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The Cuban Revolution at the Crossroads

23 February 2007, by **Jan Konrad**



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

What is at stake

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

Whereas capitalist relations of

production have been re-established practically everywhere on the planet and the last barriers to the penetration of commodities are being removed, facilitating the realization of surplus value (that part of the value of labour that capital appropriates for itself, but whose realization is only possible on condition of being able to sell everything that is produced), Cuba is still resisting. And this resistance encourages people to think what another world could be like... Because even if the Cuban system is bending under the pressure of the world market, it has not yet capitulated in the face of the absolute domination of the commodity.

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

Because in spite of its numerous faults, Cuba remains a model of reference on this continent where poverty continues to worsen. What is more, the emergence of governments

that are breaking with imperialism in the three countries we have just mentioned loosens the stranglehold that imperialism has imposed on Cuba. The recent failures of US imperialism in Latin America and in particular the failure of its project of the Free Trade Area of the Americas are proof of this. And so is the rehabilitation by the Venezuelan and Bolivian governments of the very idea of nationalization, after 20 years of absolute world domination of a model whose aim is to privatize everything.

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

An Economy in Crisis

Isolated by the imperialist economic blockade, the Cuban revolution had no other choice but to re-orient its economy towards the Soviet bloc. But this re-orientation had to bend to the demands of the Kremlin. First of all by imposing an economic model which

excluded the establishment of collectivist relation of production, based on workers' self-management, the free cooperation of the producers and their democratic planning. Instead of which it was a centrally administered economy, leaving no space for the initiative of the producers, which came into existence, a wasteful and completely dependent economy...

Such a central, hierarchical administration is the very basis of inequality. Especially when shortages increase, as has been the case since the reduction and then the ending of trade with the Soviet camp. Today that model - which continues to be wrongly identified by the Cuban leadership with socialist planning - is in the process of collapsing.

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

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

But there are also all sorts of non-market relations which escape the administrative economy, services that citizens do for each other by breaking or circumventing the administrative rules. These services can sometimes

lead to monetary compensation, but even in such cases it is not a question of market relations, in the absence of a unified market that fixes prices.

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

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

Bureaucratization

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

East European ideology was imposed everywhere, to the extent that the official discourse was full of praise for the supposed successes of the Soviet Union and its system, even going so far as to consider as ideologically unsound any criticisms of it". [2]

The historic leadership of the Cuban revolution, particularly Fidel Castro, had always kept a certain distance from this bureaucratic layer, sometimes publicly treated with a certain attitude of superiority. But at the same time it relied on this bureaucratic layer in order to govern the country.

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

And if in the face of the collapse of the Soviet system we have seen economic reforms - de-penalization of the possession of dollars in 1993, re-opening of free peasant markets in 1994, authorization of foreign investments in 1995 - it has to be recognized that they do not at all go in the direction of collectivization of management, quite the contrary. Finally let us note that the various measures that have been taken since then with the aim of limiting the possibilities of private accumulation on the basis of these reforms repose, once again, not on the development of mechanisms of social control, but on the recourse to an administrative and

bureaucratic control.

Transition and Market

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

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

The regulation of the market itself must depend on the tendencies that are brought out through its

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

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

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

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

social relations that they were supposed to control. And by becoming in this way a new ruling class.

Defence of Gains

At the moment when the generation which led the Cuban revolution is beginning, of necessity, to leave political scene, Cuban society is at the crossroads. It has succeeded during the last 15 years in maintaining its non-capitalist course, even if that took place at the price of developing its internal contradictions. There is no doubt that this was a conscious choice by its leaders. In the same way, the Cuban leadership has shown itself to be capable of establishing internationalist relations with governments thrown up by the struggle against imperialism and its neo-liberal globalization, in Venezuela, in Bolivia, and - at the present time - in Ecuador. Cuban aid has been of great importance for the advances made by the "Bolivarian revolution" in Venezuela.

At the same time, in the absence of a framework that would allow the self-activity of the masses in Cuba, the re-establishment of market social relations, even partial and subject to administrative control, reinforces the passivity of the population, as well as cynical and disabused attitudes among the young generation [8] and weakens the legitimacy of the Cuban system, even in the eyes of those who are in the final analysis the only ones capable of defending it against capitalist restoration.

Manuel Vazquez Montalban proposes the following rather neat formula: "The Cuban revolution deserves to safeguard the best of itself, and to offer that to the globalized peoples as an alternative paradigm to present globalization. But to do that it must break with the worst of itself, that which is inimical to the mechanisms of participation, to criticism, and to a modification of the architecture of power". [9] The question that is waiting for an answer suspense is whether the Cuban revolution still has enough vitality to enable it to break "with the worst of itself", in other words if the workers of Cuba have not suffered such a strong and long-

lasting atomization that they no longer are capable of collectively opposing

the restoration of capitalism and

taking their future into their own hands.

Official: Capitalism is killing our planet!

23 February 2007, by **Socialist Resistance**



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

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

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

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

The report also found that rising global temperatures will erode the planet's natural ability to absorb man-made CO₂. This could lead to CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere

rising by a further 44 per cent, causing global average temperatures to increase by an additional 1.2C by 2100.

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

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

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

In a sharp rebuff to those who continue to argue natural variation in the sun's output is the real cause of climate change, the IPCC says that in fact. "These changes took place at a time when non-anthropogenic forcing factors (i.e. the sum of solar and volcanic forcing) would be expected to have produced cooling, not warming". It concludes that mankind's CO₂

emissions over the past 250 years since the industrial revolution have had five times more effect on the climate than any fluctuations in solar radiation.

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

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

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

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

On the contrary the time has long gone when market mechanisms can

have any real effect on this situation. We have to struggle for a different system, based on social and ecological needs. One which we ourselves

control and plan democratically, rather than leave to the dictates of the market. Only eco-socialist planning

can provide the framework for the kind of changes which are necessary to create a long term future for life on this planet.

On the French Left: what's going on?

23 February 2007, by **François Duval**

Many friends from the anti-capitalist Left in Europe (and elsewhere) are worried about what's happening now in France and are asking questions about the political orientation and behaviour of the LCR. [10] This document intends to give some information in order for "non French readers" to understand the French situation, and some explanations about the way the LCR has tried to deal with it.

