



IV388 - April 2007

A New Period for the Italian Left

29 April 2007, by [Franco Turigliatto](#) , [Salvatore Cannavò](#)

The Partito Democratico (Democratic Party)

We should particularly note the forthcoming birth of the Partito Democratico which is likely to find obstacles in its path due to its internal contradictions but which has considerable traction both through the “liberal” vision which it puts forward and through the pressure for “unity” from which it derives its strength.



New parties for all: Massimo D'Alema of the DS (right) with former Rifondazione leader Fausto Bertinotti, now Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies

Unity against the right and against the danger of the “return of Berlusconi”, desired in the abstract by a large part of the centre-left electorate, is in fact an essential ingredient which could bring about the successful final transformation of the Italian left that comes from the PCI (Italian Communist Party) tradition. In fact with the Partito Democratico project, which will be approved at the DS (Left Democrats) [1] and Margherita (Daisy) [2] conferences on 20-23 April, the Partito dei Democratici di Sinistra (Party of Left Democrats [3]) will complete the process of adaptation to the laws of capitalism that has long been underway and that was symbolically blessed by the dissolution of the PCI decided upon by Occhetto

in 1989.

Today we are finally seeing the launch of the democratic-liberal force with some progressive vestiges that has been talked about for more than a decade - a calculatedly social-liberal force, which although voted for by the majority of the working class does not have the working class at its centre, and whose main aim is to protect the interests of a certain section of the Italian bourgeoisie, that represented by pro-European banks and large companies.

The new Partito della Sinistra (Left Party)

The other project, less visible but also underway for some time, is the one that will probably be called “Partito della Sinistra” in its socialist or neo-social democratic version. The project is still little known, and is only now starting to be much talked about, but it is already being put in train by the leading groups on the left and will, besides profiting from the space left empty by the dissolution of DS, help to resolve the three different and interwoven crises that exist between themselves.

The first crisis results from the defeat of the left-DS inside the congress, when the secretary, Fassino, won with 75% of the votes, and the left only got 15%; a defeat which obliges those who have come out against the project of the Partito Democratico to find an adequate response.

The second crisis is that of

Rifondazione (Party of Communist Refoundation), which has found in this project an answer to the impasse in which it finds itself over the governmental crisis, and one which has demonstrated the failure of the strategy outlined by the Venice congress, as can be seen clearly from an interview with Bertinotti published in Liberation, and now admitted more clearly by the party's ruling group.



European Social Forum Florence 2002 - high point of the 'Rifondazione period'

After Vicenza, after the vote on Afghanistan, after nearly a year of the Prodi government, in fact, the three theses of this congress have shown their weakness: first the idea that country's balance of forces could allow a “Grand Reform” government has been demolished by the result of the election on 9 April which saw a country divided precisely in two, along with an evident marginalisation of the left forces (representing a mere 26-27% of the electorate); second the idea that the centre left had changed in comparison with the 1996 Prodi government composed of exactly the same people and political forces with the exception of Rifondazione, has been briskly given the lie to by the government's action along classic liberal lines of offering finance to the enterprises, cuts in social spending, and increases in military spending - and with the same result in the form

of the Partito Democratico of which we spoke earlier; and third the idea of the “permeability” of the Prodi government to social conflict finally crumbled on the night of 17 February with Prodi’s reply of “the base is doing what is always does” to the enormous demonstration at Vicenza against the construction of the new US base.

The failure of the government

Then to entangle the two crises we have just described came the crisis of the government, detonated by various different factors (the base at Vicenza, the behaviour of old Christian Democrats such as Andreotti and Cossiga), but substantially provoked by the disillusionment and disenchantment of the part of the electorate that votes centre-left.

The Prodi government has quickly swept away many of the expectations that its victory had generated. Already with the boeing from Fiat workers (at the leaders of the CGIL, CISI and UIL after they signed an agreement with the government on pension reform, and after their support for the Finance Bill), we had already seen a certain level of disillusionment, but with Prodi and D’Alema’s crass response to Vicenza, the detachment was more clearly evident.

But no part of the future Partito della Sinistra has been willing to make a balance sheet of this reality, instead choosing unconditional support for the government and for the deployment in Afghanistan, and at the same time rediscovering the value of “realpolitik” and of the political class with regard to the hopes and expectations of Porto Alegre and Genova.

Those who avoided subscribing to this scheme and its political logic (as in the case of Franco Turigliatto) were locked into the political corner where it is only possible to “bear witness” and “be pure and consistent” without any ability to be effective, thus demonstrating the state of degeneration in which the left finds itself today.

Another left

But we think that the alternative left can only respond to the crisis if it

sticks to its basic values and does not renounce its anti-capitalist radicalism. Anyone who says that compromise and acting as an intermediary are indispensable political tools is helping the return of the right and of Berlusconi (a real and genuine obsession of the “official” left in Italy) while in reality favouring the policies of war and cuts in social welfare, and is only giving real assistance to the bringing about a new victory of the right.

So much so that the most recent polls, a bare year after the 2006 victory, say that today the Italian right would win with more than 55% of the votes. But we are opposed, as we have said publicly, to reassembling for the nth time political forces that are just the same as before, and completely unchanged. Above all we are not willing to travel again the road of “social compromise” to which the future Partito della Sinistra has pledged itself and which closes the period, anomalous for Italian politics, of Rifondazione Comunista, doing so both on the level of policy and of the centre of gravity which it intends to establish for the left: in a prospect of participation in government, premised on a willingness to act as an intermediary force, and incapable of thinking outside a left-liberal framework.

If the Partito Democratico is aiming to put together a bloc of the democratic bourgeoisie and of needy progressives in order to control the popular vote, then the Partito della Sinistra (whose name alludes to the German Die Linken, upon which Bertinotti and Mussi, the left DS leader, and Diliberto and Boselli, leader of the small socialist party SDI, are modelling their project) resembles a new social democracy in which “reformist” and “maximalist” socialists will co-exist as happened at the beginning of the 20th century.

We say no to this prospect and will devote ourselves to the rebuilding of an Alternative Left: alternative to the right, but also to the governmental centre-left, which is moderate and pledged to social compromise.

The alternative left is above all an alternative to what exists at the

moment, therefore to the war and to neo-liberalism. This means voting against the war. And against the pensions “counter-reforms” or against the large scale projects that will wreck the environment; and likewise it means not sinking to the level of making compromises with the blackmailing tactics used by the Vatican gerontocracy. The alternative left will operate without “ifs and buts”. This is how we have tried to act as representatives in Parliament during the last few months, by trying to stimulate a huge debate, and being subjected to disciplinary measures like the expulsion of Franco from Rifondazione, and doing our best to stimulate a clarifying discussion within Rifondazione.

The Alternative Left will only be an alternative left insofar as it starts from the class struggle and the social movements and on this basis plans to restart a project of social recomposition and even of political recomposition.

In the immediate future, to talk about an alternative left means to build the “social opposition” to the Prodi government. The decision to remain “technically loyal” to the government as implemented in the Senate (while in the Second Chamber we did not vote) does not diminish but in fact reinforces this position. The Italian left lives in a state of paranoia about the return of the right and another victory by Berlusconi, but a consistent left cannot turn into the lightning conductor for this situation, and is entitled to choose when to oppose the government without having to make concessions. This is the guideline which led to the announcement of “external support” for the government, while making clear that the government will be judged on the basis of every single one of its measures and plans, starting with the vote against more money for the war in Afghanistan.

So today a new phase is opening which we will try to approach constructively, starting with the consolidation of the Associazione Sinistra Critica (Critical Left Association) as an instrument for launching a process of recomposition and rebuilding an alternative anti-

capitalist left and one to the left of the present organisations.

The end of the Rifondazione period

Obviously this all means that a huge problem opens up inside Rifondazione, which is hastening to change its policies for the future.

Our judgement is that the period represented by Rifondazione is over, that this party has run its course. The decision to subordinate itself to the choices made by the government, to vote for war, to return to the old method of purges and expulsions (not to say of political and moral lynchings), to embark on the construction of a new political subject of which the foundation of a European Left is only the first stage, have the characteristics of the end of a period. A new phase is opening. Certainly, Rifondazione has not been the revolutionary subject that we intended to build, but rather a process of social and political resistance which was able to open the way to a new period. This was achieved partly, but only partly.

Rifondazione has carried out one worthy historical task, that of maintaining a communist perspective in a phase of depression and abandonment of their former positions by the old vanguards of the working class. But it was unable to turn the tide, not even with the extremely important efforts of the anti-globalisation movement. It was unable to address the problem of social radicalisation and how to achieve victories, albeit partial ones, in such a way as to point the way to a countervailing tendency or a reversal in the balance of social forces. This limitation was very visible in its absence of influence in the trade unions.

