figure in the continuation of the struggle that Quispe described and helped to build. The veiled references in Quispe's interview to the present time being devoted to re-organizing the community bases of the indigenous peasantry in the western highlands (which are intimately connected to the histories of struggle in the urban slums, full of recent rural indigenous migrants), suggest that while there are no visible mobilizations at the moment, the power they've expressed in the past may very well be going through a period of merely relative dormancy, latent, barely beneath the surface in the western altiplano, and capable of re-emergence when a propitious moment arises.

Another possible reading of the situation in the western altiplano comes out of the Rojas Apaza interview: that the propitious moment may be nearer than it first appears. At 44 years, Eugenio Rojas Apaza's political history is reflective of a somewhat more general pattern of indigenous radicals trained intellectually in urban settings who then devote themselves to struggle, whether in the countryside or the cities. After abandoning a career as a mathematics teacher in the village of Warisata in the department of La Paz, Rojas Apaza studied sociology at UMSA where his professors included  lvvaro Garc a Linera, Raquel Guti rrez, Ricardo and Eduardo Paz, and the radical anthropologist Silvia Rivera. He subsequently spent time as a union leader and then a school teacher, only to be banned from his teaching job by the minister of education under Gonzalo S nchez de Lozada's administration. He was accused of being a guerrilla.

Rojas Apaza speaks more directly than does Quispe about engagement in the struggle around the Constituent Assembly now. The struggle in this regard, according to Rojas Apaza, is to compel the assembly constituents to

elaborate a constituyente that reflects the “will of the bases, the communities and the people.” He stresses that the Aymara struggle is not a parochial one, limited to the Western highlands. Rather, they are reaching out to movements at a national level, seeking alliances with indigenous radicals in other areas of the country.

For Rojas Apaza, the constituent assembly cannot be reduced to the work of the constituents alone, nor to a battle between political parties. Constituents need to be forced to consult the bases, to attend social movement assemblies, and community meetings and to subsequently reflect the decisions of the bases at the highest levels. At the moment, from his perspective, the assembly is turning into a dispute between officialism and the opposition, or the MAS against PODEMOS. If it continues in this direction, Rojas Apaza argues, the assembly will become completely distorted, with no future.

For the moment, the communities in the highlands are holding assemblies and meetings and developing resolutions which they plan on taking to Sucre, in an effort to intervene in the assembly process. In the present situation, according to Rojas Apaza, they are not planning to block roads and battle head-on with the government. Instead, through dialogue and demands, they are going to attempt to influence the Constituent Assembly. However, he stresses that the bases in the rural areas of La Paz, so instrumental in earlier mobilizations, are always prepared for mass actions: “We are organized, the organizations are present, living. Therefore, it is as simple as coordinating a little more and working toward mobilizations,” if necessary.

In a declaration of the militancy of this region, Rojas Apaza argues that if the Constituent Assembly fails to deliver what it was genuinely intended to do, “we will impose it through force; we have experience with change. The fact that Evo Morales is president is not because of democracy,” but rather the elections should be understood simply as the end result of an extended process. “It was the social movements who demanded the changes, and it

was through force: the massacre at Warisata [in which the military killed several people in September 2003, including a nine-year-old girl], the slaughter in El Alto [where most of the deaths of the 67 killed by the military in the 2003 Gas War occurred], the roadblocks, all of this was through force.”

Because the mainstream press and much of the left do not consistently follow developments in the western highlands, it is difficult to gauge the current process in that region. The summaries of these two rare and insightful interviews are simply an attempt to make clear the complexity of the social movement-MAS relations in the current context and to remind us that, historically, the indigenous Aymara peasants of the altiplano have been critical factors in popular movements for radical change. This is unlikely to have changed dramatically with the assumption of electoral power by MAS.

Revolutionary Miners

The Bolivian government recently released its National Plan for Development, a document which sets out in detail the parameters of the economic development model to be embraced by MAS for the next four years [20]. Bolivian economist and sociologist Lorgio Orellana Aillón reviewed the document and arrived at the unpopular but compelling conclusion that the new development model fails to break with the inherited neoliberal one, which was first introduced in 1985 [21]. The plan is predicated on the continuation of an export-led economy rooted in the exportation of non-value-added, primary natural resource commodities, most importantly hydrocarbons and various minerals already being mined. The state will have an extremely limited role to play, with financing coming from transnational corporations and external credit.

In order to ensure the “competitiveness” of the export sector, the basic foundations of the political economy will be oriented toward reducing aggregate domestic demand (or the capacity for consumption by the Bolivian

population). This means measures to keep inflation low and with minimal fluctuation of prices, maintenance of the independence of the Central Bank which will continue enacting restrictive monetary policy, measures to put a tight lid on salaries of the working class, and all the while implementing a framework to ensure “attractive” conditions for private capital to invest in the export sectors. In other words, as Orellana argues, the government’s plan posits a political economy based on “macro-economic stability” and the perpetuation of the superexploitation of the Bolivian labour force.

This approach is plainly evident in the mining sector, though, as we’ll see, popular resistance to it is mounting. As is well known, the soaring price of oil (until it recently dipped below \$60 US) has resulted in record profits for multinational petroleum corporations. It is perhaps less well known how other corporations involved in the extraction of a whole series of other minerals - iron, magnesium, tin etc. - are also recording record profits, as demand soars parallel to China’s rapid growth [22]. This international context has caused a spike in mining activity in Bolivia, drawing the sector back into the heart of economy, though still some way behind natural gas.

The paradigmatic case of the MAS government’s position on mining development is to be found in MutÃn, the largest iron deposit in the world, located in the department of Santa Cruz. For decades the MutÃn mining project lay dormant. Recently, however, spurred by the explosion of demand for iron in China and concomitantly high prices, transnational corporations made clear their interest in exploiting the huge deposits in MutÃn. Recently, Jindal Steel & Power, an Indian multinational, was granted the license for exploiting MutÃn by the Bolivian government. Mining is to begin on September 24, 2007.

The government argues that it is a tremendous deal which will result in \$200 million dollars annually in tax revenue. According to economists at the progressive think tank CEDLA in La Paz, however, of the 50 million tons of iron which Jindal will likely extract

each year, 95% will leave the country in its raw form, with only 5% being industrialized in the country. Mut  n is said to contain 40 billion tons of ore, valued at approximately US\$30 billion at today's prices [23]. According to James Petras, "Bolivia will receive an additional US\$0.50 a ton to an undisclosed   but reasonable' amount (according to the multinational corporations). Bolivia will receive 10% and the Indian Corporation... will receive 90%). [24]" A number of progressive economists have pointed out that Mut  n represents a failed opportunity of historic proportions. The MAS government could have used this window of opportunity to reconstruct the state mining enterprise, Corporaci  n Minera de Bolivia (COMIBOL), such that it could once again play the protagonist in that sector of the country's economy. Not only would this have wrestled control from transnational corporate influence in Bolivia, it would have provided a basis for contributing to a socially just development model focused on meeting the needs of the impoverished population.

If we need to register developments in Mut  n, in eastern Bolivia, as an historic loss for the Left, it is, fortunately, far too premature to say the same thing of the mining sector as a whole. Popular struggles in the mines of the western altiplano are once again erupting, with demands including the restoration of COMIBOL, the nationalization of the entire mining industry, and workers' control.

The mining industry is essentially divided into one set of workers, organized through the Federaci  n Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (Mining Workers Union Federation, FSTMB) and employed by the state mining company COMIBOL. The FSTMB was the heart of arguably the most militant and revolutionary trade union movement in Latin American for much of the twentieth century. The other set of workers is made up of self-employed cooperative miners organized through Federaci  n Nacional de Cooperativas mineras de Bolivia (National Federation of Cooperative Miners of Bolivia, FENCOMIN).

Many of the cooperative miners barely subsist and engage in intense self-exploitation in order to survive, while a privileged sector of the cooperative miners does much better. Moreover, cooperative mining actually involves the class exploitation by some "cooperative" associates of others. Rather than hiring employees, some wealthier cooperative miners sign on "business associates" (other poorer cooperative members) to work for them. The workers in these relationships are not paid a salary, but instead are given a small chunk of whatever they are able to extract from the mines. Increasingly these workers are women and children. The workers in these situations, unlike the COMIBOL workers, therefore have no security, no fixed salaries, no benefits, and are not provided any protection from existing labour laws [25]. In the past, the national leadership of FENCOMIN formed alliances with neoliberal political actors, including mining magnate and reviled ex-president Gonzalo S  nchez de Lozada [26].

It is the privileged layer of the cooperative miners which is represented by the MAS through the Ministry of Mining and Metallurgy. In a pre-electoral arrangement between FENCOMIN and MAS, cooperative miners pledged their support for the miners in exchange for their particular interests being represented in the government in the event of a MAS victory. The MAS certainly delivered, appointing the ministry to W  lter Villarroel, a former leader of the cooperativistas. More revealing still is the fact that Pascual Guarachi, the current president of FENCOMIN, recently confirmed that Villarroel is still a registered member of the cooperative "La Salvadora" of Huanuni. The privileged cooperative miners are attempting to influence the party into facilitating shared risk contracts between cooperativistas and transnational mining companies. They are also trying to expand their activities through the takeover of mines currently operated by COMIBOL, such as Huanuni, Caracollo, Barrosquira, Telamayu, and Colquiri. These takeovers and the politics of the cooperative miners are being resisted by the FSTMB miners who are demanding that COMIBOL be

restored to its former, formidable status as an important state enterprise [27].

In late September, FSTMB miners radicalized their efforts to push Morales toward a socialization of the mining industry. Over 200 miners, with the support of almost a thousand indigenous peasants, blocked the highways connecting Oruro to Cochabamba and Potos  , cutting traffic flow to a large part of western Bolivia. The banner of their struggle was the nationalization of the mining sector, with the immediate demands that the state create 1,500 jobs and invest money in the refoundation of COMIBOL. The government initially responded to the miners and peasants with a lurid campaign of defamation, calling the protesters "provocateurs" and "Trotskyists." Eusebio Gironda, adviser to the president on mining affairs, reportedly told the representatives of the protesters that unless they abandoned their intransigent stance, no representative of the government would even bother negotiating them. This backfired wildly, as the miners and peasants fortified their positions and declared that they would now not even consider negotiations unless the vice-president or president came to Oruro. A pact was formalized between the unionized miners of Huanuni and the local affiliates of the central peasant federation, CSUTCB.

These developments are profoundly inspiring, putting into action the positions assumed at the general assembly of the FSTMB on July 4, 2006. In that assembly the miners agreed to struggle for the nationalization of the mines without compensation for the transnationals currently operating in the sector, the consolidation of COMIBOL as the sole enterprise with the right to exploit mineral resources in the country for the benefit of the people, and for the management of the company to be put under collective worker control [28]. In this emergent conflict, the legitimacy and leftist credentials of the government is being challenged squarely from below. While Evo Morales in various speeches earlier this year proclaimed that the government was theoretically behind re-nationalizing the mining industry,

in practice every move of the government has been to support the cooperative miners and the attraction of transnational capital into the sector. During the height of the conflict Villarroel told La Razón that the protests were impeding the government's search for foreign investment to reactivate the mining sector: "The government guaranteed legal security for foreign companies to invest in mining," Villarroel lamented [29]. How this conflict plays out could be fundamental to determining the dynamics of the Bolivian process in the months and possibly years to come.

Postscript: The Bellicose Right and Tragedy in the Mines

As I was finishing this article, events took a dramatic turn, demanding an immediate response here, even if the situation on the ground remains fluid and indeterminate. First, I deal with the tragedy of the mines, before closing with a warning about the escalating possibilities of a right wing military coup in Bolivia.



The basic facts of the last week, insofar as there is clarity at this point in time, are as follows. On Thursday, October 5, cooperative miners stormed the Huanuni mine and attacked miners employed by COMIBOL, the state-owned mining enterprise. The COMIBOL miners fought back, and in two days of intense exchange of gunfire and dynamite between the two sides, between 11 and 21 people were left dead (there are wide variations in press reports), while between 60 and 80 people were injured, some of whom could presumably die in the coming days [30]. The mine is located in the mountain of Posokoni which contains the largest deposit of tin in South America, tin which is, furthermore, relatively pure and easily extractable. Huanuni is a town with 19,428 mostly indigenous inhabitants, located roughly 45 kilometres outside of the city of Oruro, in the province of Pantaleón Dalence, in the department of Oruro. Mining is, by far and away,

the principal economic activity in the area.

The battle started, by most accounts, early Thursday afternoon when the cooperative miners, who had assembled earlier to plan the invasion, exploded the compressor of the mine which provides oxygen to the miners inside. This was an effort to force the COMIBOL miners to exit the mines, such that the cooperativistas could take it over. While they say they aimed to take the mine peacefully, they launched the first dynamite, and could not have expected anything but a fierce response from the state-employed miners.

In the current situation, the better part of the Huanuni mine is worked by COMIBOL miners, unionized locally in the Sindicato Mixto de Trabajadores Mineros de Huanuni (SMTMH), which is affiliated with the national federation of miners FSTMB. For much of the twentieth century the Huanuni miners in particular, and the FSTMB more generally, were the pillar of Bolivia's revolutionary left. Their power was dramatically reduced in 1985 when the neoliberal (counter) revolution began with the privatization of most of the mines and the "relocation" throughout the country of almost 30,000 newly unemployed miners. Along with the SMTMH miners in the Huanuni mine, but in much fewer numbers, work the cooperative miners.