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

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

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

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

First of all, it is necessary to provide a more complete and better-balanced approach to the long-lasting trends of the French situation. One generally considers that since 1995 there is a rich and powerful social movement in France with big strikes and huge

demonstrations, and even political successes for the Left. And one could easily enumerate:

- The result gained by Arlette Laguiller [11] for the presidential election in 1995;

- The strikes and demonstrations against the government six months later;

- The election of five revolutionary MPs [12] to the European Parliament in 1999;

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

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

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

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

- The victory of youth and workers' movement against CPE [13] in May 2006.

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

exploited and the oppressed.

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

In the political and electoral arena, real life has not been a continuous increase of the results for the radical and/or revolutionary Left. A few weeks after the presidential election in 2002, for general elections, the cumulated results of the LCR and LO (Lutte Ouvrière) represented an average rate of 2.5%. In 2004, common slates (LCR and LO) reached an average rate of 3 to 5%.

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

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

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

It does not mean a "downturn", like in the 1980s and the first part of the 1990s. But, at least, it means that the situation is unstable and volatile. The short periods of social explosion have

not succeeded in reversing the relationship of forces between the ruling classes and the working class. And because the periods of social movements are intense but very short, the lessons drawn by significant sectors of the working class or even groups of activists are very heterogeneous. That is the first substantial obstacle confronting any attempt to change resistance into a political alternative. And that point really explains a lot of things that have happened since May 2005!

After the victory

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

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

A shared refusal of the neo-liberal European Constitution does not mean that all these people could automatically - or, even, easily - agree on a common approach for elections. More precisely: specific elections, general elections, where what is at stake is political power, government, parliamentary majority. Or, to say it with "old" words: state power.

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

This explanation is so widely shared

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

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

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

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

The sectarianism of the LCR, really?

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

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

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

Jose Bové is clear.

The LCR thinks that a genuine anti-liberal candidate must say clearly that he (or she) is in favour of getting rid of nuclear power as soon as possible. But the programme of the "29 May collectives" did not say that, mainly because the Communist Party is deeply involved in the pro-nuclear lobby!

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

But, during the debates about the programme for election, the LCR has not made any overbidding. We just stated that these points (and some others) were not an absolute obstacle for a united coalition, but temporarily unsolved questions we could deal with.

Of course, the main problem was not that these very "cautious" ideas were not shared among the activists of the "anti-liberal collectives". Most of them agreed with our more advanced demands. The main problem was the orientation of the CP, which was also by far the main political current involved in the process.

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

The scenario, not the cast

For months, everybody seemed to

agree: a political agreement was the most important issue, not the name of the common candidate.

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

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

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

We have not heard such an answer.

Distorted debate

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

The leaders of the French CP have a

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

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

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

Turning point

The next step was the debate about that issue inside the National Collective and the hundreds of collectives. This debate ended in September 2006 when the National Conference of the "anti-liberal collectives" adopted a document entitled "Ambition and strategy". This document included ambiguous formulas about the hegemony of "social-liberalism". But it does not clearly state that it will be impossible to join a SP government, nor to support it in the framework of a common parliamentary majority with the really existing SP, its programme and its leadership.

The LCR proposed amendments in order to clarify the issues. These amendments were neither accepted by

the national Collective nor submitted to the vote of National Conference of the "anti-liberal collectives". A quite similar amendment from a collective from the South East of France was moved out of the way as well. Another amendment from the same collective specifying that the "common candidate cannot be the spokesperson of a political party" was also eliminated in the same way.

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

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

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

Misunderstanding

The decision of the National Collective to withdraw any amendment specifying that the spokesperson of a political party could not be the common candidate was another weakness in the process. Actually, the CP thought that, in the end, everybody

would agree to support its candidate. And the other currents and the other members of the National Collective thought that, in the end, the CP would agree to withdraw its candidate! But that did not happen.

As usual, the CP wished to gain a unitary cover, but it also wanted to keep control of the movement. And the best way to do so was to have its own candidate standing on the behalf of the anti-liberal movement! It never intended to do anything different. And that is exactly what had happen...

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

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

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

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

The question we raised had not been answered. It has led to our political eviction from the process. But the unsolved problem → and the divergences between some activists and leaders of the anti-liberal process and the CP leadership → has reappeared in the worst manner: the

designation of the candidate. Almost 60% of consulted people were in favour of MG Buffet, which only illustrates the real ratio between CP membership and other people in the "collectives".

A major opportunity lost?

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

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

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

This movement raised the issue of a political alternative and we have tried, with our own political orientation, to move forwards alongside people who came together during the campaign. But, as explained before, the prerequisite for a move forwards was political clarification on central issues.

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

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

been better understood and we wouldn't have made any demonstration ...

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

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

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

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

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

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

The LCR isolated?

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

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

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

But regrets and sorrows are inefficient. It is more important to try to understand what happened. We have been partly isolated because we have raised some difficult and uncomfortable questions. It was not so popular to tell people and activists who desperately want a single candidate of the anti-liberal left that it was not so easy. It was not so popular to tell them that political clarifications were mandatory in order to build a long-lasting coalition. It was not so popular to tell them that the electoral results of an anti-liberal candidate, even a unitary and unique one, will not be fabulous. It was not so popular to tell them: although the majority of the people who usually vote for left-wing parties have voted against the EU Constitution, although the SP was

in favour of the Constitution, nevertheless many of them will vote directly for the candidate of the SP for presidential election. It was not so popular to tell them: no, there will not be several dozens of anti-liberal candidates elected as MPs. It was not so popular to try to tell these things (which were true) to people who didn't want to hear them! Of course, our political function is not to smash the hopes of thousands of people. But we are not supposed to feed them with fanciful illusions!

J. Bové, the man we need?

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



Bové, Besancenot and Buffet

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

The methods used to build this

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

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

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

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

This is important because the background of all these debates is about the type of new anti-capitalist movement or broad left party we want to build in the future. [14]

A fight for political independence

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

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

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

It was not about "united front" versus sectarian isolation: from the 1970s until now, there is much evidence (such as our involvement in the 2005 campaign against the EU Constitution) that the LCR has always favoured the

building of a unitary framework for action rather than the emphasis on our party.

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

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

Link: Visit the [site of the Olivier Besancenot campaign](#).

After a long wait..."Critical Notes" from Che

20 February 2007, by **Michael Löwy**



Che in Bolivia

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

Why were these notes of Guevara not published sooner? From the outside, we can understand that before the end of the USSR, there were (bad) "diplomatic" reasons for keeping them confidential. But after 1991? What

"danger" did these notes represent? This concealment is really strange... Who decided that they should be kept in a drawer? Who finally give the "green light" for their publication? The preface to the book, by Maria del Carmen Ariet Garcia, of the Centre of Che Guevara Studies in Havana, explains nothing and confines itself to observing that "this document has for years been one of the most awaited ones" by Che.