Rifondazione has not emerged strengthened from this period of resistance, if you look at the level of militancy, the ability to mobilise, the state of branches, paper sales, etc., and it does not seem to be able, without overcoming its own limitations, to be able to put forward proposals for a new period. In the eyes of most people in the party, it is precisely this overcoming its own

limitations which constitutes the main project for the future, with the proposal of the Sinistra Europea (European Left), the first step for the new Partito della Sinistra, which has been put forward as the continuation of the spirit of refoundation.

But this new step has ceased to be anti-capitalist in any consistent manner, or to be an alternative to the liberal left. The logic of being in government, the real obstacle at this stage to building a working class left, has led to a consistent course of action that breaks sharply with the history of the PRC (Party of Communist Refoundation).

Sinistra Critica for the Sinistra Alternativa

If Rifondazione has come to the end of its life and has largely failed in its aim of recomposing the working class and anti-capitalist left, we ourselves still believe that different ways need to be found of carrying out this task.

We are talking about an extremely difficult objective, made more difficult by the failure of Rifondazione which we have acknowledged here. We should have no illusions about this: a further defeat of the left will produce more demoralisation and regression, especially if it is registered in the absence of any clear alternative. To be able to maintain a prospect of building an anti-capitalist left however is indispensable if we wish to keep a group of reference points and ways of working that can form an authentic terrain for consistent anti-capitalist work.

We cannot predict the forms that the new period will take. Probably they will not take the traditional roads that the left is used to. We for our part think that the reorganisation should discover its content and its line of march, and then furnish itself with suitable organisational forms. We would definitely not go into a neo-social democratic party and be able to keep alive the option of an anti-capitalist, ecological, feminist and internationalist left, which is the axis along which we propose to work and build. But we intend to do it in a positive way, building movements and social struggles, accumulating

experiences and attracting vanguard activists around a shared project.

This is why we have decided to form the new association Sinistra Critica, which at our last meeting became "Sinistra Critica, associazione per la sinistra alternativa" ('Critical Left, association for the alternative left'). Sinistra Critica has been born as an anti-capitalist current during a party battle. Today our political priority is the building of Sinistra Critica as a political subject.

The building of a new instrument for taking political initiatives, or a "political subject" as we say in Italy, does not mean that the space filled by the anti-capitalist left can be reduced to this. The difficulty of the social period, the limits of the movement, the stagnation of the class struggle, the failure by the workers' movement to learn the lessons of various crises, still pose the task of political recomposition as a necessity. The fact that this is more difficult than in the past does not preclude the orientation of our work being that towards strengthening a broad, pluralist, anti-capitalist, democratic, feminist, environmentalist and internationalist left.

This is a subject which is relevant to the whole European left, which has been made a laughing stock by the Sinistra Europea (European Left Party) and its strategy of an organic alliance with social democracy in full knowledge of the fact that the necessary recomposition has to have, more obviously than was the case at the beginning of the 90s, a very clear indication of its working class and anti-capitalist character. Now in fact, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the USSR, in many matters we acted with the knowledge that it was necessary to "resist" and to recompose the communist vanguard elements that had ties to the working class and wanted to undergo a process of political and programmatic clarification. This period is over. Today the process of recomposition has benefited from several important experiences: the Italian and Brazilian ones, and, upon different terrain, the French and English, where you are talking about four countries especially

committed to and influenced by the global justice movement.



Recent Sinistra Critica conference

It is true that the difficult question of government in a capitalist country is decisive: to underestimate it after all that has happened in Brazil and Italy could be a fatal error. This is the debate that will be faced within the anti-capitalist European left, which Rifondazione emerge from not by accident, and which today has the chance to make a qualitative leap forward, at least on the level of the discussion, but also on the level of taking political and social initiatives. Sinistra Critica will be happy to devote its energy to this course.

However from the failure of the

Rifondazione project the centrality of a process of social recomposition has emerged in renewed form as a preliminary lesson for the future, and within this problematic the trade union problem is the one that has been most starkly revealed. We need to have a serious discussion about this, as without at least a partial project for implantation in the working class and for social recomposition, which the movement has in fact hinted at in recent years, the reconstruction of a class left will never take place.

Such a discussion would also be useful as a more accurate reflection of the global justice movement, on this particular crisis which today exists between organised politics, often constituted by professional political layers, and society, since this way there can be a better assessment of the consistency and the quality of the social and political vanguards. A process of reflection, which makes a new phase of "social learning"

necessary to undertake radical reconstruction is integral to these processes: the organised workers' movement is no longer adequate as a "comfort zone" in which people can stay, profiting from radicalisation elsewhere and limiting activities to propaganda. This is the new phase which is opening. It is hard to say whether we can do it, whether we have the necessary forces, but certainly we have no more credible or interesting alternatives.

Footnotes

[1] Successor organisation of the PCI

[2] Remnants of the CDI, Christian Democrats

[3] Earlier name of DS

Critical Left assembly charts left opposition to Prodi

23 April 2007

Birth of the left opposition to Prodi

"If the future of the left is a Democratic Party which Montezemolo supports and a Mitterandist socialist refoundation, we decidedly think that a new political subject is needed". This is what Salvatore Cannavà² and Franco Turigliatto, respectively Communist Refoundation (PRC) MP and Senator, both supporters of Critical Left (Sinistra Critica) had to say, opening and closing the meeting organised by their association.



Franco Turigliatto speaks to Assembly

Speaking to a thousand activists, the two leftwing parliamentarians emphasised the incapacity of the

current restructuration underway on the left to provide a voice to bodies that come out of the social movements. "Far from it, more and more the forces of the radical left act as an obstacle to the movements", added Turigliatto, "as all the actions of the last year show: Have you seen the radical left mobilise to support an "exit strategy" from Afghanistan?"

The meeting was also an opportunity to propose a "pact" among movements to the many social, trade union and political forces invited, to unite and co-ordinate social struggles, territorial summit meetings and major mobilisations.

"For example, we could organise a worthy welcome to Bush," Cannavà² proposed at the outset of the agenda, in reference to the US president's visit to Italy foreseen for early June - a proposal taken up by many speakers.

Participants in the assembly included Giorgio Cremaschi, from the FIOM (Metalworkers' Federation) Luca Casarini and Piero Bernocchi, spokespersons for the No TAV and No Dal Molin committees, as well as university students, the feminists from "Facciamo Breccia", MEP Giulietto Chiesa, trade unionists from SDL <http://www.sincobas.org> and USI <http://www.ecn.org/usi-ait>, Tommaso Di Francesco a journalist with the left-wing daily Il Manifesto and many others.

Opining the meeting's work, on behalf of the Emergency association, the well-known political cartoonist Vauro, who demanded a governmental commitment to the liberation of Rahmatullah Hanefi and announced an initial mobilisation of Emergency next Friday in Rome, at Piazza Farnese. Emergency's presence was sought out by the organisers in order to provide

an initial, tangible concrete solidarity to Gino Strada's association. Vauro took the opportunity to explain the horror of war, Emergency's humanitarian vocation, its resolve to save human lives, which spurred Gino Strada's association to take action to free Mastrogiacomo and his colleagues, just as it refuses war "with no ifs, ands or buts". "I fully recognise myself in this meeting's title "Incompatible with War" because it is what Gino Strada and Emergency have represented up to now".

Closing the meeting, Turigliatto reiterated the need to oppose the Prodi government and its policies of continuity, with attacks on the workers' movement and continued support for war. "We want to affirm that our lives, the lives of millions of people, take precedence over profits and business needs - for this reason

we can not help but be anticapitalist".



In short, this Critical Left meeting was the first public initiative by a current/association that has decided not to repeat the leftist rite of proclaiming a split from PRC and proclaiming itself a small party.

"Our project is more ambitious, we want to rebuild a class and alternative left, we want to do it while putting self-organisation of the movements at the forefront, along with a reorganisation process that will necessarily take some time. It is clear that from today, constructing the Critical Left association is our priority task".

Among the initiatives and dates set by the assembly were solidarity with

Emergency, a welcome for Bush, a strong turnout for Gay Pride on 9 June, against the Vatican's unacceptable interference, support for all struggles in defence of the environment and the countryside, starting with Val de Susa, as well as the demonstration on 19 May in Campania called by Zero Rubbish.

Finally, the meeting issued a vocal and very determined appeal to Franco Turigliatto to withdraw his resignation from the Senate announced on 21 February, after the vote against the D'Alema motion, an action that did not prevent his expulsion from PRC. "These were resignations submitted to the party which refused them," said Gigi Malabarba, closing the meeting, "and it is fitting to withdraw them so Turigliatto's contradictory voice continues to live in the halls of power."