Witnesses agree that a large number of deaths occurred in a single blast, when a dynamite stick exploded in amongst the piles of dynamite situated near an entrance to the mine, piles the cooperativistas use daily to work the mines. The live stick of dynamite set off the rest in what one witness described as an "atomic" explosion. The fighting spread to the town and in addition to the central battles between male miners, women and children affiliated with both sides also engaged in battles both at the site of the mine and in town.

Houses were burnt to the ground, while others suffered lesser forms of damage. Despite the fact that both the FSTMB and the COB called for the government to send military troops into the area to protect the state

miners from the attack initiated by the cooperativistas, the military was not sent in, and Evo Morales did not issue a public statement, allowing the vice-president Garc a Linera and the party's central spokesperson Alex Contreras to represent the government. 700 police were sent in, but were apparently incapable of stopping the events on Thursday during which time most of the blood was shed. The military was in a "state of alert," but were never given the go ahead by the executive. On Friday morning, according to Associated Press, "members of the mining cooperative rolled three tires packed with explosives down the side of the mountain toward town, causing an enormous explosion." [31]

A temporary truce agreement was agreed to by the two sides through the mediating efforts of the human rights ombudsman, Waldo Albarrac n, and the Minister of the Presidency, Juan Ram n Quintana. There is little indication of how long the pact of truce will last, however, given that none of the underlying issues have been dealt with. The most significant development, and a precondition for the state miners to accept the peace accord, was the move by the government to replace W lter Villarroel with Guillermo Dalence Salinas as Minister of Mines, as well as replacing Antoni Rebollo with Hugo Miranda as president of COMIBOL.

In La Paz an emergency assembly of the Central Obrera Boliviana (Bolivian Workers Central, COB) was held. Those assembled decided that an indefinite general strike is a genuine possibility in the coming week. Executive secretary of the COB, Pedro Montes, a Trotskyist militant who defeated his MAS opponent in the last general convention of the COB, declared himself to be on a hunger strike until the government had fully and competently committed itself to pacifying the situation at the Huanuni mine. A group of COB leaders who approached the presidential palace in La Paz to make their demands heard were met with tear gas, while one was struck by police.

Different social sectors affiliated with the COB have radicalized their positions in the last 48 hours, some of

them now calling for the nationalization of all the mines in Bolivia. At the emergency COB meeting, it was a common demand shared by constituents that the mines must be returned to the public property of the state, including those mines currently controlled by cooperativistas, and that all mines must be run under workers' control.

It is fundamental to situate this basic narrative of events in the broader context out of which it grew, otherwise the interests of the players involved and the role of the MAS government can easily be obscured and/or distorted. As was indicated in our discussion above, beginning as far back as 2002 the prices of various minerals mined in Bolivia were increasing substantially in reaction to accelerated growth in Asia, and especially in China. This fomented renewed disputes in western Bolivia as state-owned miners sought to re-embolden a workers struggle for the nationalization of the mines while cooperativistas attempted to make inroads into new mines, while shrinking the area of the mining sector controlled by the state, and therefore under the influence of the radical unions. Cooperativistas since 2002 have fought to make inroads in the Empresa Minera Huanuni (Oruro), and Caracoles, Colquiri and Viloco (La Paz).

The specific case of the Empresa Minera Huanuni has its own specificities, but needs also to be understood in this wider setting. We ought to remain ever aware of the intimate linkages between the cooperativistas and the mining ministry under the Morales government. The Empresa Minera Huanuni was privatized through a "shared risk" contract in 2000 during the Sánchez de Lozada presidency. The British transnational Allied Deals Minera Huanuni (ADMH) paid US\$501,123 and promised to invest 10.25 million dollars in the following two years, to enter into the shared risk contract.

Allied Deals has subsequently become RBG Resources and, according to many sources, having failed to fulfill its investment commitments, lost its shares in the Huanuni mine. On June

5, 2001, according to this understanding, the shares of RBG passed back into the hands of COMIBOL. Moreover, the FSTMB and the COB argue that irregardless of RBG's failure to fulfill its investment commitments, the "shared risk" contract was unconstitutional anyway, because the Bolivian constitution disallows the privatization of the mining sector in any situation, but certainly without the approval of Congress. As president, Sánchez de Lozada by-passed Congress in this deal just as he had when he privatized the hydrocarbons industry in 1996.

The cooperativistas, of course, hold a different view of the matter. They claim that they have bought shares from RBG and therefore have a right to administer the mines in their private interest. In amidst the muddiness of the legal waters, it seems quite clear that whatever shares the cooperative miners may have "bought" off RBG, they were not RBG's to sell [32].

Turning to the culpability of the MAS government, I think it is important to keep in mind the relationship between MAS and the cooperativistas, as well as the general political economic policies adopted by the government in the sector during its first 8 months in power. If we understand this, our measure of the government's responsibility for the deaths of the miners does not rest simply with the delayed and insufficient military and policing response to the attack orchestrated by the cooperativistas, as important as it is to unearth the still unclear internal governmental reasoning behind this.

The cooperative miners, given the close relationship they held with the Minister of Mining, were likely betting on the unwillingness of the government to intervene against them in this conflict. And, indeed, Villarroel clearly, passionately, and publicly aligned himself as minister of the state with the cooperative miners in the events of Thursday and Friday, before being dismissed from the position. All of this is all the more vital to consider given than prominent leftist intellectuals, such as Heinz Dieterich, have quickly apologized for the MAS's response and blamed COB and other

representatives of the state-employed miners for intransigence, and, essentially an ultra-left position that is feeding the right-wing attempts to destabilize the country. I believe this to be an untenable socialist position if we review the relevant facts of the broader scenario [33].

Whether or not the protests and road blockades of late September by the state-employed miners for the nationalization of the mines, and subsequently their armed stand-off against the provocative and violent incursions by the cooperativistas, has led the MAS government to shift its policy in mining in a more radical direction is as of yet unclear. At one level, there has been at least symbolic change, evident, for example, in the alteration of the Minister of Mines and the presidency of COMIBOL. The new Minister of Mines, José Guillermo Dalence, is an ex-leader of the FSTMB. The new interim president of COMIBOL, Hugo Miranda Rendón, was until this appointment the representative of the workers in the directorship of COMIBOL.

Also, in a Saturday address to cocaleros president Morales had this to say, according to Dan Keane of Associated Press: "Mining concessions where there has not been investment must return to the hands of the government," Morales told Indian coca farmers in the Central Chapare region on Saturday. He gave no further details about government plans for undeveloped mining concessions." [34] While this falls short of the demands coming from the state-employed miners, and while Morales has often spoken of wanting to "nationalize" the mines even while his government makes this impossible, it is not impossible that there has been a change of direction as the country polarizes and the stakes become greater. In his first, long-awaited public declaration following the tragedy in the mines, Morales acknowledged, "Until now in the issue of mining we have not complied with the Bolivian people." [35] For their part, the cooperativistas are worried about the seemingly altered direction of the government with regard to the mining industry. President of FENCOMIN, Pascual Guarachi, has bitterly announced that with his new

attitude Morales has ruptured the alliance between the government and cooperativistas, not least because Guarachi feels Morales is placing blame for the mining deaths on the shoulders of the cooperativistas [36].

The situation in the mines has come to a fork in the road, as the editors of *Econoticias* have argued, and which path is chosen as an exit to this crisis is of monumental importance. Aloft in the air is the possibility of a move toward the nationalization of mines without compensation and the establishment of workers control, or, conversely, the advance of the cooperativistas together with the transnational mining companies who today control over two-thirds of mining production in the country. The overarching goal of the latter, of course, is the "privatization-cooperativization" of the remainder of Bolivia's mineral deposits.

Let me now turn to the second instrumental change in the political environment over the last days. The far-right currents leading the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija have actually started planning and preparing a referendum against the decisions made by MAS and allied parties within the Constituent Assembly, especially the recent clear declaration that the assembly will be re-foundational and originario which would mean that the processes of building this new constitution stand above the existing three levels of state: the executive, legislature, and judiciary. It seems increasingly likely that the far-right has abandoned the process decisively and is therefore looking for any means necessary to implement its will (the will of the rich, light-skinned minority).

In an extremely threatening development, the position of the far-right was bolstered by the Supreme Court's rejection of the Constituent Assembly's re-foundational character, deeming the assembly to be of a derivative and reformist character at most, and arguing that the most robust reading of the two-thirds rule advanced by the far-right is in fact the correct reading of how procedures have to be followed within the assembly. In response, Morales

denounced the Supreme Court as one of the sectors of the state diametrically opposed to change, calling it a residual artefact of the colonial state [37].

Ralph Miliband's famous thoughts on the state in capitalist society, if we were to add a dimension of racial privilege, are a particularly salient guide to understanding the Bolivian court's decision: "... the notion of judicial independence requires to be considered rather more broadly, for it tends in its restricted sense to obscure some major aspects of the judicial role in these systems.... One such aspect is that judges of the superior courts (and of the inferior courts as well for that matter) are by no means, and cannot be, independent of the multitude of influences, notably of class origin, education, class situation and professional tendency, which contribute as much to the formation of their view of the world as they do in the case of other men." He continues, "We have, in this respect, already noted that the judicial elites, like other elites of the state system, are mainly drawn from the upper and middle layers of society: and those judges who are not have clearly come to belong to these layers by the time they reach the bench. Moreover, the conservative bias which their class situation is thus likely to create is here strongly reinforced by the fact that judges are, in many of these systems, also recruited from the legal profession, whose ideological dispositions are traditionally cast in a highly conservative mould."

It has also been reported that the prefects of the "media luna" departments, in what was intended to be a clandestine affair, recently visited Washington where they were encouraged to continue their destabilizing tactics. The private Bolivian media, much of which is owned by large capitalists with diversified interests and investments in areas such as agribusiness in eastern Bolivia, is playing its role in fostering destabilization of the MAS administration, aligning itself with the politics of the "media luna." Meanwhile, reminiscent of their role in the Chilean coup of 1973, the often-reactionary transport truckers are planning to block roads in the coming

week or so.

What is the most alarming development, portending the possibility of a right-wing military coup, is to be found in a new report by Heinz Dieterich. Dieterich writes that a few weeks ago officials in the Bolivian police approached generals in the Bolivian armed forces to measure the disposition of key elements of the armed forces toward a coup d'état orchestrated by a joint action of the coercive wings of the state apparatus. The scheme came to light because one of the "key elements" in the armed forces declined participation in the conspiracy and informed president Morales of the plot.

Such is a rough, impressionistic sketch of the contours of the state of affairs in Bolivia. As I have argued here, multiple exit routes to the current crisis are possible. Terrible counter-revolution and hopeful revolution from below are both on the table. Whether winds turn in a favourable direction over the short term will depend on the willingness and capacity of the radical social currents to stay alert and ready to mobilize, while inside the MAS the left currents of the party fight to turn around the lamentable character of the government in its first 8 months. Ideally, the far left and indigenous organizations - such as FEJUVE-El Alto, COB, sectors within CSUTCB, the Coordinadora in Cochabamba, the Landless Movement (MST), radical indigenous movements in the east, the Aymara radical indigenous peasantry of the altiplano, among others movements throughout the country - would seek and call for expanded forms of grassroots popular power, such as those which were emergent in January-April 2000 (Cochabamba), September 2000 (major sectors of the altiplano), September-October 2003 and May-June 2005 (major areas throughout the country, but most dramatically in the mega-slum of proletarian indigenous inhabitants, El Alto.) Such organs of popular demanding arms from the MAS government to protect it from the potentially imminent onslaught from the right, as well as efforts to dissuade important sectors of the military and police from taking part in any such coup attempt, could prove

determining factors in circumventing counter-revolutionary advance, and, at the same time, open up further the possibility of forcing the Bolivian path into an increasingly revolutionary direction.

Unfortunately, such organs at the present time are not as visible as they once were, and left currents within MAS are not explicitly organized with coherent political programs, but rather more closely resemble loose coalitions orbiting around various

prominent and less-prominent individuals in the party. Nevertheless, the levels of self-organization of the exploited and oppressed working classes and indigenous nations has been extraordinary in the country in recent years, and, paradoxically, even vice-president Álvaro García Linera, the least radical important leader of the party, early this month signalled the possibility of having to call on the masses for armed defence against the right. Even if a coup attempt happens in the immediate future, as some are

clearly predicting, and even if organized and radicalized sectors are not yet armed from below, it is possible that such a coup attempt might be disrupted and defeated, such as in April 2002 in Venezuela, by spontaneous unarmed uprisings in the urban slums - in Bolivia the countryside would also be key - and the defection from the would-be coup-making faction by factions loyal to the government (or simply to the poor indigenous majority of the population) within the armed forces.

Shadow of war or war of shadows?

7 October 2006, by **Houshang Sepehr**

This campaign is a psychological war aimed at forcing the Islamic Republic to accept the demands of the United States and its allies. The latter want the Teheran regime to submit to the policies that they propose for the Near and Middle East. According to the evaluation made by the warmongers, Teheran still needs three, four or five years before becoming a member of the nuclear club. There is then still room for diplomacy.

The occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq by US imperialism and its allies has increased mass protests across the region. In the absence of revolutionary and democratic alternatives, it is the Islamic Republic of Iran which profits from the mass discontent in the region. It is exactly for that reason that the Teheran regime can allow itself to prevaricate before the demands of the US and its allies.

The Iranian regime has drawn the lessons from the fate of the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The difference between the Iraq war and the threat of war against Iran is that the Saddam Hussein regime did not possess weapons of mass destruction, whereas Iran undoubtedly seeks to equip itself with nuclear weapons. On the eve of the second Gulf war, Saddam not only affirmed, even giving

proof, that he did not possess weapons of mass destruction, but produced myriad initiatives and concessions destined to deter the threat of intervention. Iran and specifically its president are doing the opposite.

Certainly, the Teheran regime denies that it is trying to acquire nuclear weapons. But at the same time, the Iranian leaders do everything to give the impressions that they are on the way to acquiring them. They seize every opportunity to stress their progress in the military area and in particular in the area of rockets capable of hitting Israel. Far from hiding their nuclear ambition, they proclaim it at every opportunity and often in a fairly ambiguous way so that civil and military ambitions are difficult to distinguish.

The regime incessantly repeats that Iran is risking nothing because the US is weakened and durably bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan. They cannot run the risk of opening a new front when US public opinion is already demanding the withdrawal of the GIs from those countries. Moreover they evoke the kinds of reprisals that they would not hesitate to use in case of attack, including the sending of thousands of kamikazes against the Americans in Iraq, Afghanistan or around the world. The new regional

situation after the war between Israel and Hezbollah, which is sponsored by the Teheran regime, renders a rapid and strong reaction from the great powers yet more difficult.

Nuclear energy, heritage of the Shah

The Iranian nuclear programme goes back to 1974. It certainly had a military dimension, but that was not a problem since it was about countering the USSR. Iran was the ally of Israel, which Washington had allowed to acquire the bomb. To better understand the circumstances we should recall the geopolitical situation of the region at the time. In the early 1960s, the war waged by China on its borders with India led the latter country onto the nuclear road, with a discreet initial aid from the US, and then the Soviet Union. India had nuclear weapons at the end of the 1970s and the latter became operational in the mid 1980s. This situation, judged intolerable by the Pakistani military, ended a little afterwards in an inevitable Chinese riposte: Beijing supplied the technical means for a Pakistani counter bomb which would lighten the burden of the Chinese deterrent.

In the ballistic area in particular, China went through the intermediary of its North Korean ally to avoid any US sanctions. But the operation, much beyond the limited means of Pakistan, was financed at 75% by Saudi Arabia, which saw the prospect of a real "Islamic bomb", with the Emirates and Malaysia covering the rest. It was then Pakistan which, in the 1980, put the Saudis in contact with the Chinese (with whom they did not then have any diplomatic relations) so that the Wahabite kingdom could buy medium range missiles, an act which for the fundamentalist kingdom represented the first step in the direction of nucléarisation. In exchange for the Sinai, Sadat had to renounce the Egyptian nuclear programme, which was partly frozen and partly transferred by Mubarak, after Sadat's assassination, to Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1980s. Different rival Arab projects emerged at the same time, in Algeria, Libya and even little Syria. None of these projects has so far led anywhere definitive, and the renouncement by Qaddafi will undoubtedly be definitive.

It is in this charged context that Iran wished to acquire nuclear weapons from the time of the Shah onwards. The US was favourable, to dissuade a possible Soviet attack on the northern frontier of the country, which was, with its Afghan extension, the sole line of Western defence in contact with the USSR without nuclear protection. It was France which took responsibility, with the Eurodif factory, for supplying the Iranian leaders of the time with the initial technical means. Iran then entered with France into the capital of Eurodif, a European consortium for the enrichment of uranium, and obtained the right to use 10% of production, for civil purposes, from the Pierrelatte factory (which alone covered a third of world needs). Parallel to this, Iran loaned 1 billion dollars to France, through the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). The repayment of this sum was to begin from the entry into service of Eurodif, that is in 1981. After the revolution of 1979, Iranian participation in Eurodif was frozen. In his book "Atomic Affairs", Dominique Lorentz shows the link between the importance of the contentious Eurodif/Iran and the terrorist attacks of 1986-88 in France.

Iran abandoned this project, but the Iranian leader would resume it in the mid-1980s against the threat of invasion by Saddam's Iraq. The first Iraq war and above all the US strikes against Baghdad in 1991 demonstrated the vulnerability of their country

After 1988, France capitulated and settled the Eurodif dispute. After the 1988 armistice with Iraq, Teheran turned toward the Soviet Union, in exchange for supporting the Russians against the independence movements in Azerbaijan and central Asia and withholding any support to the Chechen cause (which rested increasingly on the Saudi-Pakistani Sunni axis).

"America is stuck"

Playing on this theme the current Iranian leaders have tempted the Europeans, in search of an original policy, and then the Americans themselves who, behind the bombast of propagandist proclamations, have been offered precious aid by Teheran, first in Afghanistan to consolidate the anti-Taliban regime of Karzaï and, at present, more fundamentally still, in Iraq: without the constant support of grand ayatollah Sistani, himself Iranian in origin, the situation of the Americans in Baghdad would be much more difficult, much more precarious. For the major fight in Iraq really opposes combatants who are either foreign or have been trained abroad: on one side troops allied to the US, and on the other armed elements linked to the Guardians of the Iranian revolution (Pasdarans and Iraqis previously exiled in Iran), like the Al Badr brigade. It is a low intensity war between the US and Iran which is taking place on Iraqi soil.

But if the Iranians have here chosen pragmatic realism against Al Qaïda and Sunni Salafist fundamentalism, it is of course in order to receive a payback. The constant moderation of the Teheran regime in relation to Moscow has been rewarded by technical nuclear cooperation from the Russians. Their tacit alliance with India allows them to isolate their Pakistani rival. Their support, as unilateral as it is unstated, for the US

occupation of Iraq will certainly bring the inexorable arrival of a Shiite regime in Baghdad, but that is hardly sufficient. For in consolidating itself, the new Iraqi regime will become more liberal than its Iranian neighbour and ally. After that, the Washington-Washington exchange will become much less advantageous, much more even-handed than is the case today.

That is why many Teheran, and not only the extremists, believe that this is the best time to come out of the non-proliferation treaty and declare openly that Iran is a nuclear power.

The US, despite the bluff of the sabre rattlers, has neither the military means, nor the political means (the stability of Iraq would be at stake), nor even the financial means to respond: a simple blockade of the Persian Gulf would lead to a doubling of the oil price and a freefall for the dollar. Committed in Iraq, Afghanistan, several African countries, Indonesia and the Philippines, the US cannot today wage a ground war against Iran. As to the Islamist regime in Iran, to avoid this land war, it has decided to militarily pin down the US in Iraq. As witnessed by operations which involve the encirclement, indeed the bombardment of Iraqi towns.

The main Iranian leaders and in particular the current faction in power are convinced that "America is stuck" because of the Iraqi fiasco; because of the threat of a massive entry of the Shiite population into insurrection alongside the Sunni population; the rapidity of the deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan; the chaos in Palestine; the permanent terrorist threat underlined by the recent bombings in Egypt and the reappearance of Bin Laden; the fear of the use of the oil weapon; the increasingly high cost of the military operation launched by Bush; and the evolution of public opinion in the US itself.

One could add the stoking up of anti-Americanism across the entire world, the refusal of China and Russia, linked economically and militarily to Iran, to back an armed intervention to which even Tony Blair is opposed; the successive defeats in their respective

countries of those western political leaders who backed the intervention in Iraq (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Norway, Japan and so on); the dizzying rise in oil prices which has enriched all the US's adversaries or competitors, and finally the upheavals in virtually the whole of Latin America. For all these reasons, then, the US cannot take the risk of another conflict.

EU in search of markets

Officially, the historic states of the European Union (EU) would like to stop the mullahs from having an Islamic nuclear bomb. But more concretely, they would like to take back from the Russians the market in Iranian nuclear supplies. In the role of challenger, they should be more friendly than the Russians: Henceforth, the wish to recapture this very lucrative market from the Russians links in with current and very significant European interests in Iran.

Because the Europeans continue to sign new contracts of great scope. And the Iranian market is not negligible: in 2004 Iranian imports ran at USD26.6 billion; industrial machines and plant (44.8%), metals and minerals (22.3 %), basic chemical products (14.5 %) and agro-alimentary products (9.7%) represented the main areas. Overall 51.8% of imports come from the European Union.

Germany occupies first place with 11.4% and France second with 8.5% of the Iranian market. In particular they supply industrial machinery and spare parts. In the motor vehicle sector, France occupies first place with 1.3 billion dollars (2nd place for China with 360 million dollars). In May 2006 Renault successfully bid for a joint-venture (of a value of 2 billion dollars) with its L90 (Logan) project, with the aim of manufacturing an annual total of 300,000 cars in Iran with the hope of rising to a million each year around 2010-2012. The global stock of French investment in Iran is (according to French sources) 35 billion dollars outside Buy-Back contracts signed in the oil and gas sector by Total.

That is why the EU will do all it can to ensure that the Islamic Republic escapes sanctions from the UN Security Council. Because sanctions would restrain economic relations with Iran. Europe wants a negotiated solution: that is to say it wants to obtain the market for supplying Iran with civil power stations and nuclear fuel. Excluded from Iraq, the Europeans now consider Iran as an alternative base: and hope to win a privileged access to its oil. But that does not mean that the European leaders are ready to capitulate completely to the Iranian regime. Witness the declarations of Angela Merkel, on January 29, 2006 in Jerusalem, that an Iran possessing nuclear weapons "is not just a threat to Israel, but also to the democratic countries of the entire world". For his part, Jacques Chirac unleashed a political storm in Europe in threatening "the leaders of states who would have recourse to terrorist means against us, as well as those who would envisage using, in one manner or another, weapons of mass destruction", and stating that the France's "response" "could be conventional, could be of another kind".

But Germany and France have also sought to counterbalance US bellicosity by advocating "negotiations" and even the British government has stated that there "was no military option" in this crisis.

Strengths and weaknesses of Russian and Chinese arguments

Neither Russia, nor China, which is seeking to secure its supplies of Iranian hydrocarbons, would hesitate to use their Security Council veto to protect Teheran's back.

A long held objective of Russian policy - coinciding with that of Iran - has been to put an end to the political, military and economic presence of the US in Iran and to bring all its weight

to bear on the region as a whole. Thus, the sale to Iran of nuclear know-how and conventional weapons (more than 8 billion dollars of weapons between 1999 and 2005) is one of the most effective and productive means of attaining this objective.

There are doubts as to the acceptance by the Russians of economic sanctions against their Iranian partner: bombing means destruction and reconstruction contracts and nothing on arms sales, whereas sanctions mean the end of Russia's economic supremacy in arms sales and nuclear technology.

Russia has rejected the US demand to cease its (civil) nuclear cooperation with the regime of Teheran and especially the construction of a nuclear power station in Bushehr. The Russian minister of foreign affairs has published a communiqué according to which each country is free to cooperate with the country of its choice, each country should have the right to decide on the manner and conditions of its cooperation with another country.

Everything indicates that the Russians have energetically aided the mullahs in their enterprise of industrial enrichment of uranium for military use. The declaration concerning the freedom of industrial cooperation between Iran and Russia represents a counter attack, but Russia has no other choice than to cede: the Russians will choose neutrality.

China receives 14% of the oil necessary to its rapidly growing economy from Iran. At the end of 2004, China and Iran signed an agreement worth 70 billion dollars in oil and natural gas for a period of 30 years. The Chinese state oil company, Sinopec, has obtained a share of 51% in the recently discovered Iranian oilfield of Yadavan, whose reserves are estimated at three billion barrels.

Finally, US imperialism has built a string of military bases in central Asia, practicing a strategic encirclement of China and seeking to control oil resources against both Russia and China. The US is pursuing a policy of containment of China, by strengthening the military links with Japan and providing India (a country

which has not signed the Non Proliferation Treaty and which possesses a significant nuclear arsenal) with very advanced nuclear technologies to form a counterweight to China.

Things are evolving very slowly between the US, the Russians and the Chinese: we can already conclude that there is an agreement of principle between the great powers on the “undesirable” character of the regime of the mullahs and this for many reasons, like the need to strengthen the stability of the Middle East and Central Asia, the necessity of securing oil supplies, the war on terror and the struggle against nuclear terrorism and so on, but if the Russians and Chinese can accept that the US takes on this “job”, they would like to be sure that their interests in Iran do not suffer too much as a consequence.

But everyone knows that things can go further and that for the moment there is still much to play for. The regime of the mullahs know that it can avoid “giving in” while multiplying its provocations because it tells itself it can in any case sign in extremis (with the EU or with Russia) to “prevent escalation” or “save peace”. On the other hand, the Westerners know that they can let the crisis deepen because at any time they have the means to

bomb Iran and to destroy its installations if they judge it necessary.

Israel

There remains one more serious threat to Iran’s passage to the status of nuclear power: Israel. Certainly, the dispersal of the atomic centres renders the Israeli riposte hazardous.

And the Iranian bomb, which will only be truly operational in three or four years, will definitively protect the country against direct blackmail by its Saudi and Pakistani neighbours, with whom relations are much more tense in everyday reality than with Israel.