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

Let us begin by these limits: Che, at this time - we do not know whether his thinking had moved forward in 1966-67 - did not understand the question of Stalinism. He attributed the impasses of the USSR in the 1960s to ...the NEP of Lenin! Certainly, he thought that if Lenin had lived longer - he made the mistake of dying, he noted ironically - he would have corrected the most retrograde effects of this policy. But he was convinced

that the introduction of elements of capitalism by the NEP led to the nefarious tendencies that could be observed in the USSR in 1963, which were going in the direction of the restoration of capitalism. All of Guevara's criticisms of the NEP are not without interest, and they sometimes coincide with those of the Left Opposition in 1925-27: for example, when he remarks that "the cadres allied themselves to the system, constituting a privileged caste". We are left wondering whether he hadn't read Trotsky, who is nowhere mentioned in these notes... But the historic hypothesis which made the NEP responsible for the pro-capitalist tendencies in the USSR of Brezhnev is quite clearly not very applicable. It quite simply ignores Stalinism and the monstrous deformations that it introduced into the economic, social, and political system of the USSR. We find few references to Stalin in these notes; one of the rare ones is quite critical: "the terrible historical crime of Stalin: to have treated communist education with contempt and instituted the unlimited cult of authority". That is accurate, but it's a little bit insufficient as an analysis...

Most of Guevara's criticisms of the

Soviet manual closely correspond to his economic writings of the years 1963-64, which we already know, during the polemic in which both Charles Bettelheim (against Guevara) and Ernest Mandel (supporting him) took part: defence of central planning against the law of value and against "self-managed" factories, that is to say those which were autonomous and functioned according to the rules of the market; defense of communist education against individual monetary incentives. He was also worried, and correctly so, about the material incentives for factory managers, which he considered as a principle of corruption. We also find a criticism of the absence of internationalism in the commercial practices of the USSR - unequal exchange with dependent countries - and this affirmation, of capital importance: "we cannot build communism in a single country". Lenin, remarked Che, "clearly affirmed the universal character of the revolution, something which was subsequently denied" - a transparent reference to "socialism in one country", but once again there is no question of Stalinism.

Trotsky is absent from these notes, but we find an interesting reference to him in the debates at the Ministry of Industry: you cannot destroy opinions

with blows from a club, that would be the death of any free development of intelligence. "It is obvious that we can learn a series of things from Trotsky's thinking", even though his subsequent activity was a mistake. Guevara ironically adds that the Soviets accused him of Trotskyism, putting this label on him like a "San Benito" - that is the clothing in which the Spanish inquisition dressed heretics when it led them to the stake...

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

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

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

Burger giant's revival reveals key to US capitalism

13 February 2007, by **Phil Hearse**



Police in Quito, Ecuador, guard McDonalds after women's demo

Now the news is very different. Every quarter sees burgeoning sales - income was up 6.4% in the last quarter of 2006 and its share price have risen 25% in the last year. And the reasons for this resurgence are

utterly revealing about modern capitalism, and US capitalism in particular. Although the biggest area for McDonalds' international expansion is China, a huge potential market, the biggest turnaround is in its crucial US home ground.

Here McDonalds has responded by two key steps: first its restaurants stay open longer and second they have greatly diversified the menu. The latter step was a transparently obvious

move given a burger-jaded public. The first would have been less obvious in the 1950s and 1960s, but is a winner today. It's summed up by restaurant analyst John Glass, quoted in Business Week, "People's days are longer. So are McDonalds restaurant hours. This is a natural evolution to capture more business".

"Natural evolution" it might be in terms of McDonalds' sales strategy, but natural evolution it most certainly

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

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

But it's not just the longer opening hours and concentration on breakfast that are tell-tale symptoms of a country where people are made to

work continuously longer and harder. The type of meal is revealing as well. Nearly two-thirds of McDonalds US business is done at drive-through windows. A popular meal for these drivers tends to be the specially designed Snack Wrap - a strip of deep-fried chicken, with cheese, lettuce and a sauce in a folded tortilla. Before it was launched last August the company experimented with the size of the tortilla and the consistency of the sauce to discover one crucial thing - was it easy to eat with one hand while driving, and did the sauce drip?

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

The process of turning the day into a 24-hour profit opportunity is a circular one. While McDonalds with its huge number of outlets currently dominates the breakfast market, competitors like Burger King, Wendy's, Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts are rapidly trying to address the same market. Which means a bigger section of the restaurant workforce, hundreds of thousands of people, having to work night hours too. Another twist of the neoliberal screw.

While the company is trying to address burger-resistant customers with a range of new products and with its McCafé initiative, the most popular foods remain the double cheeseburger and fries. Both are high in fat and sodium. Other companies have tried to reduce or eliminate trans-fats from

their foods, but McDonalds says this impairs the flavour. Which makes the comment of Michael Jacobson, director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, self-evident, "More people going to McDonalds means poorer health".

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

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

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

Related: [McDonalds grabs a piece of the apple pie](#) - Gary Younge

Badajoz is over, welcome to the 21st century!

13 February 2007, by **Alda Sousa**



It is worth reminding that, in 1998, only 31.9% voted, a massive abstention for Portuguese standards: the NO had an extremely narrow

majority, 50.07% against 48.28% who voted YES. Thus, the penal code which criminalises abortion - with the threat of up to three years in jail - did not change then.

It was a very heavy defeat for women's rights and for the left. It took

quite a few years until the question of decriminalising abortion was again in the agenda. For very bad reasons: in October 2001, 17 women were brought to trial in Maia (near Porto) for the "crime" of abortion. They were mostly working-class women. The facts for which they were prosecuted

had occurred, in some cases, more than 10 years earlier. Solidarity with those women and opposition to trials started to build a new mood and new initiatives. The pickets outside the court became bigger and bigger, as the trial went on. All of a sudden, Portugal seemed to have woken up to the reality of backstreet abortion and to the deep cruelty of the law. Two women were convicted, but the prison sentence was replaced by a fine in one case and a suspended sentence in the other. Therefore no one went to jail.