"After Socialism" - Sad Outcomes

21 April 2007, by [Phil Hearse](#)



Heroes to zeros - shift of Vietnamese Communists to corrupt capitalism shook Kolko's outlook

In particular, his book *Main Currents in Modern American History* [1] deploys substantial empirical evidence, together with deft analytical skill to show that, contrary to appearances, the post first world war period was one of an emerging crisis for the US capitalist class as domestic profitability faltered. Seeking more profitable outlets for the accumulated capital surplus, the American bourgeoisie made a decisive international turn - consolidated by the Second World War and its aftermath. Which explains why there wasn't a single US soldier on active service on foreign soil in 1938, and why there are something like two million today.

Kolko was a champion of the

Vietnamese Revolution, and wrote a long account of the struggle of the Vietnamese Communist Party against the United States, leading to its eventual victory in 1975. This was an engagement which eventually went sour for Kolko, leading to his 1996 book, *Vietnam - Anatomy of Peace*, which shows his bitter disillusion with the post-war VCP and its eventual turn towards corruption and capitalism.

Kolko is of course a sharp critic of the present phase of Bush's "new imperialism", but his exact political position has always been unclear, although there were emerging clues in his bitter dismissal of "Leninism" in his *Vietnam - Anatomy of Peace*.

In *After Socialism* however, Kolko gets out the Full Monty and fires round after polemical round of buckshot at Marxism and all forms of socialism, demanding instead that we refound a radical critique of capitalism on the basis of "reason". In a quite astonishingly embittered tirade Kolko, knowingly or otherwise, repeats some

of the most exaggerated polemics made by right-wing critics of Marxism. Equally astonishing is his willingness to provide almost nothing by way of a replacement for Marxism and socialism, and excuses himself with that lamest of canards - first we have to clear away the rubbish before we build an alternative. Why Kolko has gone down this route one can only guess, and indeed at the end I will hazard a guess. Meantime, let's look at some of his basic arguments.

Bloody Hegel

Kolko takes the axe to the root by going after key post-Enlightenment thinkers, in the first place Hegel. By following Hegel's mumbo-jumbo nonsense about "dialectics", Marx inevitably mired his own schema in total obscurity and contradictory arguments, which make his writing almost unreadable and incomprehensible:

"From its very inception, Marxism was plagued by obscurity. Hegel's mysticism always suffused Marxism's

schema and its attempts to add force to its economics. Marx...could not divorce Marxism from its original inspiration in German philosophy, which added countless layers of analytical obscurity to an already overloaded theoretical formulation." (p21)

Moreover:

"The goals that socialists advocated and the reason for them could have been far simpler and more easily expressed and defended, but socialism from its inception was hobbled with an incomprehensible Marxist method and mysticism." (p.23)

In addition to adding obscurantism to the main theories of socialism, Hegel was in any case a total reactionary apologist for the Prussian state! And Marx took this reactionary's theories seriously!



A much better account of Hegel's inspiration and politics has been provided by Alasdair MacIntyre:

"The inheritors of the Enlightenment were in their different ways Hegel and Marx. In their writings there is a ferment of concepts whose life derives from their close interrelationship, the concepts of reason, of freedom, of human nature and history. "When individuals and nations have once got in their heads the abstract concept of full-blown liberty, there is nothing like it in its uncontrollable strength, just because it is the very essence of mind..." So Hegel. His belief in the strength of the concept is not so surprising in one who wrote in the shadow of the American and French revolutions, above all in the shadow of the tree of Liberty planted in his student days at Tübingen. Unlike all his successors in disillusionment with revolutionary politics from Wordsworth to Malraux, Hegel never came to think his youthful belief in freedom mistaken. Even in his old age when he combined detestable political attitudes with bad logic to prove the Prussian monarchy the embodiment of freedom, he would on every anniversary of the taking of the

Bastille drinks toasts with his students in commemoration of that great liberation. What survived every twist and turn of Hegel's career was the conviction that freedom is the core of human nature." [2].

For Kolko the Enlightenment itself is a problem, even before the obscurantism of Marx and Hegel. Why? Because of its unreasonable belief in the inevitability of human progress, and therefore the belief - transmitted to Marxism - that things would inevitably get better. In Kolko's account therefore, Marx and Marxism believed in the inevitability of progress - a simple teleology, or as Karl Popper famously put it, "historicism", the notion that history has a pre-defined goal.

History without surprises

So far, so familiar. Apart from the violence of the polemic, this doesn't get us past Popper. But, astonishingly for someone so familiar with the history of left movements, Kolko asserts that this led Marx and the Left to passivity and fatalism - sitting back and waiting for the inevitable dawn of socialism - what he calls "history without surprises".

So for Kolko, Marxism is a determinist philosophy, and like all determinist philosophies has a mechanical view of history, a blind optimism and a view of the working class as passive. Actually this last point is modified a bit in what Kolko actually writes in detail; he really sees Marx as underestimating the unevenness and varied nature of working class consciousness, and therefore of having a fatalistic and mechanical view of the inevitability of the working class drawing revolutionary conclusions from crisis situations. It's not that Marxists see socialism inevitably coming out of "history" from nowhere, it's that they see revolutionary consciousness inevitably coming out of crisis, and therefore socialism automatically coming out of crisis, via the inevitable development of working class consciousness (pp 27-8).

This, according to Kolko, leads Marxists to see the working class as an homogenised mass, and therefore to have a contemptuous and

manipulative attitude towards it - ergo authoritarian leftism like "Leninism" (a term he uses interchangeably with Communism) and Social Democracy.

Having established the theoretical roots of socialism's failure, Kolko then proceeds to chart the actual failures of socialists in the last century, and how all have failed in government.

On social democracy he is clear; it capitulated to the capitalist class. On the Communist parties he is less coherent. They became mass parties out of chaos and war, he claims, and their leaders had little knowledge of the real world and no idea about democracy. This is a very partial and one-sided critique of the roots of Stalinism. On both classical social democracy (ie pre-1939) and the Communist parties, Kolko insists they were blinded by mechanical theories, and above all by the short-sightedness, the dogma and the lack of knowledge of their leaders, who often found themselves as a result of the chaos and war of the 1930-50 period, in "accidental mass parties".

In passing, Kolko - like the little green man in [The Restaurant at the End of the Universe](#) who zaps around the universe with a clipboard in a frenzied attempt to insult all sentient beings - lambastes all the socialist leaders he can think of. Lenin was "at best a crank and at worst quite mad" and Rosa Luxemburg was "pathetically naïve". Gramsci attempted to add some voluntarism to the inevitable "laws" of Marxism, and thus created an incoherent system and more confusion (pp66-67). Leon Trotsky does not appear in the book.

So here we have it. Marxism is inevitably flawed by its obscurantist origins in Hegel's teleological "dialectical" schema, and inevitably generated parties which could not understand working class consciousness, and were authoritarian and dogmatic. It is a total failure. What have Marxists got to say about that?

Dialectics, science, teleology

First on dialectics. Marx in volume 3 of Capital, claimed that he had

adopted the ‘rational kernel’ of Hegel’s dialectical method because it enabled him to see things in their interconnectedness and internal contradictions. In particular he insisted on the difference between the immediate appearance of phenomena and their real determinants, their ‘laws of motion’. This was well explained by Georg Lukacs:

“If the facts are to be understood, this distinction between their real essence and their inner core must be grasped clearly and precisely. This distinction is the first premise of a truly scientific study which in Marx’s words, “would be superfluous if the outward appearance of things coincided with their essence”. Thus we must detach the phenomena from the form in which they are immediately given and discover the intervening links which connect them to their core, to their essence...It is necessary because of the historic character of the facts, because they have grown in the soil of capitalist society. This twofold character, the simultaneous recognition and transcendence of immediate appearances is precisely the dialectical nexus.” [3].

Kolko spends pages decrying Marx’s political economy and its alleged obscurantism, but in fact this method allowed Marx to understand the Capital-Labour relationship and to scientifically situate exploitation via the category of surplus value. It is not only one of Marx’s scientifically most important insights, but also of decisive political significance in giving a scientific political rationale to workers revolts. It is based on the core of the dialectical method.

It is of course highly ironic that Kolko should launch an attack on the dialectical-historical method of Marx, since he uses something very like it in his own work. What is Kolko’s account of modern American imperialism if not a large body of work that seeks to discover is the inner dynamic, the ‘laws of motion’, of US capitalism, and not just the surface appearances in the newspapers or the speeches of bourgeois politicians? This is especially so since Kolko analyses foreign policy and war precisely in terms of the political-economic motivations of the contending parties.

And in any case what precisely is the ‘reason’ that is different from both Marxism and bourgeois apologetics? How can any social phenomenon be analysed with ‘reason’, without considering it in terms of historical development, its internal contradictions, its overall development over time?