The offensive options are, on the other hand, more limited: For an uncertain strike on Israel (the anti-missile defences of the Jewish state are also progressing rapidly), the Tsahal submarine permanently immersed in the Oman sea and equipped with cruise missiles with multiple warheads could vitrify Teheran, the oil zone, the religious capital of Qom and several dispersed nuclear centres, with a precision of around 15 metres. No doubt the mullahs, less and less fanatical and increasingly given to the simple joys of existence, would ultimately choose life rather than death.

Also as has happened since the 1950s with all the new successive holders of the atomic bomb, the apparent tragedy which threatens at this time between Israel and Iran can also end in a dramatic turn of events. The US does not wish to compromise still further its position in Iraq. Iran would have a lot to lose if it sacrifices, like pawns, its positions of strength among the Shiite Arabs of Iraq and Lebanon. And Israel could not advance as quickly on the Palestinian terrain if a broad regional crisis broke out.

Immediately, the Iranian bomb bothers Pakistan and Saudi Arabia much more than Israel. And Jerusalem and Teheran share a very friendly relationship with India (and secondarily with Turkey). If an acceptable compromise can be found to the crisis, perhaps a great upheaval in the Oriental world would take place under our eyes.

Today, it is certain that the Islamic regime wants to secretly procure the nuclear bomb like Israel. However the goal of the Iranian regime is not to destroy Israel as the warmongers claim. For some years Iran has renounced the myth of the Islamic Revolution in the Muslim world to privilege the interests of the class in power, the sole preoccupation of the regime.

An Islamic “Chinese model”?

7 October 2006, by Houshang Sepehr

Corruption and poverty

Corruption has submerged the regime. A number of officials have immensely enriched themselves through the black market, favoured by the state monopoly of foreign trade. Others have become rich by buying the previously nationalised industries at very low prices. According to “Forbes”, Rafsandjani and his family have scooped up nearly a quarter of

the country’s wealth. Which makes him one of the richest men in the world, but above all the most powerful man in the country. The Iranians say often that their country has become a Rafsandjani private limited company. It is a capitalist-mafia regime, which divides Iran into territories, each of which is directed by a family, the Rafsandjani have oil, pistachios, arms sales, the Jannati have the monopoly of sugar, the Pasdarans have the cosmetics and drugs markets, and so on.

According to a classification of global assets in foreign exchange and gold held in world banks, the Islamic Republic has more than 40 billion dollars, or half of the assets of the USA, which makes it one of the richest countries of the world. Still, according to this report, the majority of these assets are held in personal accounts, unlike many other states.

These figures are all the more notable in that, at the same time, the foreign debt of the Iranian Republic is growing unceasingly. A foreign debt of

around 24 billion dollars and a Central Bank debt of 11 billion dollars weigh on the economy of the country and on the margins of manoeuvre for the Islamic regime.

With hydrocarbons at record prices, oil-exporting countries have been able to repay their debts early (Russia 15 billion dollars; Mexico 7 billion dollars; Algeria 8 billion dollars), but the Teheran regime has not succeeded in repaying its debt and it is even over-levered. This debt, which was 12.5 billion in 2004, rose to 17 billion in 2005 and 24 billion in summer 2006. Iran has not been able to profit from the current explosion of oil prices, because the regime does not sell Iranian oil at market prices but in Buy-Back, between 8 and 18 dollars a barrel. . And if, according to the US Energy Information Center, Iran is the country which has most increased its oil and gas reserves during 2005, the ageing oil industry needs significant investment: Iranian investment needs in the oil sector alone are estimated at 100 billion dollars.

Unemployment is rampant among the young. In the absence of reliable statistics, many analysts estimate the rate of unemployment at 40%, if not more. The Iranian population has grown rapidly since the revolution. Today half the 70 million Iranians are under 18 and it is estimated that it is necessary to create a million new jobs every year to provide work for these youth. In fact the growth of GDP has fallen. The problem of unemployment is particularly sharp among urban youth. And young graduates are especially sensitive to the absence of job openings.

A recent UN report reveals that more than 550,000 children in Iran live on less than 1 dollar per day. This same report reveals that of 35.5% of the population live on less than 2 dollars per day while the price of oil has tripled in the past two years.

Officially, this regime is a republic with a "Parliament", opposition parties and even "reformers", but in fact it remains a sectarian ideologically totalitarian regime that one can not even characterise as a "dictatorship" inasmuch as the power of clans is immense and the grip of sectarian

religious rules on the lives of Iranian individuals is omnipresent.

A creeping coup d'État?

It is in this political and economic context that the Iranian people were asked to participate in the farce that the Islamic regime calls "presidential elections". The term "election" appears inappropriate to the extent that the candidates in the presidential elections were selected in advance by a council which issued an opinion on the level of their competence and their religious virtues. For the first time following the contradictions and tensions of the adverse factions of the regime the electoral masquerade of 2005 was supposed to take place in two acts.

Out of more than 1000 possible candidates only five were not rejected as unsuitable by the Council of Guardians, which is a watchdog of the Islamic constitution. The five candidates selected were: MoÃn, then Minister of Culture (candidate of the reformers); the former president Rafsandjani, strong man of the regime; Karoubi, then president of the Islamic Parliament; Ahmadinejad, the mayor of Teheran, unknown to the public and outside the political scÃne; and a fifth with no known past. The first round created a surprise: with 6.5 millions votes the unknown Ahmadinejad arrived first, beating the all-powerful Rafsandjani.

In the second round only 29 million voted out of 47 million registered; Ahmadinejad received 17.5 million votes. It was obvious that the vote for Ahmadinejad meant above all a big "no" to Rafsanjani, as someone who has incarnated the regime since the beginning. Each time the people are given a chance to express themselves, they seized the opportunity and used it as a plebiscite to express rejection of the regime.

But another new element surfaced in this election: the role of the Guardians of the Revolution. The regime had used the whole state apparatus and its whole propaganda machine to promote Ahmadinejad. Faced with the total defeat of the so-called "reform"

in the economic and political areas, it turned towards a new strategy. At the economic level, a pure liberalism, on the internal political level absolute repression - an Islamic "Chinese model"!

Some years ago, a translation of the famous book by Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order", appeared in Teheran. The editor received an order for 1,000 copies, half of the print run. The distributor recalls: "We wondered who had ordered such a quantity. We had the reply when we saw a military lorry arrive belonging to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRCG), which took away the books". Yahya Safavi was among the officers who received a copy of the book; today he is general, commander in chief of the Guards. another copy went to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a former reserve officer of the Guards, now president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In recent years, the regime has slid, by various means, into the hands of the Guards. A former officer of the IRCG, Ibrahim Asghazadeh, has himself said that the new political-military elite had fomented a "creeping" coup d'État. While the former president Mohamed Khatami roamed the world, seeking to impress the Western public with quotations from Hobbes and Hegel, the Guards have built an impressive popular network throughout Iran and created two political organisations which are highly respected: the Usulagaran, or fundamentalists, and the Isargaran, those who sacrifice themselves, each attracting the young generations of officers, civil servants, entrepreneurs and intellectuals.

In 2003, the network gained control of Teheran municipal council and appointed Ahmadinejad to the post of mayor. Two years later, the latter emerged as the presidential candidate of the Guards, beating the former president Rafsanjani, one of the richest men on the planet and a representative of the old guard of mullahs on the road to disappearance.

Who is Ahmadinejad?

Born in 1956, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad grew up in the poor neighbourhoods of southern Teheran. In 1975 he went to university with the intention of becoming an engineer.

During the Iranian revolution Ahmadinejad became a leader of the Association of Islamic Students, an ultra-conservative Islamic fundamentalist body. He then played a role in the seizure of the US embassy in Teheran in November 1979. During the repression in the universities in 1980, which Khomeiny called "the Islamic cultural revolution", Ahmadinejad and his organisation played a key role in the purges of dissident teachers and students, many of whom were arrested then executed. The universities stayed closed for three years and Ahmadinejad joined the Guardians of the Revolution.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Ahmadinejad worked in the "internal security" of the Guardians of the Revolution and acquired a reputation as an interrogator and a cruel torturer. For a while he was a torturer in the deadly prisons of Evin, where he participated in the executions of thousands of political prisoners in the massacres of the 1980s. In 1981, he

joined the brigades of the terrible prosecutor-executioner Lajevardi, who operated from the Evin prison where, every night, they executed hundreds of prisoners. He was then nicknamed the "finisher": he who fired the last bullet at those who were dying.

Involved in the terrorist operations of the regime abroad, he masterminded a series of assassinations in the Middle East and in Europe, notably the Kurdish leader Ghassemlou, assassinated in an apartment in Vienna in Austria in July 1989.

After serving several years as governor of the towns of Makou and Khoy in 1993, he was appointed cultural adviser by the minister of culture and Islamic orientation. Some months later, he was appointed governor general of the province of Ardebil. In 1997, the newly installed Khatami government relieved Ahmadinejad of his post and he returned to the university, but his main activity was to organise Ansar-e-Hezbollah, an ultra-violent Islamist militia.

After becoming mayor of Teheran in April 2003, Ahmadinejad set out to build a powerful network of fundamentalists, Abadgaran-e Iran-e Eslami (literally "those who develop an Islamic Iran"). Working closely with the Guardians of the Revolution,

Abadgaran succeeded in winning the municipal elections of 2003 and the legislative elections of 2004. Abadgaran described itself as a group of Islamic neo-fundamentalist youth who wished to revive the ideals and politics of the founder of the regime, Ayatollah Khomeiny. It was one of many ultra conservative groups set up on the orders of the supreme guide, Ayatollah Khamenei to combat the faction of the outgoing president Khatami after the parliamentary elections of February 2000.

The balance sheet of Ahmadinejad is typical of that of the men chosen by the entourage of Khamenei to give a new face to the identity of the religious elite. But the façade is thin. And the despotism apparent.

Ahmadinejad is the first non-mullah candidate to become president since 1981. His modest origins and his demagogic and populist discourse have won him, at least during the presidential election, the confidence of a part of the population, particularly among the poor who feel abandoned by the corrupt religious chiefs. But Iran is on the verge of a very deep social crisis. After more than 20 years of the reign of the mullahs, the masses have accumulated much anger and frustration. The movements of youth and open divisions inside the regime are clear signs of a crisis which is mounting.

A Caliphate disguised as a republic

7 October 2006, by **Houshang Sepehr**

In fact, the Islamic Republic is a mode of government in which power, supposedly emanating directly from God, is exercised by those invested with religious authority. The theory of velayat-e-faghi (rule by theological jurisprudence), cornerstone of the Iranian system, the concept on which the whole institutional edifice rests, is the sole theocratic theory in the Muslim world. At the same time, and this epitomises the complexity and

paradox of the Iranian model, this theocratic nature combines with a republican dimension appealing to popular participation, and an electoral apparatus close to the democratic model. A network of institutions whose members are nominated and controlled by the powerful and conservative Supreme Guide of the Revolution thus coexists with an elected president and parliament.

Religious authority

- The Supreme Guide: The real head of state is the Supreme Guide of the Revolution, theoretically elected by an Assembly of Experts of 86 religious members, an assembly itself elected for eight years by direct universal suffrage with a generally very low rate of participation. The Guide is appointed for life and can only be relieved of his functions in exceptional

circumstances. The Guide intervenes most often in relation to legislative power; but also dominates the judiciary and designates the head of the judiciary system. The Guide also designates six members (out of twelve) of the powerful Council of Guardians of the Revolution, the commanders of the armed forces, the imams for Friday prayers and the director of the radio and television station. The Guide also validates the election of the president and sets the guidelines for the general policy of the regime.

- The Council of Guardians of the Constitution: Under the control of the conservatives, this institution is the body that exercises the most influence in Iran. The Council is made up of twelve members who serve for six years, six theologians appointed by the Supreme Guide, as well as six jurists (generally also clerics) designated by the judges and whose nomination is approved by the parliament. The Council has to approve legislation passed by the parliament. It has the power to use its right of veto, if it considers that the laws passed by parliament are incompatible with the Constitution and Islamic law. The Council can also prevent any candidate from running at the parliamentary and presidential elections, or being elected to the Assembly of Experts. All initiatives aimed at reducing the discretionary powers of the Council have until now foundered. The Council had barred more than a thousand candidates at the 2005 presidential election, with only five being authorised to run.

- The Expediency Discernment Council: This council, created by a decree by Khomeiny in 1988, includes about thirty members, all designated by the Supreme Guide. It is a consultative organ that subjects its conclusions to the Supreme Guide. This institution is at the same time authorized to settle all litigation of a legal nature between the parliament and the Council of Guardians. In certain exceptional circumstances, the Expediency Discernment Council can exercise a legislative function. In October 2005, the Supreme Guide gave the Council the "attributes of surveillance" to follow the activities of the other branches of the government,

delegating a part of his powers within the limits of the Constitution.

- The Assembly of Experts: The members of the Assembly of Experts nominate the Supreme Guide, closely follow his performance and can remove him if he is deemed incapable of fulfilling his duties. The Assembly holds two ordinary sessions every year. The direct election of 86 members of the Assembly is organised every eight years. The next elections are envisaged for 2007. The members are elected for a term of eight years. Only religious figures are authorised to run for election. The candidacies are examined by the Council of Guardians.