Other trials followed: Aveiro, Lisbon, Setubal. The cruelty of the law became more and more visible and more and more intolerable. In 2003, a coalition of Liberals and Christian Democrats ruled the country. It was impossible then to think of any change of the law in the parliament. Several Left Bloc and Socialist Party MPs, together with a wide range of people, from Catholics to feminists, trade-unionists and intellectuals, launched a "popular initiative" asking the Parliament to call for a new referendum. Although according to the law only 75,000 signatures are needed, 160,000 were gathered over a 3-month period. The proposal was then defeated in Parliament, during March 2004.

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

As described in [a previous IVP article](#), 5 pro-choice movements took part in

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

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

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

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

black market business around selling placental material, etc. They were shameless enough to distribute a leaflet in a primary school ('Letter from a child to his/her mother').

On the question of criminalisation, several 'no' positions developed in the course of the campaign, from the hardest one, those who publicly stated that even if raped a woman should carry her pregnancy to the end, thus defending a change to an even more restrictive law, to others who said that women should go to jail, if not for their first abortion, surely for the second. A former minister of the Conservative government, known for his anti-working class laws, stated that women should not go to jail but, after pleading guilty, they should have their prison sentence replaced by community work, at a nursery or a small children's school.

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

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

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

objection from the doctors.

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

safe, early, free and rare.

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

was about our collective future.

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

Romano Prodi Challenged on the Left

13 February 2007, by **Flavia d’Angeli**

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

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



**PRC leader Franco Giordano
(tie, centre)**

A balance sheet was drawn of the neo-liberal and warmongering policies that have been conducted over the last 15 years in Italy, by governments of both the right and the centre-left. With the adoption of a budget for 2007, the most austere budget in the entire history of the Republic, the sending of troops to Lebanon, the maintenance of those in Afghanistan, the confirmation of submission to the dictates of the Vatican on questions of civil rights and secularism, the comrades of the Critical Left reaffirmed the necessity of building a left opposition to this government, in order to respond to the growing malaise in Italian society.

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

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

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

A rapid glance at the future

10 February 2007, by **Aurelio Alonso**



May Day in Revolution Plaza

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

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

The importance of the affair stems from the impact of such a fact for Cubans, for the road of construction of a society of equity and justice, of intense solidarity, proclaimed socialist, having been led for a half century in a clearly personalised fashion, as much concerning the general orientation of the project as the conjunctural decisions. An orientation which has been forced - by an implacable blockade - to carry out strategic zigzags to guarantee its survival, to resist in the conditions of an austerity imposed on the population, under a permanent threat of aggression which becomes stronger at critical moments, thus restraining

the capacities of ensuring the satisfaction of a great part of popular basic needs. It is not necessary to pursue this rosary to sketch out the socio-economic landscape the country has traversed. I try to allude here to concrete reality, not value judgements.

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

Concentration of leadership

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

The leadership of our revolutionary process (I do not wish to generalise here) is based on a double legitimacy. On the one hand the charismatic legitimacy (a category well defined at the theoretical level by Max Weber), based on the capacities and the consensus around a historic leadership, that the figure of Fidel embodies, and which is unique and cannot be passed on for various reasons, including the genius or talent of this leader. On the other hand, an institutional legitimacy, based on the political and legal instruments adopted since the mid-1970a and

which were partially renovated at the beginning of the 1990s, even if they kept to a large extent the imprint of the structural and functional conception of the Soviet bureaucracy, with positive aspects but undoubtedly also with certain faults, which led to the death of socialism in such a powerful country.

Between these two legitimacies of organs of power it is, for obvious reasons, the charismatic leadership which has dominated the institutional aspect. For today the authority of the Commander in Chief (the only title which includes all the powers and which, from its formalisation during the restructuring of the military grades, should disappear with Fidel, if my memories are correct) is decisive and is questioned neither in the Political Bureau of the Communist Party, nor in the National Assembly of Popular Power, nor inside the Council of State. The same goes obviously in the armed Forces, of which the head of state becomes Commander in Chief in wartime under all latitudes. Thus the decision-making organs, which are explicitly and intentionally collegial and which were thus conceived, are subject to the personal leadership.

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

Such a concentration of the leadership has led to some errors (I am not capable of judging them), but has allowed a coherence of the revolutionary project, a continuity of consensus concerning sovereignty and the vitality of the ideals of social justice and solidarity, which after a hazardous itinerary have found their place and an appropriate echo on our

continent. But the preservation of these gains and the development of new ones will demand, in my opinion, a change in the apparatus of power.

Ideally the effacement of the historic leadership of the first political level should lead to a transition of this form of leadership to a new relationship, in which collegial relations prevail over individual will concerning the taking of decisions and the conception of strategies. In fact, that is what the Constitution states: that the President is not at the head of the country, but chairs the work of the Council of State and that, when his proposals do not have majority support there, he should submit to the majority. Something similar should have taken place concerning the role of the head of state before the National Assembly.

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

The intervention of Fidel Castro at the Aula Magna of the University of Havana on November 17, 2006 impressed the audience, for it presented concerns which had not been previously made public. [15] They surely assail the great statesman, who knows that his days are numbered. The socialist experience born out of the October revolution has proved itself to be reversible. This catastrophe has dismantled the myth of its irreversibility. The epicentre of post-capitalism inside the world system has been disarmed (and the second nuclear power of the planet has been cast to the winds on the néolibéral ocean, pauperised and dependent).

Not surprising in this situation that the first preoccupation of Fidel turns around the reversibility of our own process, taking account of the fact that in Europe it is not only the

experience and its conception which have failed, but that the defeat has affected socialism (and even the utopia around which the Bolshevik project was established). All that was supposed irreversible. And it is not that they have decided to do otherwise. No, they have abandoned. A catastrophe which has provoked a generalised crisis of the socialist paradigm. Not because it is completed, but because obviously it is necessary to think otherwise and take account of the fact that socialism has proved itself reversible.

Democracy?

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

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

We have not created it in the socialist experiences, because efforts to allow to the people an effective participation in the decision-making mechanisms, laudable in certain cases, have been

insufficient. Che noted that "the masses should have the possibility of leading their destiny, of deciding what would go to accumulation and what would go to consumption; economic technique should work with these choices; the consciousness of the masses will guarantee its implementation". This is a long-term project, which we will not arrive at if, for example, corruption submerges us. For this reason we should not only consider corruption as an offence, but also as a moral problem. Because success in relation to an offence does not guarantee its suppression and the corrupted of tomorrow can take the place of the corrupted of today.