What of the alleged teleology of Marxists? That they think socialism ‘inevitable’? It’s here we meet Kolko’s missing category - Stalinism. In fact you can find plenty in the Stalinist manuals of the 1920s and 1930s about the inevitability of socialism, but you won’t find it in any of the analytical or theoretical works of Lenin, Luxemburg or Trotsky. True, in Luxemburg’s *Reform or Revolution* you can find references to inevitable economic collapse of capitalism, which Luxemburg saw as a key theoretical distinction between reformists and revolutionaries. But you will - famously - not find reference to the inevitability of socialism. Rather she saw the possibility of another alternative - barbarism. It all depended on the outcome of struggle, which of course includes a battle over the political choices of the working class (if you want their ‘consciousness’). Recent articles in this magazine by Michael Löwy and Daniel Bensaid show how key founders of revolutionary Marxism had a very different vision of history compared to the mechanical teleology ascribed to them by Kolko. [4]

But Kolko has one more telling point as a sub-argument - but a decisive one - in his critique of ‘Leninism’. He claims - as the author of the monumental *Century of War* - that Marxists have a simplistic account of working class consciousness and that it is war and uniquely the social collapse engendered by war that will make a working class revolutionary. In my view, as an overview of the 20th century this has a lot going for it, but is itself simplistic and one-sided. For example, the attempted fascist coup in July 1936, in Spain brought forth what was undoubtedly a revolutionary outburst in the Spanish and Catalan working class. This wasn’t exactly war, but it did indeed lead to fighting and indeed eventually civil war. In the era of imperialism it is not

surprising that conditions of social collapse and crisis are accompanied by wars of different types. Indeed Kolko’s penultimate book is entitled, *Another Century of War?* It is clear that revolutionary, anti-capitalist consciousness is unlikely to take anything like a mass hold anywhere outside of conditions of harsh crisis and prolonged partial struggles, including partial defeats. It will not grow automatically, it will never arise as a result of “objective circumstances” or “events themselves”, as Ted Grant used to say. But only as a result of political struggle, the interaction of agency, the subjective factor and the clash of political forces over time. There is nothing automatic or predestined about it.

Left Outcomes

It seems to me highly likely that Kolko’s reflection on the failures of the left were not just prompted by the collapse of Communism or working class defeats in general, but more likely also by what happened in Vietnam in particular. Perhaps the book that Kolko is best known for in a non-academic public is *Vietnam - Anatomy of War* (Unwin paperbacks 1986). In this book Kolko’s identification with the Vietnamese Communist Party is pretty explicit. In fact its leaders become disembodied and semi-mystical in the form of ‘the Revolution’ - the Revolution decided this, prevented that and calculated the other. There isn’t a word of criticism or reflection on the VCP in the book.



Gabriel Kolko

Gabriel Kolko

Ten years later, *Vietnam - Anatomy of Peace* is decrying the VCP’s failures as ‘astonishing’ (Kolko’s favourite adjective) and rooted in all-round theoretical and political failures. It’s in this book that Kolko develops his critique of ‘Leninism’ as having totally failed to think through what might be a viable post-capitalist society. His picture of the VCP during the war has changed to seeing them as tactically clever and resourceful,

but clueless in terms of overall social objectives.

What Kolko doesn't engage with is the fact that there has been an alternative Marxist tradition, indeed alternative Marxist traditions plural, which do not fit his picture of a bureaucratic left with mechanical, dogmatic theory. Such a recognition would not fit his outrageous and totally exaggerated notion that "Socialism has disappeared in all but name; parties that use that name are anything but radical". Frankly that claim is absurd and in contradiction to all known facts, from France to Bolivia.

Kolko's last chapter on the future merely says, well we have to start again, tough luck. We have to be careful about opportunist and authoritarian leaders, and we have to base our ideas on reason.

However, Kolko does defend the idea that an alternative future will have to go beyond capitalism and retain key objectives of socialism, like social ownership. That's exactly Gabriel Kolko's problem. If I call my cat 'Fido' and feed her dog food, that won't disrupt her fundamentally feline nature. And fighting for a collectivist, non-capitalist future, won't stop you striving for socialism, whatever you call it.

This book has some sensible concerns, but is spoilt by really exaggerated and unfounded accusations against Marxism and Marxists. If Kolko had been prepared to admit there were non-bureaucratic socialisms that have always fought Stalinism and social democracy, he might not have been led into such bad tempered

incoherence.

Read [Louis Proyect's critique of Kolko at Unrepentant Marxist](#)

Footnotes

[1] Harper Row, New York, 1976

[2] Breaking the Chains of Reason, in the collection *Out of Apathy* pp 199-200, Stevens and Sons, London 1960

[3] *History and Class Consciousness*, p8. Merlin 1968, London

[4] See for example the article on the [Marxism of Trotsky's Results and Prospects](#) in the Theory section.

Fact and fiction about climate change

8 April 2007, by [Jean-Pascal van Ypersele](#)

Up until now, the European Union is the only political body to have officially taken a position: in June 1996 it adopted the objective of maintaining the increase in temperature below 2°Celsius in relation to the pre-industrial period (around 1750).



Jean-Pascal van Ypersele

But for the small island states, 2°C increase is already too much. They are at present suffering more and more frequent floods because of the thermal dilatation of the oceans. An increase of 2°C will condemn them to disappear. In my opinion, that can almost certainly no longer be avoided for the lowest islands.

So the answer to your question can only be very subjective. If you live in a temperate region situated far from a river and at an altitude of more than 50 metres, which does not depend economically on skiing or agriculture, you will not suffer, or just a little, from

climate change and probably a rise in temperature of 2°C does not represent a dangerous perturbation. On the other hand, if you live in one of the small island states in the Pacific, then the present situation is already dangerous, and probably fatal.

That is why, as a complement to the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases, the small islands are asking for financial compensation in order to try and adapt.

I personally very much want to be in solidarity with the inhabitants of these islands, but we should know that from their point of view, we have to turn off the lights right away! In other words: we need an immediate and brutal reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases, on such a scale that it would have serious social consequences for many people in other regions of the world.

Consequently, you understand that the answer cannot be given by climatologists alone. The question is addressed to human societies. It necessitates a political debate, in the

noble sense of the term.

Are the social protagonists sufficiently conscious of the necessity of this debate and of its importance? How can they participate in it?

The environmental NGOs are obviously very present in the debate, as is normal. The trade union organizations are becoming more and more interested in it, as are the employers' organizations. The development NGOs are perhaps a little bit behind, but in a general manner the tendency is towards the broadening of participation in international conferences. In my opinion this is a very positive point.

It is not just a question of being present as spectator: these conferences are also an extraordinary occasion to share knowledge and to collectivize experience. Information is obviously a precondition. Without it no debate is possible. That is why I devote time to answering interviews and to meeting social actors, whoever they are.

But information is not enough: we need places for the debate, it has to be organized and those who take part on it have to know that it will serve some purpose. It is not a question of discussing for the sake of it.

What message are you carrying in this debate, as a climatologist?

Everyone can see that the impacts of climate change are becoming more powerful. The analyses of the group of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) can no longer be considered as alarmist. If we want to stay below 2°C of temperature rise, we will have to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 80 per cent on a world level, well before the end of the century.

The emissions of the developed countries first of all, because they are the primary countries responsible and they have considerable means at their disposal. But also the emissions of developing countries.

Without this global effort there is quite simply no solution possible, given the enormous mass of carbonic gas that has accumulated in the atmosphere over the last centuries.

Like very many specialists I consider that the situation is serious and requires much more resolute action than what has been put in place or is being envisaged by the international community. In relation to this I would draw your attention to the fact that several researchers, and not the least important ones, consider that the ceiling of 2°C of maximum increase in temperature is too high and that it must be lowered.

“There is urgency, but that is not a reason to act with precipitation.”

So there is urgency?

There is urgency, yes, but that is not a reason to act with precipitation. Whatever we do, the inertia of the climate system confronts us with an inevitable rise in temperature. We

have ten years. In the course of these ten years, very radical measures will have to be taken in order to save the climate in the following fifty years, and beyond that.

Rather than rushing ahead and taking spectacular measures whose articulation is not always sufficiently thought out, it is a question of preparing a global plan, including all the aspects of the problem.

It is in this sense that the decade before us must be considered as decisive.



If it were possible to reduce emissions by 80 per cent in ten years without creating very great difficulties for the majority of humanity, I would be the first to argue for doing so.

But it is not possible. The plan to be worked out can therefore have no other goal than to limit to the maximum the causes and the effects of climate change, while knowing that these effects will be serious for certain populations.

From there comes the importance of adapting to changes, principally in the Third World, and as a complement to the reduction of emissions. This adaptation can take different forms.

For the small island states, it would probably involve migrating. Tuvalu has begun negotiations with Australia and New Zealand, and as you know they have got off to a bad start.

Beyond the migration of populations that are confronted with the rise in the level of the ocean, what should the plan that you evoke consist of?

I am neither Nicholas Stern nor God the Father. I have neither the resources, nor the personnel, nor the competences to reply alone to this question.

The problem that we have to confront is without precedent. To claim to have a ready-made solution would be pretentious. I am sceptical and distrustful towards this kind of discourse.