- The judicial system: The Iranian judicial system has never been able to shake off the weight of politics. Until the beginning of the 20th century, it was under the control of the clergy. The system was subsequently secularised. But after the revolution, the Supreme Court abrogated all law deemed not to conform to Islam. New laws, inspired by Sharia - the legal code of Islam - were introduced. The judicial system guaranteed that Islamic laws are applied and defined the country's legal environment. The system is also empowered to nominate six members of the Council of Guardians. The head of the judicial system is nominated by the Supreme Guide to whom he personally reports. In the course of recent years, the ultra-conservatives have used the legal system to counter several reforms. To do this, they have imprisoned reformers and journalists, while forbidding the publication of newspapers of the reformist current.

Republican dimension

- The president is elected for a term of four years, and is limited to two consecutive terms. The Constitution presents the president as the second personality of the country. As head of the executive wing of the regime; the president is charged with guaranteeing the application of the Constitution. But in practice, the prerogatives of the president are limited by the religious figures and the

conservatives, as well as by the authority of the Supreme Guide. It is the latter, and not the president, who controls the armed forces and takes decisions in the area of security, defence and foreign policy. Candidates for the presidency are carefully examined by the Council of Guardians. This institution opposed hundreds of candidacies during the 2005 elections. That year, the conservative mayor of Teheran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, acceded to the post of president, after having defeated Hachemi Rafsandjani (who was president from 1989-1997) during the second round of the election. Rafsandjani had denounced "an illegal campaign aimed at discrediting him". Ahmadinejad replaced Mohammad Khatami, elected president in May 1997, who had not succeeded in persuading the Council of Guardians to approve the adoption of important reforms. He encountered numerous obstacles, after the conservatives regained their parliamentary majority in 2004.

- The government: the members of the government are appointed by the president. Their nomination must be approved by parliament. The latter had in 2005 rejected four ministers chosen by president Ahmadinejad. Parliament can also remove ministers. The Supreme Guide is broadly involved in the management of matters linked to defence, security and foreign policy. The Council is placed under the authority of the president or vice-president who are responsible for the activities of ministers. The government of Ahmadinejad includes two religious figure, six pasdaran and no women.

- Parliament: The Islamic Republic also has a Parliament, whose 290 members are elected by universal suffrage by the whole of the population aged over 15. Candidates in parliamentary election have to be approved by the minister of the interior, the minister of information and above all the Council of Guardians, or Council of Surveillance. Parliament has the power to introduce and vote on laws, and can summon or dismiss ministers, or the president. However, all laws adopted by the Parliament must be deemed compatible both with the Constitution and above all with Islam, by the very

conservative Council of Guardians of the Revolution. So far as parliament is concerned, the Council of Guardians controls entry through deciding on the validity of candidacies, and output through its judgements on the conformity of the laws that the parliamentarians have drawn up. A majority of elected so-called "reformers" entered parliament, in 2000. It would be different four years later, in 2004: A good number of reformist candidates were not authorised to take part in the elections. The current president of the Parliament however has family links with the Supreme Guide, the Ayatollah

Khamenei, one of whose sons is married to his daughter.

The armed forces

The armed forces comprise the Guardians of the Revolution (Pasdaran) and the regular forces. The two bodies are placed under a joint general command. The main heads of the army and the Guardians of the Revolution are appointed by the Supreme Guide and only report back to this person. The corps of the Guardians of the Revolution was created after the revolution of 1979,

to protect the new leaders and the institutions. They also have the role of fighting those who are opposed to the revolution. The Guardians of the Revolution are powerfully represented in the other institutions. They control the volunteer militias who operate in every town.

This rapid overview of the institutional edifice of the Islamic regime of Iran shows clearly that this system has nothing to do with a Republic or a modern rational state. It is a theocratic regime disguised under a republican mask, in other words a "Caliphate".

The Year the Ice Broke

3 October 2006, by **Murray Smith**



Kruschev's sensational secret speech

Far and away the most important series of events in 1956 concerned the Stalinist states of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and indeed the whole world Communist movement. At the beginning of 1956, the Communist parties of the world, those in power and those in the capitalist world, seemed united under the leadership of the Soviet Union, just as they had been in 1945. Stalin, who had died three years earlier, was still officially revered and placed on a par with Marx, Engels and Lenin. However even during Stalin's lifetime cracks had begun to appear. Tito and the Yugoslav communists, who had made their revolution without Stalin's approval and with very little help from the Soviet Union, were considered a threat to Soviet hegemony in Europe and excommunicated in 1948.

Throughout Eastern Europe, Communist Party leaders who were considered even potentially independent of Moscow were purged and very often executed. It was not yet

widely known to what extent the Vietnamese and Chinese parties, while bowing to Moscow, conducted their own independent policies. In the case of China, underlying tensions would several years later explode into open conflict.

Fairly quickly after the death of Stalin, his successors began to make changes that marked a certain break with the past. Political prisoners were freed on a massive scale. The accused in the so-called "doctors' plot", the last of Stalin's projected show trials, were rapidly freed and exonerated. Measures were taken to improve the standard of living of the population. Within the top party leadership there was a secret debate on Stalin period, which was criticised to varying degrees by all its components.

Emphasis was placed on "collective leadership". In foreign policy, there was a move towards what became known as "peaceful coexistence" with the capitalist world. In a spectacular turnaround, there was a rapprochement between the Soviet leadership and the heretical Yugoslavs. In Eastern Europe, the victims of the purge trials were being rehabilitated in piecemeal fashion and

old-style Stalinist leaders were removed or under threat.

There had also been in June 1953, two serious movements of revolt in Eastern Europe. In Czechoslovakia the regime quelled a workers' revolt with its own forces. In East Germany Soviet forces intervened and the repression was much more severe. In both cases revolts that started from economic demands soon expressed democratic and national aspirations.

These elements enable us to understand, retrospectively, that the momentous events of 1956 did not fall from the sky. They nevertheless came as a shock to contemporaries;

The first shock came in February 1956. Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor at the head of the Soviet Communist Party, made his famous "secret speech" at the 20th congress of the CPSU denouncing the crimes of Stalin. The contents of this speech were initially intended only for the congress delegates. However they were gradually made known to lower levels of the party and to foreign communist leaders, some of whom then made them known in their own parties. (Though others, like the leadership of the French Communist

Party, did nothing of the sort and continued for decades to refer to "the report attributed to comrade Khrushchev"). Following some fairly accurate reports of the contents of the report in the Western and Yugoslav press, it was in June made known in its entirety to the whole world, courtesy of the CIA.

The report denounced in quite unambiguous terms Stalin's crimes - the mass deportations, including of entire peoples, the extent and methods of repression, the purges and executions of communists. But there were limits. There was no rehabilitation of the Left and Right Oppositions of the 1920s, of Trotsky, Bukharin, Kamenev, Zinoviev, nor of their followers who were liquidated in the 1930s. The communists who were rehabilitated were mostly Stalinists who had opposed Stalin and been arrested and often liquidated, with or without a public trial, from 1934 onwards, in the purges of which the show trials in 1936-38 were only a small part.

The report had the effect of a bombshell. In the capitalist world, the revelations of the extent of the Stalinist terror profoundly shook communists who had for decades defended en bloc Stalin, the CPSU and the Soviet Union against all criticism.

In Eastern Europe, the denunciation of Stalin, coming in the wake of the rapprochement between Moscow and Belgrade, the loosening of highly centralised control and the rehabilitation of some of the victims of the purges of the late 40s and early 50s created a climate of instability. This was a dangerous time for the Stalinist regimes, who were disunited, unsettled by the changes in the Soviet Union and forced to make some concessions to the population. When a dictatorial regime starts to make concessions there is always the danger that it will simply embolden opposition rather than placate it. And that is exactly what happened, in two key countries of Eastern Europe.

In Poland movements developed in both intellectual circles and in the working class and were reflected in an inner-party struggle. In June, in the city of Poznan, a strike and

demonstration took on an insurrectionary character and was repressed, with more than 50 dead. But the insurrectionary movement did not spread.

There was a groundswell of opposition to the old Stalinist regime, a ferment of ideas, the creation of workers' councils. But many workers placed their hopes in a peaceful change of leadership at the top of the Communist Party. Wladyslaw Gomulka, a party leader who had been purged in 1948, but unlike many of his peers in other countries not executed, was making a bid for power and was seen as embodying a socialism that was more democratic and more independent of the Soviet Union. Gomulka rode to power on the back of the mass movement, convincing centrist elements in the party and finally, in a tense confrontation in October, the Soviet leadership, that he would not change the fundamental bases of the regime nor the alliance with the Soviet Union. He was true to his word and subsequently managed to demobilise and/or repress the radical anti-Stalinist forces and reassert party control.

In Hungary the same ingredients produced a quite different outcome. Rumbling unrest finally broke out into insurrection on October 23 when a demonstration of solidarity with Poland was harshly repressed. Neither the party nor the army could control the situation. Sections of the army went over to the insurgents, forcing a temporary withdrawal of Soviet troops. But the reformist Communist Imre Nagy, recalled as Prime Minister in extremis, was unable to control the situation as Gomulka had. He finally gave in to popular national and democratic aspirations and announced Hungarian neutrality and the return to a multi-party system. This was too much for the Kremlin. A second Soviet intervention on November 4 drowned the insurrection in blood.

Only three days separated the peaceful resolution of the Polish situation and the beginning of the insurrection in Hungary. Whereas the first seemed at the time to confirm the possibility of a self-reform of the Stalinist system, the second showed what could happen when the

Hungarian people went too far. Khrushchev had managed in the space of just a few months to demolish the myth of Stalin by revealing the extent of the terror - and then demonstrate that in spite of attempts to liberalise the system, anything that went as far as real democracy or national independence would be met with tanks. The effect on the communist movement was devastating. It brought the biggest wave of resignations since the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939; The British party, for example, lost one third of its members in a year. 1956 can really be said to mark the beginning of the long-drawn out decline and fall of Stalinism.

One reason that made it easier for the Soviet Union to intervene in Hungary was the Suez affair, which illustrated another aspect of the international situation, the decline of the old colonial empires and the rise of national liberation movements. In July the radical nationalist regime of Nasser in Egypt had nationalized the Suez Canal, which had been owned by an Anglo-French consortium. The reaction of Britain and France was to concoct a secret agreement with Israel, which invaded Egypt on October 29. Britain and France then intervened "to protect the Suez Canal", provoking widespread protest both at home and in the Arab world. They were finally obliged to withdraw ignominiously under pressure from the new hegemonic imperialist power, the United States.



British troops in Port Said

This was the last occasion on which the two European colonial powers tried to act in any serious way independently of the United States. Britain had already, since the Second World War, begun to settle into its new role as America's number one ally, in the so-called "special relationship". Suez was its last fling.

Both Britain and France were in the process of losing their colonial empires. In spite of some local insurgencies in Malaya, Kenya and South Arabia Britain was to make the painful transition from a colonial to a

post-colonial power with a certain degree of aplomb. Suez was a humiliation, but otherwise Britain managed in most cases to hand over power to local elites. The process was much more painful for France, which had already suffered a catastrophic defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the first time a colonised Asian people had militarily defeated an imperialist army in a pitched battle. France had just accorded independence to Morocco and Tunisia, in order to concentrate on holding onto Algeria. There a further defeat lay some years down the road, though it was not yet obvious. When it became so De Gaulle precipitously granted a usually very formal independence to France's African colonies, which it continued to dominate.

1956 saw the beginnings of a new and non-Stalinist Left in the imperialist countries, of which former CP members were an important part. It was uneven and expressed through a series of often ephemeral political formations and groupings. Nevertheless it constituted a bridge towards the new radicalizing generation which began to appear at the beginning of the 1960s. It was also after 1956 that the most consistently anti-Stalinist and anti-imperialist forces regrouped in the small Trotskyist movement began to grow in a very modest way, something which would accelerate with the youth radicalization of the 60s.

Sometimes events take place which go virtually unnoticed at the time, but have important consequences in the

future. In December 1956 a small group of revolutionaries in a leaky old boat landed on the coast of Cuba and began the process that would lead to the first socialist revolution in the Western hemisphere. July 1956 was the date when according to the Geneva Agreement of 1954, free elections should have been held to unify Vietnam, but never were due to the opposition of Washington and its Vietnamese puppets. The unification of Vietnam was to be a longer and more bloody process. And the two revolutions, Cuban and Vietnamese, were to be powerful magnets for the radicalising generation of the 1960s.

Full text: Report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, by Nikita Sergeevich Krushchev

Support the Livio Maitan study centre

3 October 2006, by **Centro Studi "Livio Maitan"**

Livio Maitan died on 16th September 2004. Born in Venice in 1923, he participated in the resistance movement during the Nazi occupation. Obligated to seek refuge in Switzerland, he was interned at the end of the War. In 1947, he joined the Fourth International, and was a leading member of the latter from 1951 until his death.



Livio Maitan

From the creation of Rifondazione Comunista onwards, he held without interruption a national leadership role in the party to which he devoted most of his energy during his later years. From 2001 he followed with interest the activities of the anti-globalisation movement and often participated in it.

Maitan's indefatigable activism was always accompanied by reflection and political and economic analysis, which bore fruit in an innumerable series of articles and many books. Amongst the

latter, over and above the translation and editing of a large part of Trotsky's writings, his works treated subjects as wide and varied as the nature of social classes in Italy, world economic crises, the history of the PCI from its origins to the present, the theoretical heritage of Gramsci, as well as the historical trajectory of China, especially the Cultural Revolution. At the end of his life, Maitan even found time to write his memoirs and a history of the Fourth International, which will be published shortly.