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

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

New situation, new challenges

But the most important thing in my opinion is to take account of the current scenario. To sum it up briefly: the collapse of socialisms created illusions inside the Empire. They collapsed rapidly and the world is beginning to experience another wave of transformations. This wave, which could be more promising than that

which has led to the appearance of the bipolar world that we have known, has begun in Latin America with motors which coincide harmoniously with the Cuban project. This scenario has seen an opening to Fidel's Cuba and this Cuba of Fidel has, in many ways, helped what has also started in America. The famous dictum of Margaret Thatcher - "there is no alternative" - used to justify the application of the neoliberal model, is now turned against its creators. Today there is no alternative for imperialism and for its centres of power it could be very difficult to accept even a different capitalism, and not only the progression of a reinvented socialism. Fidel Castro could not experience his reality in withdrawal, as a simple witness, nor would the world which is beginning to arise want him to.

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

escaping from traps and harassment, can still have things to contribute to us.

It is certain that for many years we have committed errors and that we will continue to do so in believing we know what socialism is. And also in believing we know what democracy is. And beyond that it is true that economics is far from being an exact science. The term "political economy" is not born out of caprice, which economists imbued with their science tend to forget, as they tend to depreciate the pertinence of the debate opposing the econometric criteria to the extra-economic criteria. [16] This is not a local disease of Cubans, nor even a specificity of socialism. John Kenneth Galbraith, who died recently at the age of 97, was not even proposed for the Nobel Prize in economics because his theories went too far from the narrowly economic framework, and this despite the quantity and importance of his writings and despite the fact that he was an adviser to three US presidents. But by chance, it appears that we are arriving at a consensus: it is the socialism of the 21st century that needs to be invented.

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

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

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

Neoliberal counter-reform and militarisation

9 February 2007, by **Kenji Kunitomi**

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



Shinzo Abe

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

Workers who have stable regular jobs have been replaced by unstable non-regular workers who earn only very

low wages. Labour laws do not apply to most of these non-regular workers. Many workers are forced to accept illegal over-time work without payment. With privatization of public services, the part of the budget given over to healthcare, education and the pension system has been severely cut down. 'Economic Survey of Japan 2006' published by the OECD said the following: "Addressing the rise in inequality and relative poverty requires measures to reduce labour market dualism. Reform of the tax system should take into account its potential impact on income distribution, which has become more

unequal for the working-age population in recent years.

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

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

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

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

On the one hand, the Koizumi administration followed the global U.S. military strategy, facilitated the

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

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

In his New Year press conference on January 4th 2007, Abe claimed that his cabinet would promote a political process aimed at scrapping the existing Japanese constitution, which renounces war and all armed forces, in the name of prohibiting any renewed militarist attempts by Japan. Abe described this as a 'departure from the post-war regime'. According to a set of laws enacted last December, overseas operations have been defined as the primary missions of the Japanese Self Defence Forces.

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

During his visit to European countries

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

The workers' movement and other social movements in Japan still remain very weak. Left political parties such as the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party have only 16 seats between them (JCP-9, SDP-7), out of a total of 480 seats in the House of Representatives (Lower House) and 15 seats (JCP-9, SDP-6) out of 242 seats in the House of Councils (Upper House). The Democratic Party of Japan, the main opposition party, which is supported by Rengo (the biggest trade union confederation), is another capitalist party with a neo-liberal orientation. In this context, the anti-neo-liberal movement and the traditional peace movement have been facing a very difficult situation. At the same time, many workers and youth are recognising the disastrous outcome of the neo-liberal offensive by the capitalist class.

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

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

The Water Crisis in Gaza

9 February 2007, by **Alice Gray**



UN-supplied water tanks in Rafah

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

The roots of Gaza's water problem lie in the over-population of the area, due to a high influx of refugees in 1948, when approximately 200,000 people fled to Gaza from the Jaffa and Beersheva areas of what is now Israel, following Israel's War of Independence. The original population of the Gaza Strip at that time was 80,000 people, thus this represented an increase of some 250%. Today, over three quarters of the estimated Gazan population of 1.4 million are registered refugees. [17]

The Gaza Strip is a very small area of land with a total area of only 360 square kilometres (roughly 150 square miles - ed.). It is underlain by a shallow aquifer, which is contiguous with the Israeli Coastal Aquifer to the north. Gaza is the "downstream user" of the Coastal Aquifer system, and hence water abstraction in Gaza does not affect Israeli water supplies. The Gaza Aquifer has a natural recharge rate of approximately 65 million cubic meters (MCM) of water per year from rainfall and lateral inflow of water from Israel and Egypt. [18] This aquifer is essentially the only source of fresh water in the Gaza Strip.

By 1967, when Israel occupied Gaza,

the sustainable yield of the aquifer was being fully utilized. [19] Since then, as the population has grown, so too has the demand for fresh water. No serious attempt was made at exercising any water management strategy in the Gaza Strip during the Israeli administration, with the number of registered wells increasing from 1200 in 1967 to 2100 in 1993. [20]

Abstraction from the aquifer was approximately 110 MCM per year by 1993, resulting in falling water levels and degrading water quality due to seawater infiltration, caused by the over-pumping that had been taking place. Likewise, there was little investment in maintaining or improving the deteriorating water infrastructures of Palestinian municipalities during this period, despite taxes being paid by Palestinians to the Israeli government. [21]

In 1994, the Gaza-Jericho agreement placed water resources in the Gaza Strip under the control of the newly formed Palestinian Authority (PA) and, in 1995, the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) was formed. It was given the mandate for managing water in the Palestinian Territories. At this time, it was widely recognized that there was a serious environmental problem with the Gaza Aquifer, with experts predicting that if nothing was done, the entire aquifer would become unusable by the year 2000. [22] In addition, the water infrastructure was in a very poor state, with 50% of water being lost through leaking pipes. [23]

Therefore the PWA, with the help of international donors (principally the United States Agency for International Development - USAID), set out to develop a management strategy for the Gaza Aquifer and engaged the engineering firm Metcalf & Eddy to carry out an environmental survey and draw up a management plan. The

Integrated Coastal Aquifer Management Plan (CAMP) was drawn up in 2000, with an implementation period of 20 years.

The main components of the CAMP included reducing the amount of water pumped from the aquifer for agricultural irrigation, while simultaneously improving supply of drinking water to the population by providing additional water from sources other than the aquifer. These included the import of water from Israel, construction of seawater desalination plants and improving wastewater treatment to allow it to be used for irrigation and managed aquifer recharge.