I have only one personal conviction: we need action on a very large scale, coordinated on a world scale, which will only be effective if it is presented in the form of a plan.

I am ready to think about it with all those who want to think, preferably in the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention. The plan has to be built up. It is not the job of scientists alone to elaborate it. They can enrich the discussions, but the answer is on the level of society. We need a wide-ranging debate.

If a plan was put on the table by a group of experts, other experts would consider it to be unrealistic, populations would consider it unacceptable, and it would be contested by the people who would have to implement it.

Even if I had such a plan, it would only be an outline, one piece to put among many others. I think that it should at least contain the following elements: measures making possible a fairly rapid transition towards models of development that are much less energy-consuming, based on giving priority to renewable energies, and territorial planning which reduces the demand for automobile transport, very strict norms for construction and fabrication, a true price of the impacts of the consumption of fossil or fissile energies, education at all levels on the reduction of our impact on the environment, scientific research that is reoriented towards really sustainable development, all of these while satisfying the essential energy needs of all the “tenants” of the planet.

Is it possible to arrive at a consensus on a plan to save the climate?

Answer: I would rather speak of indispensable compromises. The dramatic case of the inhabitants of the small island states is enough to indicate that a plan cannot be satisfying for everyone. That is obvious, it is in the nature of every human enterprise, of every political initiative. If the plan implies social regression for the whole of the developed world, it will not work.

I support the idea of avoiding social regression, I recognize the importance of social progress. But social progress for everyone, not only for the inhabitants of the developed countries.

I am not convinced that social regression would be an automatic result of measures of reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases. Let us note by the way that the Stern report doesn't say anything different: it talks on the contrary about chances, economic opportunities. That can perhaps be contested, it is perhaps promising that people can have their cake and eat it too: I am not qualified to say.

In any case we have to take account of the fact that social regression can also be a result of climate change itself. This is even one of the big difficulties in working out the plan: there is a double unevenness, spatial and temporal, between the measures and their effects.

Temporal: given that climatic problems are caused by the accumulation in the atmosphere over decades of excessive quantities of CO₂, reducing emissions only very slowly affects the total that has accumulated; so to decide not to put into question today the advantages of which certain sectors of the population benefit could cause serious social regression in thirty or fifty years.

Spatial: the problem is all the more complicated because this social regression, in thirty years, will no doubt strike less hard those here whose advantages we will have decided not to put into question, whereas others, in Bangladesh or in Africa, for example, will bear the brunt of it.

Is the plan that you envisage conceivable without escaping from the mechanisms of the market?

Nicholas Stern, who is not the most radical of global justice economists, poses the following diagnosis: "climate change is the biggest and broadest market failure ever seen". For me, who is not an economist, this

diagnosis, if it is correct, would seem to indicate the difficulty of saving the climate while remaining in an "all market" system.

Venezuela is nationalizing its oil, Bolivia is nationalizing its gas, the trade unions in Quebec are demanding the nationalization of wind farms.

Is collective ownership of energy resources not necessary for the working out of a plan?

The market is not the panacea, but is nationalization a solution? I did not know the case of Quebec that you evoke, I do not know the arguments that are put forward in this precise situation. But in a general fashion, I am not really sure that nationalization is the answer to the problem. EDF is a nationalized enterprise: is its strategy transparent, are its policies subject to democratic control?

Besides, I strongly doubt that nationalization leads to an improvement in terms of management. Are civil servants the most qualified to manage technical installations? We cannot deny the dynamism of the private sector on the level of investment and development.

Moreover, the balance sheet of the former USSR concerning ecology and management of resources is hardly encouraging... A debate is necessary about the conditions that have to be met so that management of resources responds to the interests of the collectivity, I agree. The objective must be that the populations should have their say.

Perhaps that involves nationalization in certain countries. But politics can also impose obligations of public service on private operators, so that certain guarantees are respected. The most important in my eyes is not to know who manages the resource, but to create the conditions for the way in which the resource is managed to give service to the widest public, while respecting the environment.

"Solar flux is fully

enough to satisfy all our energy needs."

More than ten years ago, you launched the idea of an "energy revolution". What does it consist of?

The principle is extremely simple: our energy system must abandon as soon as possible fossil combustibles and nuclear power, in order to base itself on renewable energies which all flow from solar energy. Coal, oil, gas, and uranium are non-renewable resources. Their stock is by definition limited. In saying that I am only stating a physical reality, which has strictly nothing to do with ideology.

Now, there exists another energy resource that is not a stock but a flux: the Sun. This flux is fully sufficient to satisfy all our energy needs, today and tomorrow. I quote the evaluation of the OECD (it is higher than my own calculation): the rays of the Sun which reach the surface of our globe are worth 8,000 times the primary world demand for energy.

The Sun is the best reactor that we could have: it is free, it is installed 150 million kilometres away from Earth, it recycles its waste itself, it has been functioning for 5 billion years and will continue functioning for at least 5 billion years. To capture even 1000th of this energy would be enough to cover the needs of the whole world, including billions of people who live in extreme energy poverty.

This is absolutely possible with the long-term technical potential of renewable energies: the IPCC estimated it already in 1995 to be more than ten times the present world consumption of primary energy.

Why do we have to radically reduce the primary demand for energy in the developed countries, if the technical potential of renewable energies is equivalent to 10 times world consumption?

Good question... It seems to me that

the answer resides in the qualification "technical". The technical potential of renewable energies is worth ten times world needs, but all this potential is not necessarily realizable as quickly as would be necessary in the economic and political context of today...

So here too the problem is therefore social and political?

Not only. The time factor seems to me to be decisive. I became aware in mid-December 2006 of a sensational communication concerning photovoltaic cells. It spoke of a rate of conversion of 40 per cent of solar energy into electrical energy, which is double the rate realized at present thanks to semi-conductors. Photovoltaic cells are making enormous progress on every level: longevity, efficiency, cost.

But it will take time for these discoveries to be confirmed, for a prototype to be created, for the technology to be diffused. Having said that, it is obvious that political will can shorten these times.

When the United States decided to go to the moon they gave themselves the means of doing so, and ten years later it was done. With the knowledge that we have, by concentrating on the improvement of existing techniques and their diffusion on a mass scale - which will create employment - it is perfectly possible to rapidly increase the share of solar energy.

The reduction in energy consumption in buildings is also taking time, but the technologies and the competences are already very widely diffused, capacities of production are installed, etc. In my opinion the reduction in demand must be seen as a stage, a necessary transition towards the energy revolution.

In the same register of ideas, it seems to me important not to miss out on carbon capture and sequestration, as an immediate means of reducing emissions.

Isn't the energy transition likely to pose all sorts of extremely complicated problems?

The implementation is likely in fact to be very complicated, and the difficulty

is not only technical. It is a question of reviewing the way we travel, heat ourselves, consume, produce, plan the territory.

Take the example of housing and territorial planning: we need norms of construction so that new buildings are heated by the Sun, we need to stop building just anywhere "zonings", residential zones, commercial centres which increase needs for mobility that are impossible to satisfy with public transport.

We can get a bus to pass by every quarter of an hour in a concentrated habitat, not in a dispersed habitat. I could give many more examples. It is easy to understand that all these domains are interconnected. To deal with them, a long term vision is indispensable. That is why we have to take the time to think and to discuss with the whole of society.

"We have to first of all create the collective means of reducing emissions"

The British Minister of the Environment proposes individual carbon rationing by means of a green credit card. What do you think of that?

Can such a system function? It will certainly be difficult to implement practically... I don't say no from the outset... but everyone needs to be concerned, not only individuals, but also economic and public actors. Otherwise revolt will not take long to rumble.

And then, we cannot limit ourselves to carbon rationing. We also have to give people the means of limiting emissions. Now, this reduction of emissions is not a purely individual question, but a collective question. Each person individually cannot develop solar cells, or increase the provision of public transport.

If we give people individually carbon credit cards without having previously created collective means of reducing

emissions that will open the door to discontent. What will people do when they notice in the middle of the year that they have no credit left?

There will be understandable explosions of anger, and this anger will not be constructive. The result will be that nine tenths of the population will become hostile to the fight against climate change.

Therefore: a carbon credit, why not, if all the collective measures making it possible to reduce emissions have previously been taken? But that means that there are many, many things to discuss before putting such a proposal on the table.

You support the proposal of Anil Agarwal [1] . What social force could impose it? Are the poor of the Third World going to mobilise for such an abstract and complicated demand?

It is a bit of a caricature to pose the problem in these terms. The governments and political men and women have the task of translating the aspirations of the people they represent into policies that can be applied.

The NGOs of the South can take part in the process of informing and make things move. The cancellation of the debt or agrarian reform are no less abstract demands, nor is it obvious that they automatically benefit the populations.