His activity as a political leader as well as his theoretical reflection were characterised by great rigour, ethical and intellectual, without ever becoming dogmatic. On the contrary, what remained constant throughout his nearly sixty years of political engagement was his attention to the concrete dynamics of the relationship of forces between the classes and the historical and political dialectic, combined with a real openness to debate and confrontation with different positions.

To create a research centre in his name and dedicated to his memory means, first of all, to take up his inheritance. However, to take this up means to make it live in the present. The research centre will thus have the following concrete objectives:

1. To create a library which can give the general public access to the many works on politics, economics, history of the workers' movement, revolutionary Marxism and so forth which Livio Maitan had collected over many years and which he left for all to be able to use.

2. To pursue Livio Maitan's historical, political and economic thought via the promotion of research in the domains of the history of the workers' movement and of an open and critical Marxism, via the organisation of conferences and discussion sessions at a national and international level, and via the publication of new research and the encouragement of young students and researchers engaged in work in this field.

The Livio Maitan research centre thus sees itself as a contribution to the renewal of Marxist debate at an international level, by stimulating the encounter of currents of critical thought which have different traditions and cultural references, as well as between activist and academic currents and between older and younger generations which have grown up in different intellectual and political contexts.

For all these reasons, we support the creation of the "Livio Maitan" Research Centre (centrostudiliviomaitan@email.it), with which we hope to collaborate over the next few years.

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Conditions of membership:

There are two types of membership of the Centro Studi Livio Maitan:

10 euros: simple membership: you will be regularly informed of the initiatives of the Centro Studi and have the right to a discount of 20% on all of its publications.

30 euros: you will have the right to receive gratis all of the notebooks and publications produced by the Centre throughout the year (see the activity programme).

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conferences

The Centre wishes to promote a series of events open to a wide public for in-depth discussion and reflection on various themes related to Marxist studies. One of the aims will be to pursue the research carried out by Livio Maitan on the world economy, the history of the international labour movement, the analysis of class structure, as well as on more specific subjects such as the contradictions and developments of the Chinese phenomenon.

We plan in particular to organise throughout the year roundtables bringing together researchers, trade unionists, political and movement activists, which will serve as regular moments of reflection and which will result in small publications and notebooks.

In January will take place the annual conference organised by the Research Centre, which this year will be entitled: "Thinking with Marx, Rethinking Marx" and which will be a space for two days of discussion and debate on the relevance of Marxist analysis today. The conference will take place in Rome over 25th-26th January 2007.

In addition to the above, we will host a series of other initiatives, such as book launches, seminars and debates which will be organised throughout the whole year.

Library and Website

The books, journals and documents left by Livio Maitan will constitute the starting point for the constitution of a library dedicated to Marxist studies and the history of the labour movement: this year will be devoted to cataloguing this bibliographical heritage with a view to it being opened to the public in a short period of time.

In addition to the library, the Research Centre plans to construct a website which will be a useful research tool, with the online publication of a part of Livio Maitan's Œuvre, in particular his articles, archival documents and

Programme of Activities of the Livio Maitan Research Centre, September 2006-2007

Seminars and

essays, and with the creation of a thematic bibliographical repertory which will carry information not only on monographs but also on dissertations and articles published in different languages.

Publications

Via our collaboration with the publishing company Alegre, we plan to launch a series of publications edited by the Research Centre: in particular, a volume of papers from the January conference and notebooks stemming from the roundtables organised over the course of the year.

Promotion of New Research

In order to promote new research in the areas treated by the Research Centre, we will grant scholarships for masters students or doctoral students.

The Crushing of the Hungarian Revolution

3 October 2006, by Phil Hearse

The crisis in Hungary was part of a generalised crisis in the eastern bloc. At the end of June 1956 there had been riots in the Polish town of Poznan against price rises and the repressive regime, initiating a movement which would lead, against the wishes of the Russians, to the installation of Poland's "reform Communist" Prime Minister Gomulka.

The developments in eastern Europe followed turmoil in the Soviet Union itself. After the 1953 death of Stalin, his successors, first Malenkov then Khrushchev, sought to develop a new road forward, given the misleading name of "de-Stalinisation". This meant the attempt to create a more collective leadership style amongst the bureaucratic tops, a lessening of the terror and GPU repression, the release of thousands of political prisoners; more freedom for the arts; and crucially the attempt to define a new economic way forward, involving less emphasis on heavy industry and more emphasis on consumer goods.



These events shook up the faithful Stalinist bosses in the "satellite" countries of eastern Europe.

By 1953, the situation in Hungary had reached breaking point. Successive wage and price reforms, and the priority to heavy industry, were crushing the workers. The repression by the hated AVO secret police, many

of them recruited from wartime fascists, was among the most brutal in the eastern bloc. Although quickly hushed up, 24-hour and 48-hour strikes were beginning to break out.

Fearing the situation would explode, on June 28 Soviet leader Malenkov secretly summoned Premier Rakosi and other Hungarian leaders to Moscow. Rakosi was told he was no longer prime minister and would be replaced by Imre Nagy, who would implement a "New Course". Rakosi, however, was allowed to keep the position of party first secretary.

On July 4, 1953, Nagy announced his New Course. The expansion of heavy industry would be slowed to give more priority to consumer goods. The forcible collectivisation of the peasantry and persecution of "kulaks" would be stopped. Compulsory purchase of government "peace bonds" would be ended. Bureaucratic excesses would be ended. Some small-scale private business would be allowed. And intellectual and artistic freedom would be extended.

To strengthen his hand against the Stalinist diehards around Rakosi, Imre Nagy (pronounced 'Nodge') formed a non-party mass organisation, the Popular Patriotic Front (PPF), with himself as president. But infighting continued inside the leading bodies of the Communist Party.

In the 18 months that the New Course was applied, it has been estimated, the real standard of living of industrial

workers increased 12%. Food shortages disappeared, and the supply of consumer goods increased. Political prisoners were released, and freedom of expression extended. Forced collectivisation of the peasants stopped.

But the changes brought some dislocation, especially the closure of a number of large factories. When Nagy was put out of action by a mild heart attack in February 1955, and Soviet attention was diverted by the overthrow of Malenkov, the Rakosi faction struck, calling a special party central committee to remove Nagy from the premiership.

A whole indictment was drawn up against Nagy, including being responsible for grave economic "dislocation"; but his gravest crime was the creation of the PPF, allowing the development of political activity beyond the bounds of the Communist Party monopoly. Successively, Nagy was deprived of his position in the politburo, forced to give up his seat in parliament and finally expelled from the party. But he refused to organise his supporters, even after his expulsion, fearing that he would be accused of "factional activity".

In less than a year, however, the Stalinist leaders of eastern Europe were hit by another thunderbolt: Khrushchev's "secret speech" at the 20th party congress in Moscow, which fiercely attacked the Stalin regime, accusing Stalin of mass murder and a reign of terror. Once transcripts of the

speech leaked out, the world "Communist movement" was in turmoil. It could not escape most Hungarians that the indictment against Stalin fitted their own Stalinist leader Rakosi — a close personal friend of Stalin — like a glove.

Despite Imre Nagy's caution, discontent seethed, especially amongst students and intellectuals. The Literary Gazette published articles demanding freedom for writers; the party journal *Szabad Nep* made disguised attacks on Rakosi; the Petofi Circle, a Communist youth discussion club, raised criticisms of the leadership and allowed Julia Rajk, wife of a Communist leader murdered by the regime, to make a much publicised plea for posthumous justice for her husband.

Most startling of all, the state-run Writers Association congress in June 1956 refused to accept the "recommended list" for its new executive and had a proper election instead. This greatly embarrassed Rakosi, then in Moscow.

Upon his return, Soviet leaders Mikoyan and Suslov, who had followed him to Budapest, walked into his office and demanded to discuss the situation. He presented them with a master plan to purge "right-wing deviationists". They responded by telling him that he was no longer prime minister of Hungary. Mikoyan told him that a long holiday in Crimean would do him good; and that one of his bureaucratic lieutenants, Erno Gero, was now prime minister.

But the removal of Rakosi failed to end the crisis. Gero's appointment hardly inspired the critics of the old regime, being rightly interpreted as the replacement of one Stalinist bureaucrat by another. *Szabad Nep* made the astoundingly rebellious suggestion that Nagy should be brought back. The ceremonial reburial of purge victim Leslo Rajk on October 4 was turned into an anti-government demonstration by students, 300 of whom marched to the monument to Count Batthany, executed by the Austrians in 1849. The march was an obvious attack on "foreign occupiers" — i.e. the Russian army.

The nation's attention was now gripped by events in Poland. On October 19, the Polish politburo, plotting the return of "reform Communist" leader Gomulka, was stunned by the sudden arrival of a delegation of Soviet leaders — Khrushchev, Bulganin, Molotov and Kaganovich. They told the Poles that the appointment of Gomulka was off, as was their plan to oust the Soviet-appointed Polish defence minister, Marshal Rokossovsky. The Poles told the Russians to go home, which, astoundingly, they did, accepting that their authority had been flouted.

The Russian climb-down in Poland brought events in Hungary to fever pitch. If the Poles could — apparently — break free of Soviet tutelage, then why not Hungary? Mass meetings at the Budapest Polytechnic and the Writers' Association on October 22 proposed a mass demonstration for the next day. In Hungary's second town, Szeged, students announced the formation of a new, independent, student organisation. Student groups throughout the country formulated programs of demands, which typically included the call for "an independent socialist Hungary", the return of Imre Nagy and a new economic policy and party leadership.

October 23 was the first day of the revolution. Tens of thousands, including a huge contingent from the Communist youth organisation DISZ, marched through Budapest. Peter Veres, president of the Writers Association, made the main speech, calling for "an independent national policy based on the principles of socialism" and the involvement of the workers in running the factories.

At 5pm the crowd marched to the parliament building. A few thousand made a detour to the city park, where they pulled down the huge statue of Stalin. In the early evening Gero made a radio speech denouncing the demonstrators in uncompromising terms.

Following this, a section of the demonstrators made their way to the radio station in Sandor Street to demand an end to biased coverage, and a delegation of 16 was admitted to present their demands. When the

delegation failed to return, it was obvious they were being held prisoner, probably by AVO guards. The crew of a Hungarian army tank tried to force admittance to the radio station and were met by gunfire, killing dozens of people in the crowd.

As battles with the AVO developed across the city, workers at the armaments factory in the industrial suburb of Csepel raided their own stores and freely distributed weapons and ammunition to the crowds. By 1am, hundreds of thousands of people thronged the streets.

Gero now took two fateful decisions. First, he called on the Soviet army to intervene; second, he handed the premiership to Imre Nagy, while keeping the post of party first secretary for himself. He hoped that by giving Nagy the formal position of prime minister he would appease the insurgents, but events had gone too far.

Next morning, in Budapest the workers and, especially, youth were doing battle with Russian tanks.

Within two days the revolution was being spearheaded by the main centres of the Hungarian working class: Csepel, Jupest, Dunapentele and Miskolc. In the town of Gyor, near the Austrian border, an insurrectionary committee took over the running of the town and proclaimed its own "National Revolutionary Council". In Miskolc, as a precursor of what was to follow more generally later in the revolution, the leading role was taken by the workers' factory councils.

The demands being put forward by the movement were overwhelmingly for independence and democracy within a socialist framework. In general, such demands included specific references to the end of the political monopoly of the Communist Party and its satellites, and for free elections. Yet as news of the revolution spread worldwide, the Communist parties everywhere spread the lie that the uprising was "counter-revolutionary" and led by fascists and CIA agents.

Journalists on the spot knew this was untrue. Peter Fryer, correspondent of the British Communist Party paper,

the Daily Worker, later author of *Hungarian Tragedy*, sent back reports outlining the true nature of the revolt, which were all suppressed. Correspondents of other west European Communist journals had the same experience.

The fighting in this first phase lasted until the end of October. Militarily, the revolution was victorious. The youth of Budapest and other cities rapidly learned how to deal with tanks, using Molotov cocktails. The Hungarian army spontaneously joined the insurgents against the Soviet troops. Many Russian troops fraternised with the rebels, until the intervention of their officers.

In Budapest, the fighting revolved around two giant battles, the first at Szena Square, where young workers and students under the leadership of a 59-year-old former bus driver, Janos Szabo, held back Russian tanks using barricades and Molotov cocktails. The other symbolic battle was at the Killian barracks, where a veteran Communist tank officer, Pal (Paul) Maleter, led Hungarian army units against a Russian siege.

After one day of fighting, the Hungarian Stalinist leadership got another lightning visit from the Soviet leaders. Mikoyan and Russian party ideologist Mikhail Suslov denounced the actions of Gero as insane, especially calling in Russian troops. They were furious with the Soviet commander Thikonov for allowing his men to be dragged into the conflict. They removed Gero as party first secretary and replaced him with Janos Kadar, who had been a victim of Stalinist purges in the late 1940s.

There was now a joint leadership of Nagy and Kadar, who appealed for an end to the revolt and promised reforms once the fighting stopped. The fighting did start to die down around October 30, because the Russian tank attack had been defeated — and they withdrew from the main towns.