It was envisaged that, in the longer term, following a political settlement with Israel, and resolution of the Palestinians' water rights in the West Bank, a pipeline could be constructed between the West Bank and Gaza to ensure adequate supplies for the growing population. If implemented on schedule, it was expected that the CAMP would bring the Gaza Aquifer back into a positive water balance by 2007, whereas "failure to implement the CAMP in accordance with the schedule will result in continuing decline in the quantity and quality of the aquifer water." [24]

The Impact of Conflict

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

The number of agricultural wells, many of them unregistered, has increased to approximately 4000; [25] the supply of water from Israel has

declined by approximately half from 1998 to 2004 in breach of the Oslo Accords; [26] construction of the planned regional desalination plant halted in 2003 when one of the workers was killed; and Gaza's wastewater treatment facilities are still vastly inadequate, with 80 % of sewage being discharged untreated into the environment (UNEP, 2003). [27]

In addition, missile strikes and ground incursions have repeatedly damaged and destroyed pipelines, and maintenance personnel have been arrested, shot at, or even killed whilst trying to carry out repairs. [28] Inadequate sewage treatment infrastructure and damage to wastewater and drinking water pipelines has allowed sewage water to contaminate drinking water supplies, leading to sharp increases in water borne diseases in many areas.

Failure to control over-pumping has led to sea-water intrusion into the aquifer to the extent that, in 2003, only 10 % of the wells produced water of World Health Organization (WHO) drinking water standards. [29] Most recently, this year's Israeli invasion of Gaza (Operation Summer Rain, June 2006) has caused untold damage to water infrastructure, with destruction of the Gaza Electric Station affecting the operation of the majority of wells, pumping stations and sewage treatment facilities. [30] In short, Gaza teeters on the brink of a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe and urgent action is required to prevent widespread suffering. To compound matters, USAID have recently pulled out of the Palestinian water sector, abandoning ongoing projects and closing their contractors' offices, in an international aid embargo aimed at undermining the Hamas government.

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

since 2000. Namely, additional supplies must be made available: through desalination, wastewater treatment and reuse, import from Israel, or import from the West Bank. Currently, the unstable conditions in the Gaza Strip make large scale engineering projects impossible to implement.

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

The water situation in the West Bank is almost the exact inverse of Gaza, in that there are relatively abundant water resources in the Mountain Aquifer system and Jordan River, but there is very little access to or sovereignty over them. This is due to the fact that Palestinians have been denied any access to the Jordan River waters since 1967, and 80% of the Mountain Aquifer water is utilized by Israel, which is downstream of the West Bank in terms of water usage. Thus control over water resources was very tight during the Israeli administration (1967 - 1995), with only 23 licenses being granted for new wells, and the number of working wells, in fact, decreasing from 413 in 1967, to 300 by 1983. [31]

Many communities in the West Bank currently suffer from severe water shortages, and 13% of the West Bank population is not connected to any form of water network. [32] The Oslo Agreements of the 1990s deferred definition of Palestinian water rights in the West Bank to "final status negotiations," which have yet to take place.

Crisis of Dependency

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

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

It may be that Rabin had changed his mind by the time he made the historic move of shaking hands with Yasser Arafat and legitimizing the Palestinian Authority. It is possible, although various features of the Oslo Accords, such as the minimal transfer of sovereignty over environmental resources would suggest otherwise. It is possible. No one can tell what Israel and Palestine would have looked like today if Rabin had not been assassinated by a far right Jewish extremist.

However, if Rabin no longer believed in transfer of the West Bank and Gazan populations, Ariel Sharon, architect of the Gaza Disengagement Plan certainly did. Many years ago he explained that "You don't simply bundle people onto trucks and drive them away. I prefer to advocate a positive policy, to create, in effect, a condition that in a positive way will induce people to leave." [33]

Olmert, Sharon's heir, has also recently avowed his commitment to

the ideal of â€˜Eretz Israel' saying that "Only a person in whose soul Eretz Yisrael burns knows the pain of letting go of our ancestral heritage;" [34] and explaining: "I believed, and to this day still believe, in our people's eternal and historic right to this entire land." [35]

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

Creating Mini-Gazas

A close examination of the Gazan water crisis illustrates this point very well. If nothing is done, there will be no usable water resources in Gaza and it will become impossible to live there. Nothing can be done without Israeli cooperation. Thus, whilst Israel may not have intentionally set out to create

the Gaza water crisis, it fits in rather well with Zionist expansionist aspirations to perpetuate the situation and prevent meaningful action being taken to resolve it. If one examines the process that is taking place in the West Bank, whereby a series of Bantustans are being created through land confiscation, settlement expansion and the building of the "Separation Barrier," with the population becoming ever more urbanized, and access to resources such as water and land becoming ever more restricted, it is possible to see that what in effect is happening is the creation of a number of "mini Gazas."

To illustrate this point: the building of the Wall in the north of the West Bank led to the destruction of 25 wells and the isolation of 50 more, [36] isolating many localities from their only source of water and destroying the irrigated farming industry. One estimate anticipates that when completed, the Wall will isolate Palestinians from 65% of their water resources (CAABU, 2003) [37], although so much uncertainty surrounds its final route that no solid predictions can be made.

Thus a number of highly urbanized communities will be created, with poor economic and social conditions

and inadequate resources to sustain themselves. This is the manifestation of Sharon's "positive policy," which essentially amounts to ethnic cleansing by other means, causing widespread suffering, illness and death.

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

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

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

Cuban Reality Beyond Fidel

8 February 2007, by **Samuel Farber**

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



Cuban Communist youth

Samuel Farber: In fact this was totally

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

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

SF: Yes, there was this grotesque spectacle of people honking their

horns on the streets in Miami. But that's not important; what matters are these U.S. government commissions propelled by certain elite Cuban-American and U.S. circles.

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

ATC: You mean, through U.S.-promoted schemes that have been

publicized recently for massive privatization and economic neoliberalism?

SF: That obviously sounds like fantasy in the absence of an (unlikely) U.S. military occupation of Cuba. But not when you see it in the context of how the people on this side of the Gulf of Mexico might ally with circles in Cuba, especially people today in the Cuban government who are closet neo-liberals and who may surface in the transition. Such a likely alliance would create a new political map that would be unprecedented in the almost 50 years of U.S. attempts to overthrow the Cuban government.

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

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

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

Rewriting History?

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

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

In the case of Russia, there were always people who were critical of Russian Communism all the way back to the 1917 Revolution itself. This became very strengthened by the collapse of the Soviet Union; it became the fashion to rewrite the entire history. So I'm not engaging in rocket science to suggest that there

will be similar efforts around Cuba.