For every big reform, it is necessary to verify on the level of its application that its spirit is really respected in practice. I think that certain leaders of the developing countries could get down to defending this kind of proposal in a more visible and effective way.

We are perhaps on the eve of the moment when that will be done openly. It has not been given prominence in the media, but, in Nairobi, certain representatives of African countries, Kenya in particular, said that it was necessary to move towards a system of "contraction and convergence". That is not quite the same thing as the Agarwal proposition, but it is also very abstract.

Just before the Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC which was held in New Delhi in 2002, I went to listen to the debates of the "Climate Justice" movement. Hundreds of Untouchables and Indian small fisher folk were taking part. I didn't really have the impression that the notion of climate justice seemed to them to be too abstract.

"We cannot speak of scientists as a monolithic bloc"

Furthermore, saving the climate is not only a question of social forces. When we say "social forces", in general, we think of an action that goes from below towards the top: strikes, demonstrations, a revolution... Here, the process is different because everyone is involved in the climate. I know that the poor are the main victims, but you suffer from a heat wave even if you live in castle with air conditioning.

People are realising little by little that there is a message that is coming directly from Nature. Nature, in fact, is beginning to take part in climate negotiations.

That was very clear in Nairobi, since heavy rains perturbed the conference, a complete anomaly for that season. So there are not only social forces, but also physical forces, and they act on each of us individually. It would be a mistake to forget that factor.

From the moment that everyone is convinced that there is a problem, we are not quite in the same situation as when a demand comes only "from below". Now, that is what is happening at present in the negotiations: everyone is beginning to understand that, at the present rate of progress of the discussions, we will not succeed, and that there will be very serious impacts for everyone. That exercises pressure. Having said that, so much the better if there is, on top of that, pressure from below...

Reading certain publications, you get the feeling that the scientists are putting on the same footing physical laws and social laws, for

example by posing as a dogma that measures must be "cost effective". What do you think?

The principle of the least action in physics is not only a hypothesis. According to it, nature operates by consuming the least possible amount of energy and resources. Can this principle be compared to cost-effectiveness? That is the whole question.

I am thinking aloud...One is tempted to say yes, at first sight...But on the other hand, in physics, energy is a well-defined notion, which obeys determined laws, in particular a principle of conservation. Whereas money is not a physical category, but a human creation.

Other than a simple comparison, to imprudently transpose from one domain to the other could therefore turn out to be deceptive...That reminds me that the approval of the second report of the IPCC gave rise to extremely animated debates about the estimation of costs of damages.

In reality, it emerged that this estimation was based on a measure of the cost of human life in terms of salaries, which obviously led to the conclusion that the life of an inhabitant of Bangladesh was not worth as much as the life of an inhabitant of a developed country. But there was in fact a debate.

So we cannot speak of scientists in general as a monolithic group: there are different opinions, sometimes opposed. I must make it clear that I am particularly concerned by the work of working groups I and II of the IPCC.

In group II, there is a debate with those whom I call the narrow-minded economists, but the economic debate takes place mainly on the level of working group III. I am less well equipped to judge what is happening there.

The IPCC comes across as an incontestable scientific authority. Now, it is an intergovernmental group. Are its reports reliable? Don't scientists run the risk of falling into a trap?

It is in fact an intergovernmental

group, but the influence of the governments is quite limited on the level of reports, and it is very indirect.

It is true that the plenary assembly of the IPCC determines the contents and that this decision is made by representatives of governments. It is also true that that sometimes gives rise to rather difficult discussions. But, beyond that, the governments do not have much direct say. Certainly, the governments elect the bureaux of the working groups, but they are made up of scientists. Once they are constituted, they do not receive instructions from individual governments. There are perhaps exceptions for certain countries with a very authoritarian structure, but that certainly does not go for the majority of the members of the bureaux. The bureaux freely choose the authors who will contribute to the reports.

The governments can formulate their comments on the reports, but at the end of the day the authors decide and there is a system to guarantee that they decide honestly, and that they have to take account of every comment that has been made. At the end of the process, the governments intervene again in the approval of the summary for policy makers. Their written comments are collected together by the secretariat, then the authors and the bureaux of the working groups decide on the version that will be submitted to the plenary assembly.

The governments can again intervene at this level, to introduce nuances, but the final approval of is done line by line, on the basis of the report and the authors would not accept that the summary for policy makers should contain things which were incorrect. The freedom of the scientists who work in the framework of the IPCC is quite large. Moreover, the possibility of appealing to specialists from all countries opens up very broad horizons.

Twenty-five thousand people, especially young people, demonstrated to save the climate, in London on November 4 2006. What do you think about that?

It is very encouraging to see that so

many people are ready to mobilize on a question like that - it gives one energy. I did not see this demonstration, but I saw the one in Montreal in 2005, where there were 12,000 people. You can say that a demonstration doesn't settle anything, but it is important to physically see that there are people who are moving. And if they are young people, that

gives a lot of hope.

Interviewed by Daniel Tanuro, December 22, 2006.

Footnotes

[1] This proposal, made by the late Anil Agarwal, is known as "Contraction and Convergence". See Anil Agarwal and Sunita Nairin, "The Atmospheric Rights of All people on Earth", www.cseindia.org. See also Daniel Tanuro's article on this site, "The devil makes the saucepans, but not the lids".

A Revolutionary Marxist Party in Mindanao

6 April 2007, by [Clara Maria Sanchez](#)



The party was formed in an uncompromising Mao-Stalinist mould. Philippine society was characterised as "semi-colonial and semi-feudal" and the revolution defined as "national-democratic". The CPP's strategic line was that of prolonged people's war, surrounding the cities from the countryside, and passing through rigidly defined stages of strategic defence, strategic stalemate and strategic offensive, each with sub-stages.

All the party's work was to be subordinated to the primary objective of building a rural guerrilla army. The open mass struggle against the dictatorship and for reforms was considered as simply a propaganda exercise and a source of recruits for the underground party. The party's organisational principles were based on Stalinist bureaucratic centralism, with no right of tendency. Its First Congress was announced to have taken place in December 1968. There has never been a second congress.

All of these aspects of the CPP's politics were going to run up against quite different Philippine realities. Contrary to Sison's analysis, Philippine society was not semi-feudal but dependent capitalist. Secondly, the complex reality of Philippine society and the struggle against the dictatorship pushed the party to develop combinations of mass struggle and armed struggle that rapidly outgrew the simplistic "prolonged

people's war" schema. This produced debates over strategy and tactics that for a time endowed the CPP with a certain pluralism.

Debates around the issues that would be behind the 1992 split began as early as the 8th CC plenum in 1980. But at that time, as Francisco Nemenzo observed in a 1994 interview, "it did not seem to be urgent to resolve them since the movement was surging forward" [1]. Not only was there time and space for debates, but there was even experimentation with different forms of struggle that did not fit with the strategy of prolonged people's war. This was particularly the case in Mindanao. These experiments were influenced to a considerable extent by the experience of the revolutionary movements in Central America and by the Vietnamese experience. This was taking place in a period when Sison himself had been captured and imprisoned, from 1977 to 1986.

A turning point came in 1986 when the CPP took the decision to boycott the "snap election" that was held following the "people's power" movement that overthrew Marcos. The election led to the victory of Cory Aquino and the restoration of bourgeois democratic forms. This decision left the party isolated from the mass movement. Some months later the party leadership published a self-criticism, saying quite clearly that the boycott was an error, but failing to analyse the reasons for this major error. Subsequent discussion was cut short by the leadership. It was following the restoration of bourgeois

democracy that the contradictions created by the subordination of mass work to the armed struggle, specifically the rural armed struggle, became sharper.



Jose Maria Sison, founder of the Mao-Stalinist CPP

Throughout the period of the CPP's growth in the late 70s and early 80s its organisation in Mindanao had developed at an even faster rate. In many ways the struggle in Mindanao was one of the most advanced in the Philippines, both in terms of the armed struggle and the mass struggle. But as the party sank roots in Mindanao it had to confront the specificity of the island. In the epoch of Spanish colonisation Mindanao had never been occupied, beyond a few coastal outposts. The island was inhabited by Muslims, known as Moros, organised under the sultanates of Maguindanao and Jolo, and by indigenous tribes. When the Philippines were sold to the United States for 20 million dollars at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898 the Americans had to conquer the country against strong resistance from the revolutionary nationalist forces who had launched an insurrection against Spanish rule in 1896.

The American "pacification" of the Philippines is estimated to have cost the lives of about one sixth of the population. In the case of Mindanao this conquest was particularly difficult and particularly bloody and resistance

lasted until 1914. Subsequently governments in Manila pursued a conscious policy of colonising Mindanao with Christian settlers from other islands, so successfully that the Muslims and the indigenous peoples became a minority. Nevertheless the settlers did not constitute a privileged layer, as in for example South Africa or Israel, they were workers and peasants who were also exploited. But there does exist a national question of the Bangsa Moro people and an armed struggle for self-determination began in the early 1970s. There is also the question of the rights of the indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands, in both Muslim- and Christian-dominated areas.