Imre Nagy

While the movement had largely been

initiated by students and intellectuals, once a serious struggle developed, the mass of the working class rushed into the breach. While the demands of the movement were overwhelmingly posed in terms of national independence and democracy within a socialist system, some of the political parties repressed by the Stalinists reappeared. These included the Social Democratic Party, the National Peasant Party and the Smallholders Party. Tiny groups expressing extreme nationalist and semi-fascist views also emerged.

Given the character of the Stalinist regime, it would have been extraordinary if procapitalist forces and sentiments had not emerged in an insurrectionary situation. The emergence of these organisations was utilised as key evidence by the Stalinists internationally to "prove" the counter-revolutionary nature of the uprising. It did nothing of the sort. It only showed that, as Trotsky had predicted, in the event of political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy there would be a struggle between the forces of socialist democracy and the forces of reaction. In Hungary, there was no evidence that these reactionary forces represented the feelings of the insurgent masses.

As the Russian tanks withdrew, Nagy found himself the leader of the insurgent nation. Nagy, a "reform Communist", had fought for his "New Course" within the framework of the Stalinist one-party system. He had never challenged that system as a whole. He was now faced with the choice of trying to take the movement forward, or to set his face against it.

After negotiations with the Soviet military high command, Nagy announced the formation of a new government, with Pal Maleter as defence minister. His next moves were fateful. On October 30 he announced the end of the one-party system. On November 2 he announced Hungarian withdrawal from the eastern bloc's defence treaty, the Warsaw Pact, and appealed to the United Nations to defend "Hungarian neutrality". Of course, once the Soviet tanks returned, none of the western powers lifted a finger to help the besieged Hungarians.

Much speculation has subsequently revolved around whether these moves were the cause of the second Soviet attack, or whether such an attack was inevitable anyway. Some have argued that these moves, coming within hours of the French-British-Israeli invasion of Egypt, frightened the Soviet leadership into believing they had to take decisive action against international imperialism. The truth is that whatever their reaction to the Suez events, the Soviet leaders were not going to accept a successful revolt by the workers of an east European country, for fear of its consequences throughout the region and in the USSR itself.

As Nagy made his fateful policy announcements, party first secretary Kadar announced the dissolution of the Communist Party (formally known as the Workers Party) and the creation of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, with himself, Nagy and internationally known theorist and literary critic Georg Lukacs on the preparatory committee.



Janos Kadar

The next day, however, November 2, Kadar mysteriously disappeared. On the same day, it became clear that a new vast force of Soviet tanks and artillery had crossed into Hungary and was beginning to surround towns and airports. On November 3 Nagy and his government colleagues took refuge in the Yugoslav embassy. As the Soviet attack began on November 4, Kadar reappeared and announced the formation of a new, Soviet-backed, "Revolutionary Workers and Peasants Government".

While resistance was bitter in central Budapest, some of the fiercest fighting was in the workers' districts. The workers' council of the steel city of Dunapentele led a desperate resistance around the steel plant for several days. "Red" Csepel held out until November 11.

As we have seen, the Hungarian movement was initiated by students and intellectuals, the workers only joining once the serious fighting

began. In the first days after October 23, the primary concerns of the workers were military — the need to defeat the Russian tanks. Only after the second Russian attack on November 4 did the workers turn their attention on a wide scale to building their own political organisations, the workers' councils. In part this was a reaction to imminent military defeat; the workers reached for the strike weapon and the creation of workers' councils to coordinate a new phase of the struggle.

By November 12, workers' councils had been established in several districts of Budapest and at least a dozen other working-class towns. A central council of the workers' councils of Budapest met for the first time on November 14. By this time workers' resistance had reached near general strike proportions.

The Russian leadership and Kadar promised Yugoslavia and the United Nations that Nagy could have free passage to exile in Romania. However, within 300 metres of the Yugoslav embassy, his bus was stopped by the GPU, the Yugoslavs aboard beaten up and Nagy and his comrades abducted to the Soviet Union.

By mid-November the workers' councils had become the universally recognised voice of the Hungarian workers, negotiating directly with the Russian army and Kadar. At first Kadar and the Russians tried conciliation; but as the strikes continued and the councils became

more powerful, it was decided to repress them. On November 21 Russian tanks prevented a national meeting of workers' councils. By mid-December the leading figures in the councils and strikes were being arrested and imprisoned. It was one of the tragedies of Hungary that the organisations of workers' power — the councils — emerged only after the revolution had begun to be militarily crushed.

The aftermath of the revolution was tragic. Tens of thousands of Hungarian refugees fled over the Austrian border. Up to 20,000 people, mainly youth, were deported to prison camps in Russia. After more than a year of silence, in February 1958 it was simultaneously announced in Moscow and Budapest that Imre Nagy and Pal Maleter had been found guilty of counter-revolutionary crimes and hanged.

The effect on the Communist parties in the West was dramatic. Tens of thousands left in France and Italy. In Britain, 6000 walked out of the Communist Party of Great Britain, perhaps 25% of its membership. Leading party intellectuals like historians EP Thompson and Christopher Hill, were among the most prominent defectors. Some who stayed, like Eric Hobsbawm, voiced sharp criticism of the Soviet actions. A huge debate convulsed the British party about the nature of socialist democracy.

The twin impacts of Hungary and Suez

gave huge impetus, in Britain and internationally, to a new kind left which would oppose both social democracy and Stalinism. The ideas of Leon Trotsky were an obvious place to look for a theoretical explanation of the nature of the totalitarian regimes in Russia and eastern Europe.

However, amidst the political ferment, some notable left figures took very bad positions. Trotsky's biographer, Isaac Deutscher, justified the Russian second attack, arguing that the revolution had taken an anticommunist direction [38]. For Deutscher the key question was the danger that Hungary could be lost to world imperialism.

Ironically, Trotsky in his writings on Poland, Finland and the Ukraine had warned against precisely such ideas — that the progress of world socialism could be measured in terms of the number of square miles occupied by non-capitalist states. In addition to pointing out that political revolution against Stalinism would always engender the danger of counter-revolution, he insisted that the key criterion in assessing political and military actions was their overall effect on the consciousness of the world proletariat.

The crushing of the Hungarian revolution, while "saving" Stalinism in the country for a period, in the long term — like the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 — helped to prepare the basis for its dissolution and collapse.

The Prodi II Government, the Radical and Pacifist Left, and the War

3 October 2006, by Jan Malewski

However this seemingly perfect mechanism seized up. The small radical Left - only a minority of the militants of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) and of the Party of Italian Communists (PdCI) - and the

pacifists (part of the Greens) were capable of blocking it. First of all, some days before the vote, a significant pacifist assembly met in Rome on July 15 to demand an end to all the wars, "with no ifs or buts". The

presence of senators of the radical Left at this assembly indicated a possible failure of the vote in the Senate, where the centre-left only has a majority of two... while several senators had announced their refusal

to support the Italian military presence in Afghanistan. The media leapt at the possible governmental crisis and in so doing enabled those who were opposed to the war to make their position known on a mass scale. As a result the pacifist movement remobilized, which was reflected in the opinion polls which showed the growth of the aspiration to withdraw troops from Afghanistan: finally, it was 62% of those polled who came out against the financing of the "mission" in Afghanistan.

Although the vote in the Lower House on July 18 was almost unanimous - only 4 deputies voted against - the Prodi government appeared as having been victorious with the support of Berlusconi and therefore in continuity with the man that the electors had just rejected. Trying to repair the damage, the Prodi government decided to make the vote in the Senate on this decree a vote of confidence, in other words to resign if it did not have a majority. The radical and pacifist Left - which paradoxically has more weight in the Senate than in the Lower House - was subjected to strong pressure: to bring down a government that had been established only two months

previously, which still enjoyed great legitimacy and which had not really begun to govern, to risk by so doing so to bring on new elections or the formation of a right-wing government, carried the risk of marginalizing those who did it, and especially of putting the brakes on the new rise in the mobilization of the anti-war movement. But to vote for war credits... So it was decided to vote, to take the government's representatives at their word - representatives who, panicked by the risk of the government falling, announced a "change of perspective for the mission" - and to allow Prodi six months more, because the financing of the "mission" will have to be put to the vote again in Parliament in December. But the vote of confidence was accompanied by virulent criticism of the choices that had been made up to then by the Prodi government, criticisms which were widely reported by the media.

The Prodi government therefore came out of the clash weakened, even though it managed to win time. The debate that was conducted by the radical and pacifist Left scored some points, because even though its

representatives in the Senate voted for the motion of confidence... and the financing of the war in Afghanistan, they showed that even a small minority can stand up to the government's policy, something which gave fresh confidence in themselves to the militants and the movements. And it is that, more than the vote, which will count in the coming confrontations, which are already being prepared.

We reproduce the main documents which enable us to better understand the fight that is being conducted by the Italian radical left.

Draft Resolution on Afghanistan - *Essere Comunisti and Sinistra Critica*

In the Chamber of Deputies: four against all! - *Salvatore Cannavo*

A parliament of just "giving the green light" is not a normal parliament - *Salvatore Cannavo*

A Vote of Confidence with a Time Limit - *Gigi Malabarba and 15 Senators*

No Blank Cheque, Ours is a Clockwork "Yes" - *Gigi Malabarba*

Draft Resolution on Afghanistan

3 October 2006, by Sinistra Critica (Critical Left)

We are going through a very difficult and dramatic phase of international politics. At present a new old war is re-emerging violently in the Middle East, with indiscriminate bombing of civilians, state terror and the unilateral refusal of dialogue and negotiation. A war which is added to and which is entangled with dramatic effects in the intensification of the war, from Iraq to Afghanistan, against which we have always fought.

As the appeal of the pacifist assembly of July 15 says, "the war increasingly appears as the preferred means of the most powerful states on the planet, and behind them the multinationals,

for constructing an international "order" based on domination and oppression, which engenders death, misery, and ever-increasing signs of poverty. War is thus establishing itself as a global political system, in its most repugnant version, that of US unilateralism, or through its toned-down version of multilateralism under cover of the UN and NATO".

It is against this war that we intend to fight without hesitation, because faced with war there are no half measures. If war is a system of domination and oppression - which does not reduce or weaken terrorist phenomena, as recent history has shown - "NO" to the

war is the foundation of a collective political identity of the movement, which was accumulated during the demonstrations against the war in Kosovo, then against those against the "endless pre-emptive war" that is being conducted in Afghanistan and Iraq.

That is why we are opposed to the measures being proposed by the government, which intends - after the important withdrawal from Iraq, which was the result of powerful mobilizations by the pacifist movement - to maintain Italian troops in Afghanistan, which is not only contrary to Article 11 of the

Constitution, but is opposed to the spirit and the aspiration of this movement. It is a measure which violates the undertaking in the programme of the Union, which accepted the exceptional character of votes concerning the overseas missions. [39] It is not surprising that this was defined by the outgoing Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fini, as an attitude that was "similar" to his own, thus marking the continuity with the policies of the outgoing government.

In the coming hours and the coming days the PRC will have to fight to modify the draft law that the government is presenting to Parliament, and to propose a strategy of withdrawal from Afghanistan and the ending of the Enduring Freedom mission, [40] which Italy is taking part in without there being any clarity about its real aims.

But the action of pacifists cannot be measured only on the terrain of parliamentary initiatives.

It must address the movement and serve to unleash a new course and a new unitary and radical initiative which is capable of putting the refusal of the war at the centre of the attention of the country. This initiative means today total solidarity with the Palestinian people for the establishment of a secular and democratic state, which includes the territories occupied in 1967 and which has Jerusalem as its capital. For this objective to become reality implies substantial conditions: an immediate ceasefire, Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, dismantling of the Wall, the unblocking of European aid to the legitimate Palestinian government. The Italian government must give undertakings on these

points and start by revising the military cooperation agreement with Israel. The UN must send a contingent of interposition in the occupied territories.

The withdrawal of troops "from Iraq and Afghanistan" must be accompanied by a peace initiative and by Italy undertaking to participate in civilian cooperation. This means putting in question NATO's role as a world policeman, starting with the revision of the Washington agreement of 1999.

The refusal of foreign military bases and of any presence of nuclear weapons on Italian soil is another important objective of the anti-war movement.

Lastly, we have to re-launch the campaign for the reduction of military spending and for a complete revision of new model of defence policy, which provides for the multiplication of military missions abroad, in favour of a policy of disarmament and re-conversion of the arms industry, without negative consequences for those who work in it. On all these questions we have to strengthen the mobilization initiatives that are underway and build the unitary conditions for the future. The choices which have to be made are difficult and demand a great sense of responsibility from all of us. The PRC does not intend to put in question the present framework of the government, but only to strongly reaffirm its refusal of the war, as an element that is part of its identity and its orientation - which takes precedence over parliamentary tactics. For that the national leadership of the PRC asks the government to make a gesture of being ready to make concessions, which it could do by modifying the

measures concerning international missions, thus making it possible, voting with a clear conscience, to strengthen the confidence of its parliamentary majority.