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

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

Bonsal was a very smooth and respectful professional diplomat. His whole approach was precisely to come to terms with the liberal right-wing of the Cuban revolutionary government, which did exist although it wasn't nearly as strong as it had been in Bolivia. So I expect, in the context of a Cuban transition, that a lot of history will be rewritten; and the analysis in my book might be useful to people who will try to build a revolutionary and democratic alternative.

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

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

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

political rights.

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

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

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

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

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

Differing ideologies may have areas of compatibility that facilitate somebody moving from one to the next. Weber

uses that notion a lot. [The most famous example is the “elective affinity” between Puritan ethics and rising capitalist business practices in 17th century England - ed.]

What’s After Fidel?

ATC: Let’s get back to the actual Cuban situation. What are your thoughts on Fidel Castro’s condition and what can be observed from the Cuban leadership’s behavior during this uncertain period?

SF: First, I refuse to speculate on what’s physically wrong with Fidel Castro; I’ve learned from hard experience that you don’t talk about things you know nothing about. But there will be an early test by the end of this week, marking the 50th anniversary of the Granma landing [38] and a belated celebration of his 80th birthday.

If he doesn’t show up at all, it would suggest that his condition has deteriorated, whether because his life is in danger or because he looks even worse than during his last appearance. He’d already said that he’s lost 40 pounds. [39]

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

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

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

I find this comment obscene, in appropriating the slogan from Seattle and the global justice movement to

promote the Chinese model. But it’s more than statements alone: there’s the role of the Cuban army, Raúl’s stronghold, as a big player in joint enterprises, including the tourism industry.

You have a number of army officers who are businessmen in uniform, deeply involved in transactions with international capitalism through the Cuban armed forces. The military has also been involved in what they call “enterprise improvement” [40], i.e. organizational efficiency, the kind of economic experimentation that would be consistent with the Chinese model.

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

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

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

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

Politically of course Fidel wasn’t about to openly criticize China, but he certainly didn’t praise it. So within the Cuban regime there’s clearly this difference over the Chinese model.

But in pointing to tendencies, one can’t predict events that will be brought about by a combination of internal and external forces.

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

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

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

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

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

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

But there’s another interesting group

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

These are journals that have developed as critical a voice as you can get in Cuba without touching a

number of sacred cows such as Fidel Castro and the single-party state. In this milieu there are writers like Ariel Dacal, who have written about Trotsky - and they don't say a word about Cuba.

That's the irony: They can say a lot about why the Soviet Union collapsed, and in that connection they can bring up Trotsky and questions about bureaucracy and the democratic alternatives to it. But you can tell

they're really writing about Cuba although they don't mention it. Paradoxically, that's what shows they're serious and far more relevant to our democratic revolutionary point of view.

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

“The Battle of Ideas” and the Capitalist Transformation of the Cuban State

8 February 2007, by Manuel Paz Ortega

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



The Cuban people does not possess many valuable tools to resist the rubbishy information, recycled and recyclable, that the state “offers it”. One could reply to that by saying that the different political regimes that exist do the same thing, and that it is

not a reason to treat the Cubans differently from the other citizens of the world. But there exist two powerful reasons for opposing these two phenomena:

- First of all, citizens must fight to have alternative means of information which enable their experiences to be listened to by others, within their society or in the world, in order to counter the hegemonic action of states.

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

To revalorize this last criteria, manifestly forgotten by those who proclaim themselves “Friends of the Cuban people”, we propose to briefly reflect on one aspect of present-day

Cuba, an aspect that is indispensable in order to produce this picture that we were talking about. This is the “Battle of Ideas”, which has already broadly affected Cuban society and which is viewed positively by many people in the world.

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

Five years after it started, the Battle of Ideas is a political operation of the Cuban state which aimed, in December 1999, to maintain in power the historic bureaucracy of the “revolution” through a deepening of the cultural and media struggle against American imperialism, and whose principal object is the Cuban people.

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

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

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

- Thirdly, the Elian case signified for the Cuban state a victory without precedent on the international level, which reinforced the legitimacy of the regime and helped it to find a way to deepen the ideological struggle against Yankee imperialism and to create new methods of politico-cultural indoctrination, by reinforcing in the consciousness of the Cuban population the necessity of the existence of an apostolic Welfare State.

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

... to the Battle of

Ideas

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

It is then that the Battle of Ideas was born. This political operation produced the whole army - that is the term - of political cadres and an ideology aimed at carrying out a project which, if we take seriously the declaration of the main leaders of the state, is the regime's last card. If the Battle of Ideas fails - the regime knows this and so that it will not happen it uses all its strength to proclaim daily the invincible nature of the attempt- it is Cuban socialism which will fail.

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

Modernizing the Means of Communication

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

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

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

The Illusion of Culture

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

Obviously it is useless to say that all the political and mass organizations, like all the institutions in the country, must try to attain these objectives at any price, without thinking about the ideological and cultural price that this campaign could imply for Cubans. The latter, without saying so, do not forget that the other campaigns of the same kind were a complete failure (the media campaign for the harvest of ten million tons of sugar; the educational campaign for a complete identification of the Cuban population with real Soviet socialism, just to quote two examples). In order to obtain the final objective of integral general culture the Cuban state has put in place a series of cultural and scientific mechanisms which, while surpassing it by their advanced logistics, do not constitute a substantial break with the modern philosophy of progress, and at the end of the day in no way contribute to creating the New Man which has been the objective of the Cuban political leadership since the 1960s.

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

Ideological Recruitment of Youth

The new “emergentes” projects [41] of training “professionals” in health and education have as their objective the improvement of the situation of these indispensable services in Cuban society, something which has become complicated since the beginning of the 1990s.

During those years there began a process of desertion of the sectors of health and education by professionals, which provoked a big crisis. In the case of health, the solution was guaranteed; given the acceptance that this profession has always had in

Cuban society it was enough to increase the number of places in the first year of studies in order to rapidly resolve the problem.

However, the decision was well thought out politically, because it began by a campaign to get young people to study general medicine. Thus we saw the appearance of Family Doctors, a positive attempt which obtained success in preventive medicine. But in the last few years the population has complained greatly of the low quality of the services of these students who were trained in massive numbers, without the same demanding criteria as in previous decades. That is also the case for nurses and health technicians (therapists, physiotherapists, etc.). Thousands of young people coming from the horde of those who did not attain the level necessary for university studies form armies of “emergentes” specialists in medicine who are helping the government to make up for the lost time.

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

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

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

and general education system.