The CPP in Mindanao had to confront this reality and began to develop alliance work both with the Moro movements - Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) - and with the indigenous peoples. This provoked debate and dissension within the party in Mindanao and with the central CPP leadership. In fact the CPP's conception of the national democratic revolution did not take into account the specific national questions in Mindanao, which in the thinking of the Sison leadership were relegated to be resolved after the victory of the revolution. The level of struggle in Mindanao also involved the use of urban partisan units and military offensives of a semi-insurrectional nature which did not fit into the prolonged people's war schema

The origins of the RPMM lie specifically in the Central Mindanao Region (CMR) of the CPP-NPA, which was established in 1987 through the merger of the North West region and the Moro region. This was at a time when the CPP and its organisations were running into serious difficulties. In the first place these were caused by the inability to analyse the new situation following the transition from dictatorship to bourgeois democracy and to reorient the party's tactics in accordance. This involved not only tactical problems but related to the whole strategy of the CPP.

Secondly the party was debilitated and traumatised by a series of self-

imposed purges in an attempt to root out government infiltrators, in which thousands of party members, most of them innocent, were liquidated. This weakened the party considerably, and the purges were particularly severe in Mindanao. The debates became more acrimonious. Sison, who had gone into voluntary exile in the Netherlands in 1988, issued a document at the end of 1991 entitled "Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors", whose aim was to return the CPP to his version of Maoist orthodoxy and purge the party of those who questioned it. All party organisations were called upon to "reaffirm". Those who supported Sison and did so became known as "reaffirmists" or "RA", those who refused to were "rejectionists" or "RJ".

Sison's position was endorsed by the 10th CC plenum in 1992 and the party's executive turned down a call for a congress - supported by some reaffirmists as well as by rejectionists - to settle the differences, making a split inevitable. Subsequently those who rejected his positions were expelled and from 1993 substantial sectors of the party, both geographical areas and departments, began to declare their autonomy from the party centre [2]. At this point the differences were wide-ranging, covering the party's analysis of Philippine economy and society, its political and military strategy, the question of minority nationalities, the party regime and the appreciation of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the process of capitalist restoration in China. On these latter points the party leadership confined itself to ritual denunciations of "modern revisionism", whereas sectors of the opposition were beginning to use the concepts of Stalinism and bureaucracy to understand what was happening.

The split confronted the oppositionists with the task of organising an alternative. Towards the end of 1994 the CMR issued a call for a Party Conference and invited the other main sectors of the rejectionists from the rest of the Philippines. The result of this conference was the launching of a pre-party formation in Mindanao called the People's Communist Party (PCP). The PCP maintained contacts and relations with other RJ forces and

in September 1995 it called a summit with the leaderships of the Manila-Rizal (National Capital) and Visayas regions, with a view to forming a new party on a national level. During this period the PCP launched a thoroughgoing reassessment of its ideology and politics, drawing a balance sheet of ten years of party work in Mindanao, holding conferences on electoral and parliamentary work, mass work and mass movements, international work, development and peace-building work.

In 1998, after three years of discussion and debate, there was a serious attempt to form a new party on an all-Philippine level, involving the PCP, the Visayas party committee and part of the leadership of the Manila-Rizal region. At a congress held in the mountains of Mindanao, the Revolutionary Workers' Party of the Philippines (RPMP) was formed, with as its armed wing the Revolutionary Proletarian Army/Alex Boncayo Brigade. Unfortunately this promising initiative towards an all-Philippine party was not successful. Serious differences arose regarding the functioning of the new party. In the opinion of the Mindanao comrades the Visayas leadership in particular had not broken from certain practices of the CPP. In 1999 peace negotiations between the government and the RPMP-RPA/ABB began and in 2000 a peace agreement was signed. The Mindanao comrades contested both the undemocratic way in which this was done and the content of the agreement, which they thought amounted to a plain and simple capitulation.

As a result on May 1st 2001 the Mindanao comrades formed the RPMM, with as its armed wing the Revolutionary Peoples' Army (RPA) - the plural form signifying its commitment to the recognition of the three peoples of Mindanao. The party has an all-Philippine perspective but its forces are in Mindanao and among Mindanaoans elsewhere. Following the split in the CPP, the CMR had established relations with other forces internationally, in particular with the Fourth International, to whose 1995 World Congress it sent a representative. These relations were maintained during the RPMP period

and in 2003 the RPMM became the Philippine section of the FI.

The situation in Mindanao is far from stable. In the first place, the Moro national question has not been resolved. An agreement signed between the Philippine government and the MNLF in 1996 led to the creation of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which has not fulfilled the hopes that were placed in it and is still dominated by Manila and plagued by corruption and clientelism. Negotiations are now taking place with the MILF, but their issue is uncertain and armed clashes with the army are not infrequent.

The presence of the Abu Sayyaf Group, a real terrorist group linked to Al Qaeda, is used as an excuse to maintain the militarization of Mindanao and to justify the presence of US troops, Mindanao having been defined as a front in the "war against terrorism". In addition, Mindanao, and the ARMM in particular, contain the poorest provinces in the Philippines. Multinational companies are plundering the island's natural resources, particularly mining and logging, bringing catastrophic effects for the environment and the invasion of the ancestral lands of the indigenous peoples. Armed conflict is not the only form of violence suffered by the people of Mindanao.

Although itself illegal and underground, the RPMM supports the efforts of a multiplicity of social movements and people's organisations which address the problems of the working class, the urban poor, the peasantry and fisher folk - health, housing, education, lack of

employment, agrarian reform. There is in particular a strong peace movement based on the tri-people concept, which seeks to resolve the national question by the recognition of the right of self-determination and the organisation of a referendum and which seeks to unite the three peoples on this basis. In December 2006, there took place on the island of Basilan the 4th Mindanao People's Peace Summit which brought together 500 people from all over Mindanao, including representatives of the MNLF and MILF and the indigenous peoples. On the electoral level the same ideas are defended by the Anak Mindanao (Amin) party list which has currently one representative in the Philippine parliament.

Mindanao is a highly militarised society. In addition to the Philippine army (two-thirds of whose forces are deployed in Mindanao) and police, there are the MNLF, MILF and the defence forces of the indigenous peoples. The CPP-NPA, which continues to be active in certain areas in Mindanao, has since the split had a policy of physically liquidating former members. Among those assassinated were two members of the RPMM-RPA. [3] Furthermore it is clear that the state security forces have been responsible for the death-squad-style assassination of hundreds of activists of social movements and people's organisations, including in Mindanao, since the arrival in power of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in 2001.

In this situation, the RPMM maintains its armed wing, the RPA. It does not however consider an offensive armed struggle to be appropriate at the present time. Consequently it signed a

ceasefire agreement with the government in 2005 and in December 2006 came to an agreement for the application of this ceasefire. But it has not disarmed and poses the question of a definitive peace agreement in terms of resolving the social and democratic issues that are at the root of violence in Mindanao. The negotiations with the government were not simply of a military nature but committed the government to provide finance for development projects in the areas under RPMM influence, the projects in question being defined by the local populations. The original negotiations covered 100 barangays (districts) but subsequently 100 more have asked to be considered as forming part of the RPMM's area of influence.

Footnotes

[1] Interview in Links no. 2, July-September, 1994

[2] These included the majority or important sectors of the party organisations in Manila-Rizal, Mindanao and the Visayas, as well as the peasant secretariat, the united front secretariat and the international department.

[3] Substantial documentation on the CPP's policy of physical liquidation can be found on the English-language pages of the site of Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières ([www. Europe-solidaire.org](http://www.Europe-solidaire.org)), under the section: Philippines - CPP killings.

War and Peace in Mindanao

6 April 2007, by Murray Smith



Independence fighters in Mindanao

The origins of the conflict go back a long way. The islands we now call the

Philippines were colonized by Spain in the 16th century. But in fact the Spaniards just captured Manila and gradually extended their control over the northern island of Luzon. Over the next three hundred years they moved southwards, not without meeting considerable resistance: there were

over 200 recorded uprisings during the Spanish colonial period. But they never conquered Mindanao beyond a few coastal settlements. The western part of Mindanao and the neighbouring islands were ruled by the Muslim sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao, the people being known

as Moros. The rest of the island was inhabited by indigenous tribes.