Finally, such a choice must also be made concerning the document on economic and financial programming (DPEF). In reality, this document deserves to be treated as it was by the PRC delegation in the Council of Ministers. This is an attitude that we shared and that we fully supported. The government must modify the document, which will be submitted to Parliament for approval, in particular by eliminating any references to the reduction of spending on pensions, on public employment, and on local and social budgets. Similarly any references to "moderation of wage demands" must disappear. The Prodi government was formed to carry out a rupture with the liberal policies of the past. This discontinuity cannot be carried out by envisaging cuts in social spending, a deterioration of the workers' living conditions, or a reduction of public services. On the contrary, it necessitates strongly re-launching an improvement in the living conditions of workers, starting by repealing Law 30, as well as the Bossi-Fini Law and the Muratti Law, [41] which represent the worst legacy of the preceding government.

It is in this spirit that Rifondazione Comunista will approach the parliamentary debate on the DPEF. But first of all the PRC will support the initiative of the movement against job insecurity, starting with the demonstration called for the month of October by the assembly in Rome on July 8 of the network "Stop Precarietà Ora" ["For an end to job insecurity now"].

In the Chamber of Deputies: four against all!

3 October 2006, by **Salvatore Cannavò**

Salvatore Cannavò: Mr President, I am sorry to have to make a statement

about a vote where I disagreed with my own group and my own party.

However the measure that we are voting on today, although it contains

the announcement that we are withdrawing from Iraq, which is very important, confirms the military mission in Afghanistan. This is a mission that not only the person who is speaking to you considers to be a war: this is also the point of view of NATO, which is directing operations; a mission that has in no way resolved the problems of the population of Afghanistan.

This is a mission which violates article 11 of the Constitution and which, in addition, was not part of the programme of the Union. So it has never been subjected to the judgment of the electors, nor to their approval, whereas 61 per cent of them are demanding that our soldiers come home.

Concerning such missions, the forces of the radical and pacifist Left have always expressed their disagreement, contrary to those parties of the centre-left which on the contrary have not hesitated to vote in favour of them, along with the Right and with the Berlusconi government [the deputy Fabris makes some comments].

Today this bipartisan unity is being expressed again in a way that does not seem natural to me; because of this the pressures on us in the name of the coherence of the vote are unacceptable; and some of these pressures are really anachronistic.

"No" to the war is a fundamental

element of politics. It cannot be satisfied with the illusory hypothesis of a reduction of the war. So I will vote against this measure, without that taking on the significance of a vote seeking to deprive the majority of its legitimacy or a vote of no confidence in the government [comments from some deputies of Forza Italia (Right)].

I would have preferred to be able to vote separately on the various missions, as the programme of the Union had announced. This programme, it's as clear as it could be, is today being violated, because by engaging the responsibility of the government they are trying to prevent the real fundamental discussion about the war. [comments from deputies of Forza Italia].

A parliament of just "giving the green light" is not a normal parliament

3 October 2006, by **Salvatore Cannavò**

At present, everyone's attention is concentrated on the role of the "dissidents" and on the risk of the government falling. This risk has only been avoided because the "objector" senators have chosen to agree, in an act of extreme sacrifice, to vote for the motion of confidence in the government, without however being any less in disagreement on the fundamental issue. This is a choice that the present conditions have rendered "obligatory" and which is therefore from this point of view inevitable. But the way that it takes on the form of an ultimatum is also inevitable: one can only express a vote of confidence on the war once. And never again.

But - over and above broader political choices, which also deserve to be thoroughly thought about, and which, if our newspaper agrees, I propose to come back to - it is worth asking ourselves some questions about the political situation that emerges from the vote in the Chamber. What is this

parliament in which the "No" to the war only gets four votes against 549, in other words, a majority worthy of national unity? So what is this foreign policy which wins such overwhelming agreement? Why should a deputy have to put his conscience in contradiction with his vote? How should we describe these institutions in which the highest responsibilities are put in question as a result of events and only depend on the pressures exerted by parties and coalitions on individuals who are threatened with being excluded from "political status"?

Italian policy concerning Afghanistan has given the impression of being literally dead. We could have had a debate about fundamental issues, we chose to chatter about formulas: about enlargement and self-sufficiency, about broad agreements and about the degree of the "anachronism" of parties and their component parts. Whereas we should all have been preoccupied by the horror of the civilian victims, the bombs, the blood spilt, the main

preoccupation seemed to be on the contrary to "mark" the dissidents, to intimidate them, to politically isolate them.

The dissidents were described as "bleeding hearts", even within the pacifist movement. Those who said that have forgotten that this insult has always been hurled, to demean the struggle for peace, to reduce it to a question of "conscience" and to deny that it can be, as it is for us, the keystone of our political commitment and of our perspective of changing society. Those who oppose have been declared guilty of "variable majorities", as if the measures that were put to the vote should not take account of the consensus within the majority.

A perverse form of the "grand coalition" appeared in the Chamber, but no one felt offended. The uniformity of the green lights which invaded the entire hemicycle did not provoke a scandal. On the contrary,

the few red lights that timidly shone, which represented all those who rose up "without any ifs or buts" against the war and who are much more numerous, provoked a scandal. It was a demonstration of what it costs to defend your commitment right to the end, including at the risk of disapproval from your own party.

Perhaps Revelli [42] was right to say that state policies are impermeable to the policies of movements and of non-violence. But that does not make it right to deduce that whoever expresses disagreement is playing "the three-card trick" [43] or even aiming only to increase their visibility to the detriment of their party. That is a summary judgment which doesn't go with this non-violent culture which those who developed it want to take forward. Is disagreement only legitimate if you hide it, take it "somewhere else" and does it cease to be when it disturbs routine and shows that uniformity is not the only rule?

It is this disavowal, in this Chamber and in this Senate, in the present political situation, which is the real "anomaly of the system", the non accidental fruit of the great lesson produced by the PRC, which was always the interpreter of such anomalies. As it is also the fruit of the lessons of the past, of the noblest former dissidents, who have left us a vibrant example, such as Ingrao. [44] We do not see any contradiction between his refusal of the Gulf War of the 1990s and our "No" today: because there is a continuity between

these two facts, and it is not true that the question of Afghanistan is particular or minor. Like the case of Kosovo, it represents on the contrary the emblem of the "humanitarian" and multilateral war which constitutes the guiding light of Europe's foreign policy.

Not to contest it fundamentally is to become an accomplice, not only to what is happening in Kabul, but also to a dynamic of an international policy that can lead to fresh disasters. Let us take the hypothesis of a multinational contingent in Lebanon: that is likely to lead to another political tragedy, because behind this proposition there hides a new enlargement of the tasks of NATO (transformed into a "new UN" for only the Western capitalist hemisphere of the planer) and a proposal to support the State of Israel which, for what happened in Lebanon, should have to answer to the International Court of Justice.

This proposal, which is likely to be presented as a "contribution to peace", will on the contrary - as all, really all, Western military missions demonstrate - be the cause of a tragic situation. Whereas there exists a political solution capable of unblocking the situation: the creation of a real Palestinian state.

In my opinion, our opposition has been necessary because it concerns a nerve centre of politics, what remains its defining element, the perspective of peace as opposed to the noise of war.

By so doing have we become the only repositories of pacifism? Those who say that know that they are talking nonsense, because pacifism is complex, both the pacifism of the movement and the pacifism that is present in the institutions of state. We are only a part of it, we are conscious of that; we do not pretend to represent all of it.

That is why we will continue to debate with everyone, inside and outside of the institutions of state, to start up a new unitary dynamic. There was a very exceptional assembly on July 15. Another one, useful and important, took place in Genoa on July 22. We talked, we confronted one another, we fixed a new meeting date in September. I do not think that our behaviour in Parliament handicapped this forward march, on the contrary - forgive me for being presumptuous - I believe that it helped and stimulated it.

Disagreement always shakes up things and people. That is why I regret having been taken as a target, sometimes also by the Left, and having been accused of seeking to valorise myself and to acquire a political substance that I lack. And having been insulted from the upper layers of the party, who are often seen as arrogant and deaf.

Because the fundamental question remains: is an entirely homogenous Parliament more normal or is it worth more for all of us that some red lights that continue to shine?

A Vote of Confidence with a Time Limit

3 October 2006, by **Gigi Malabarba**

Today we are giving vote of confidence in the government but we reaffirm our "NO!" to the military mission in Afghanistan, which we have always refused (by voting against, for those of us who were in parliament) since November 2001, faithful to the principles which are contained in

Article 11 of the Constitution.

We had strongly asked the new executive to give a clear sign of discontinuity with the war policy of the Berlusconi government, by quickly demonstrating - at the same as the withdrawal of the Italian contingent from Iraq, which was in the

programme of the Union - at least by putting an end to Italian participation in Enduring Freedom and by working out a projected strategy of withdrawal from the multinational mission FIAS, [45] which each day is becoming further integrated into Washington's military plans.

Whereas the withdrawal from Iraq took place late, no withdrawal, not even partial, has been announced concerning the Afghan theatre of war, where on the contrary a dramatic increase in war potential is envisaged by the allied forces - both in terms of troops and the relative enlargement of the rules of their engagement, and concerning devastating means of destruction.

The fact of not having accepted an increase in the instruments of death such as NATO proposed to Italy cannot be presented as a "success", because in war a policy of presumed "damage reduction" is not acceptable.

The beginning of the "reflection" that is envisaged concerning Italian military missions will for us be the occasion to strongly argue for the withdrawal of our contingent from Afghanistan, by exerting pressure on

the government to develop in all international bodies an initiative against war as a means of realizing peace objectives. The war has increased and not reduced terrorism, peace is prepared by peace.

In the Middle East, faced with the very dangerous escalation that we are seeing at present in Lebanon, neither Italy nor Europe will be able to exert influence in a sufficiently credible way and with enough authority in favour of a negotiated solution, if at the same time we are engaged on other war fronts.

We hope that if the very many voices which have been raised throughout the country against the war missions and that the opinion polls which reflect the hope of a majority of the Italian people which even goes beyond the union's electorate, are heard by the new government. We appreciate

that our positions are today considered by all the political forces of the majority as not only legitimate but even serious and representative. But so that that will not just be empty words, we are asking to be expressed by acts. The same scenario concerning Afghanistan in a few months time, with the umpteenth prolongation of the military mission, would be a regressive step and would be unacceptable for us.

To continue our battle inside and outside the institutions of state, in favour of Italy conducting a real peace policy, we will fight not only for the withdrawal from Afghanistan and for all the theatres of war, but also, as envisage in the electoral program of the Union, against nuclear weapons and military bases in our country, for the reduction of military spending and for affirming a culture of peace in all aspects of society.

No Blank Cheque, Ours is a Clockwork "Yes"

3 October 2006, by **Gigi Malabarba**

The government is trying victory. So are they. To understand whether the vote of confidence over the mission in Afghanistan was a success for the hard core of the "eight rebels" of the antagonistic Left or on the contrary a defeat, we have to listen to the most battle-hardened of them, Gigi Malabarba, senator of Rifondazione, who says: "No credit. Our vote of confidence is ... a clockwork one."

Luca Telese: Senator, let's start with the facts. You will have to give a vote of confidence, although the text of the law has not been changed as you wanted it to be. So have Prodi and D'Alema won?

Gigi Malabarba: Not at all. We have conducted a battle and in two months we have gone, according to the government's own terms, from the most ferocious epithets, from being defined as irresponsible, troublemakers, subversives that we have to get rid of, to yesterday's

respectful declarations.

Luca Telese: Honeyed words, certainly. But you don't seem to be the kind of person who is satisfied with honey.

Gigi Malabarba: Indeed. To start with there is a political fact: today the Minister Chiti [46] says that our disagreement is legitimate, that our positions deserve to be represented, that they correspond to real moods in the country.

Luca Telese: For the moment they are courting you because they need your votes, but you think that they will continue to?

Gigi Malabarba: They have gone from threats to flattery, that is undeniably a first positive fact.

Luca Telese: Let's see what the second one is.

Gigi Malabarba: Our opposition has blocked the danger of a secret and unprincipled agreement.

Luca Telese: Aren't you being too optimistic?

Gigi Malabarba: No. It's a question of fact: the government had the possibility of choosing and it preferred to reply to us rather than to accept the help of the centre-right which was prepared to support it ... for its own reasons.

Luca Telese: OK, there were no centrist votes. But the warships are still setting off and Enduring Freedom is continuing.

Gigi Malabarba: Yes that's really what is essential. Chiti assured us that there is a change of perspective in government policies concerning military mission. In six months, we, the pacifists, will be able to verify whether the promise has been kept.

Luca Telese: Excuse me, but in six months you will give a vote of confidence, all the more so because you have already done it this time.

Gigi Malabarba: And why should that be? We haven't signed any blank cheque. Even faced with those electors who, disturbed by a campaign aiming to make demons of us, asked us whether we were not being too maximalist and whether it was not necessary to give the government a little time, whether it was not

excessive to provoke a crisis on a question of foreign policy... Now, in relation to those electors we will be stronger in December, because we will be able to say: "We asked for a change and we allowed time for this change to take place".

Luca Telese: So in December, if things remain as they are at present you will be ready to refuse a vote of confidence? I don't believe you.

Gigi Malabarba: You don't pull your punches. On the contrary, I will say to

you that we shouldn't wait for December: As far I'm concerned, I am not ready to accept the neo-liberal manoeuvre of Padoa-Schioppa. [47] The movements are opposed to war and to neo-liberalism.

Luca Telese: But what about the question of confidence then?

Gigi Malabarba: It's a question of time, of clockwork, if things change. If they don't change, the next time the answer will be no.

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