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

Because of this, young people increasingly turn to jobs which bring them benefits and access to a higher standard of living; in tourism and small private activities in services and the production of consumer articles, both industrial and agricultural. So since the end of the 1990s thousands of young people had been excluded from work and from the Cuban educational system. This is “normal” in any society but in Cuban socialism, where we can suppose that modern (capitalist) rationality does not operate because it is a new society, or a society which is fighting to become new, the idea that thousands of young people find themselves in the streets with nothing to do and that it is the state’s fault is inconceivable.

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

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

The new social workers, these “doctors of the spirit”, as the government has christened them, are responsible for identifying and transmitting to the appropriate institutions the cases of families or individuals who need immediate and

reliable social assistance. However there are very many complaints about the uselessness of these badly prepared young people, who are entrusted with responsibilities that even the best professionals have difficulty in discharging.

Once again, we are not denying that there exist young people with enough of a vocation to take on the big responsibilities that they are being given, nor that many of them sincerely believe in what they are doing. But taking account of all factors we can come to the conclusion that this manoeuvre by the Cuban state is playing with the negative consequences brought about by the opening of the Cuban society to the outside. The idea is to co-opt these young people, who could represent a potential threat to the regime, by keeping them busy, which makes it possible to control them thanks to their subsequent insertion into the mass organizations in their place of work.

Preserving the Elites

What is involved is a long term project whose aim is to maintain the new political elites, the new leaders, the

consolidation of Cuban "socialist power", the new leading figures in all the political practices on the island. The present political operation of the Cuban state is a thorough manipulation of the people - fundamentally of young people - so that they will accept without resistance the successors of the regime. This system teaches them to become careerist and to take more or less cynically what the state offers them, which enables the old nomenklatura to maintain a certain equilibrium and to guarantee the future. We can imagine that the young people trained in this context will later on support the initiatives of the Cuban state, because it will guarantee them a minimum of satisfaction, by working on their interests, their preoccupations, and their aspirations. And those who will have got into the train without thinking, unconsciously, will have to follow them because they have no other way out. These are the most important postulates and the mechanisms of the Battle of Ideas. Perhaps some of the international friends of Cuba should become conscious of these reflections before giving their unconditional support to this project.

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

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

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

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

Blair Faces Endgame

4 February 2007, by **Phil Hearse**



Tony and Cherie Blair on holiday with an Italian friend

Why has the scandal arisen? Essentially because Labour has been caught trading knighthoods and peerages to wealthy business people, in return for large cash donations. There is nothing new in that of course. In fact large donors to all three major

parties stand a much better chance than average of becoming a 'Lord' or 'Sir' - and all three parties make nominations to the knighthood and peerage. But because of a new law passed in 2001 this process has become more complicated.

Now parties have to reveal the name of any significant donor to the Parliamentary Standards Committee, and donations from abroad are banned. This makes it transparent

when people have been given honors for donations, and all the evidence is that Tony Blair's team attempted to circumvent these requirements by the simple device of designating the donations as 'loans' - which (if made on a commercial, interest-bearing basis) do not have to be made public. Prior to the 2005 general election, which Labour won easily, twelve millionaire donors gave Labour almost £14m (about 20 million euros) in secret loans.

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

Sir Gulam Noon, the “curry magnate” who made a fortune providing pre-prepared foods for supermarkets, is believed to have seen his nomination rejected by the Lords appointments commission because of an undisclosed loan worth £250,000 given to Labour last year. Ironically the 2001 law was pushed for by Labour (when in opposition) because of the suspicion that the Conservative Party in government was getting secret large donations from wealthy foreign backers - in the Middle East and North America - and was engaged in selling honours to donors. But when in office Blair’s government, having distanced itself from the trade unions, found that the unions cut back their donations and the party was cash-strapped. Hence the trawl for rich donors.

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



Lord Levy

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

According to the London *Independent*:

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

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

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

“But it was not only Lord Levy who schmoozed millionaires. Labour officials, advisers and apparatchiks were also in on the game. A few years ago, Sir Christopher Evans was attending a presentation at Downing Street when a senior government adviser sidled up to him. The official told Sir Christopher, who is the

founder of Merlin Biosciences: “Your stock has risen so high, and a lot of people are saying very positive things about you’.” ([Independent](#) 3 February)

Lord Levy has now been arrested twice, once in July 2006 and again in January this year, this time “on suspicion of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice” - in Britain an extremely serious charge. However no charges have been brought against Levy or anyone else involved. Also arrested in January was Ruth Turner, who works in Downing Street with Blair as head of government publicity. Again Turner has not been charged with anything.



Ruth Turner

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

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

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

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

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

In many countries it would seem extravagant and fantastic that the

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

Blair's message to party workers in his February 3 speech was "stay calm" and not to be diverted by "things that embarrass us". But no one thinks he will survive for long if any of his entourage are charged over the scandal. According to the right-wing Spectator magazine, "Blair has already resigned, he just doesn't know it yet". Forty-three percent of Labour voters think that he should step down now, and a growing number of Labour MPs are worried about the effects on their prospects at the next election.

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

At the present time there are numerous campaigns nationwide against Blair's policy of closing down dozens of local hospitals and concentrating health care provision in a small number of huge "super-hospitals". Criticism of this measure goes across the political spectrum because of the obvious effects on the availability of local emergency and surgical care (making seriously ill or injured patients travel long distance);

the difficulties for those visiting friends or relatives in hospital; the additional burden it puts on hospital workers to travel long distances to work; and the breaking of links between hospitals and local communities.

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

Blair is self-consciously trying to "secure his legacy" by pushing through hugely unpopular public service reforms, and tying Britain to a policy of extensive and adventurist militarism - for example by rushing through the decision to replace the ageing Trident nuclear missile system (at a cost of around £30bn) and lecturing the nation about how the British are "war fighters" and not just "peace keepers". According to Blair, the war we have to fight is against "Muslim extremism". The Blair government is complicit in the generation of huge levels of Islamophobia, which numerous commentators have likened to 1930s anti-semitism. Guardian columnist Jonathan Freedland, at best a mildly progressive liberal, recently wrote "If I was a Muslim in Britain now, I would leave the country".

Tony Blair will be replaced, barring major mishaps, by Chancellor Gordon Brown. Despite the delusions of some

leftish MPs, like former film actress Glenda Jackson, Brown's policies don't differ one iota from those of Blair. Brown has never hidden his admiration for the United States, and more specifically for their business practices and economic policies.

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

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

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

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

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