In 1896 the Philippines' war of independence from Spain began. But it was impacted by the Spanish-American War of 1898. Initially presenting themselves as friends of the Filipinos, the Americans ended up by "buying" the Philippines from Spain for 20 million dollars, by the terms of the Treaty of Paris in December 1898. The resulting resistance by the Filipinos in Luzon was subdued at the cost of 600,000 dead, about a sixth of the population. The conquest of the other islands led to a similar proportion of casualties. No accurate count has ever been made, but it is reasonable to say that at least a million (out of a population of seven million at the time) Filipinos died in the course of the American conquest. The American General "Jake" Smith made no bones about what he wanted from his soldiers: "I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn; the more you burn and kill the better it will please me". His colleague General Shafter expressed the same idea in a more philosophical vein: "It will perhaps be necessary to kill half of the Filipinos in order to enable the other half to attain a level of existence superior to their present semi-barbarous state".

If the Spanish had no right to sell the Philippines and the Americans no right to buy them, they had even less right as far as Mindanao was concerned, since Spain had never conquered it. In the whole of the Philippines resistance to the American occupation lasted for years after the upper-class leaders of the movement had sold out and made their peace with Uncle Joe. In Mindanao it lasted even longer, up until 1914. A high point of the American civilizing mission was reached in March 2 1906 with what is variously known as the First Battle of Bud Dajo or more accurately as the Moro Crater Massacre. Between 800 and 1000 Moros, armed with spears and swords, including many women and children, retreated into a volcanic crater on the island of Jolo, where they were attacked with modern weapons and artillery. When the battle was over there were only six survivors among the Moros. About twenty Americans died, out of a force of

several hundred.

By such methods were the Moros brought into the Philippine state - an American colony till 1946, then formally independent. They continued to be oppressed and discriminated against politically, economically and culturally. It is easy to understand that they fiercely maintained their own identity and their desire for freedom and it was only a question of time before this broke out in open rebellion. A defining moment was the Jabidah massacre in 1968, when Moro army recruits were massacred by their Philippine army superiors after refusing to take part in the invasion of Sabah, a province of Malaysia with which the Moros have historic links. Armed struggle began in the early 1970s, first of all under the leadership of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which negotiated a peace agreement with the Philippine Government that led to the creation of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1996, though it turned out to be a very unsatisfactory form of autonomy. A second movement arising from a split in the MNLF - the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) - continued an armed struggle and is now negotiating for wider autonomy.

However, the situation in Mindanao is not simply a case of an oppressed nation, the Bangsa Moro, fighting for self-determination, for autonomy within, or independence from, the Philippines. That is one aspect of it, but not the only one. The Moros never occupied the whole of Mindanao, there were always non-Muslim tribes. Nevertheless there was a Muslim majority in Mindanao till 1918, but today the Muslim population of Mindanao is about 25 per cent. The indigenous Lumad peoples make up another 5 per cent. The remaining 70 per cent are Christian. This demographic evolution has nothing accidental about it. It is the result of a policy conducted throughout the 20th century under American rule and by the independent Philippines, of settling Mindanao with migrants from elsewhere in the Philippines. This had a double advantage: defusing rural discontent elsewhere by offering land to these settlers, and populating Mindanao with people loyal to the

Philippine state. This policy was consciously carried out by introducing land registration and Western legal norms and limiting the amount of land Muslims could own.

The aim of successive government in Manila was therefore quite clear. It was also successful. But these settlers and their descendants are not any kind of caste above the Moros, nor do they live separately from them. The migrants and their descendants are ordinary workers and peasants and they live side by side with Muslims. No one is proposing to drive them out.

Muslims are in a majority in some areas of Mindanao and the adjoining islands, which mostly form part of the ARMM, and a more or less substantial minority elsewhere. The twelve tribes of the Lumad indigenous peoples also have their ancestral lands in both Christian and Muslim dominated areas. Any progressive solution to the problems of Mindanao must recognise the right of the Moro people to self-determination as well as the rights of the Lumad. But it also has to start from the fact that three peoples with their own history, culture and identity now share Mindanao. That is why progressive forces on the island have developed, since the 1990s, the concept of a "tri-people" solution, of the necessity and the possibility for the three peoples to live together.

This is reinforced by the fact that the problems of Mindanao cannot be reduced to the Moro national question. The regions of Mindanao and the neighbouring islands are among the poorest in the Philippines, which is saying something in a country where 40 per cent of the population live on less than two dollars a day. Often referred to as the Philippines' "last frontier" Mindanao is now the target of multinational companies eager to exploit its agricultural (rubber, coconuts, mangoes) and mining resources and its forests. Apart from plundering Mindanao's natural wealth, these activities cause ecological havoc and infringe on the ancestral lands of the Lumad.

The social problems of Mindanao made it, in the 1970s and early 1980s, a bastion of the movement against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos - a

movement which involved the armed insurgency of the New People's Army led by the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines, but also mass resistance by people's organisations in the cities and countryside. The Maoist insurgency continued after the overthrow of Marcos in 1986, but it was greatly weakened in the late 1980s by political mistakes, a series of suicidal purges and finally a split in the CPP in 1992. The hardline Maoists of the CPP-NPA, who advocate - and practise - physical liquidation of political opponents, are still present. So are forces from the other side of the 1992 split, the most important of which is the Revolutionary Workers' Party-Mindanao (RPMM).

Mindanao and the adjoining islands are bristling with arms. The army and the militarised police are omnipresent. Landlords and the multinational mining and logging companies all have armed goons at their disposal. The Moro movements are armed. Organising a strike, fighting for land reform or otherwise defending the poor and exploited can make you a candidate for the death squads. Several hundred political activists have been murdered since President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo came to power in 2001, as have 50 journalists. So the movements of the left also have to be armed.

The reason for my going to Mindanao was as part of a delegation from Holland to the 4th Mindanao Peoples' Peace Summit. The main organiser of the event was the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM). The MPPM arose as a response to the upsurge in hostilities on the island in 1997 and 1999 and in particular in response to the declaration of "Total War" against the MILF by then president Joseph Estrada in June 2000. (A few months later Estrada was overthrown by a "people's power" movement).

Previous summits had taken place in 2000, 2002 and 2004. While continuing to pursue its general work for peace and organising relief for victims of the war, the MPPM decided to focus on finding a lasting solution to

the Bangsa Moro question, working in particular with the Bangsa Moro Consultative Peoples' Assembly headed by Professor Abhoud Syed M. Lingga. The twin axes of such a solution were the recognition of the Bangsa Moro people's right to self-determination and the proposal to have any settlement approved by a UN-supervised referendum. The campaign for such a referendum was launched at the 2nd summit in December 2002.

The 4th summit was held in the town of Lamitan on the island of Basilan. The choice was not accidental. Basilan and the neighbouring Sulu and Tawi-Tawi islands have been the centre of the activities of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Unlike the MNLF and the MILF, which are national liberation movements, the ASG is a fundamentalist Islamic group with links to Al Quaida that engages in terrorist actions - bombings, killings, kidnappings. Its origins are obscure and government agents provocateurs are widely thought to have played a role in creating it. Today its activities are systematically inflated and used by the government to fan anti-Muslim feeling and insecurity, in order to justify the presence of Philippine troops and American "advisers" in what Washington has defined as the latest front in its "war against terror".

Lamitan was the scene of a siege and several deaths in 2001 when militants of the ASG held their foreign hostages in a local hospital. Nevertheless the 55 per cent of Christians and 45 per cent of Muslims that make up the town's population live harmoniously together. It was to counterpose this reality to the government and media inspired hysteria that Lamitan was chosen for the summit, and the participants received a warm and friendly welcome from the municipality and the people of the town.

For five days, the more than 500 people at the summit, all but a handful of them from Mindanao and the surrounding islands, discussed how to work for a peaceful and democratic

solution to the conflict in Mindanao. Representatives of both the MNLF and the MILF, as well as of the Lumad peoples, took part. There were also organisations of youth, women and popular organisations who are active on issues of peace, health, education and economic development. The main discussion in the summit centred on the question of self-determination and of finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. But other issues were raised - Muslim women vigorously posed the issue of equality, to the obvious discomfort of some of the more traditionally-minded men.

One session of the summit reported on the peace negotiations between the RPMM and the government. A ceasefire had been signed in 2005 and agreement was reached on its application and monitoring in a meeting shortly after the summit. But unlike some armed groups, the RPMM does not see things from a purely military point of view. It makes a definitive agreement and disarmament conditional on the government fulfilling its promises to provide the resources to tackle the social problems in the areas where the RPMM operates - health, housing, employment, etc. Furthermore it lets the people in those areas define what their needs are.

The fight for peace in Mindanao is inseparable from the question of economic and social development. At present the level of armed conflict is quite low and the government is negotiating with both the MNLF and the MILF. It is possible, though far from certain, that a new agreement on autonomy for the Bangsa Moros will be reached. But peace is not just the absence of war. A lasting peace means not only respecting the rights of the Moros and the Lumad, it also means putting an end to all the forms of poverty, inequality and injustice which breed violence. Mindanao is potentially a very rich island, but its natural wealth needs to be owned and controlled by its people and not as at present by an alliance of corrupt politicians, landowners and the multinationals.

IV388 - April 2007 pdf

1 April 2007