



## IV357 - March 2004

### FI International Committee meets

17 March 2004

- The international situation, verifying and deepening the analysis laid out at the Congress around the central themes of the deepening neo-liberal counter-reform, the continuing lack of stabilization of a new world order, the crisis of legitimacy of traditional political structures and the opening of a new space for radical anti-capitalist resistance. [The report is published in this issue.](#)

- The successful international meeting of radical anti-capitalist parties which took place in Mumbai during the World Social Forum. A full report will be published in our next issue.

- The situation in Brazil. The evolution of the situation, and notably of the Lula government characterized in the international political report as “one of the best pupils of the IMF” and “having adapted to the logic of liberal counter-reforms”, raise many questions as to the tactics and strategy of the left in the PT, among

them our comrades of the DS who reaffirmed last November their intention to fight to win the majority of the PT back to its historical class struggle programme. The expulsion of parliamentarians, including Heloisa Helena of the DS, makes this a more difficult perspective. The IC decided to open an international internal bulletin to discuss the situation in Brazil.

- The World Social Forum in Mumbai as well as the recent European Social Forum of Paris-St Denis and other regional initiatives of the global justice movement. The discussion confirmed the continuing extension of this movement and the possibility it offers for bringing new layers and new regions - demonstrated by the success in India - into a radical challenge to the capitalist system, even if this remains nevertheless uneven.

- The situation in the European Union in the run up to the European

elections and the attempts by both the reformist and radical anti-capitalist left to be present at a EU-wide level in those elections. The context was also analysed in a further report, a brief summary of which is also published.

Continental-based meetings enabled the members to discuss more concretely their common tasks on a regional level.

The meeting also welcomed the presence of a long-time supporter from Syria only recently released from prison.

The meeting was equally marked by the presence and active participation of observers from organizations with which the Fourth International maintains fraternal relations: the International Socialist Movement from Scotland, the Democratic Socialist Perspective from Australia, and the International Socialist Organization from the USA.

### Elections after the massacre...

17 March 2004, by [Izquierda Anticapitalista](#)

The results of yesterday's general election, held under the impact of the massacre of 11 March and the doctoring of information by the PP, represent a considerable defeat for the PP and success for the PSOE. Socialist Party leader Zapatero has finally managed to concentrate the

“tactical vote” of a large sector of the electorate fed up with the PP's authoritarianism and warmongering and firmly determined to show its indignation at the political exploitation of the slaughter in Madrid by [outgoing prime minister] Aznar and [his heir designate] Rajoy.

But the PSOE could not have won without the mass mobilisations over the past year that built up a deep-rooted yearning for political change that was also to be seen in the protest actions last Saturday in many cities and, especially, in the increased turnout at the elections, particularly

among the youth. The development of these mobilisations is essential if the hopes raised now are not to be thwarted.

Alongside this fundamental fact marking the beginning of a new political cycle, there was a spectacular increase in votes and seats for Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, showing in this way that a broad segment of Catalan society supports a commitment to dialogue and recognition of the pluri-national character of the Spanish state. The United Left, on the other hand, suffered a major setback, due mainly to the pressure of "tactical voting", but also, in our opinion, to the wavering and contradictions in its electoral discourse and in its pursuit of distinct political profile that would make it appear as an alternative left before and during the electoral campaign.

The new parliament will therefore have a left majority and greater pluri-national representation, which straightaway poses the new challenges the government formed under Zapatero's leadership will be confronted with. Withdrawal of the Spanish troops from Iraq ought to be the first and immediate measure taken together with a commitment to set in

train a "second transition" aimed at amending the constitution so that it recognises the pluri-national character of the state and establishing a new federal pact based on acceptance of the free decisions of peoples such as the Basque and the Catalan. Urgent steps also need to be taken to protect freedoms and democracy (especially in regard to the media), while in the economic and social spheres it will be necessary to make a clean break with "crony capitalism", privatisations and the increasingly casual nature of employment for most of the working population (including immigrants, by immediately granting permits to all those without them). The new government should also make a commitment to a progressive tax policy, guaranteeing quality public services and the right to decent housing, creating steady employment with rights based on such measures as the 35-hour week, and the immediate cancellation of the National Hydrological Plan and the closing down of all nuclear power stations.

However, the experience of dashed hopes following the PSOE's win in 1982 and the prevailing orientation of the party's current leadership, as expressed in the major planks of its election manifesto and symbolically

reflected in the probable composition of the new government, should lead us not to place any trust in it. It will be necessary to keep up and intensify the demonstrations and actions taken by citizens in regard to the new government, supporting any step forward it takes, but maintaining the movements' independence and keeping up the pressure on it so as to gradually weld together a social and political anti-capitalist and alternative left, which is even more necessary today, if that were possible. For that very reason we believe the position forces such as the United Left should adopt in parliament is to support the election of Zapatero as head of the government and be willing to enter into one-off agreements on the issues mentioned above, but not be part of this government, as that would mean giving overall support to Zapatero's programme.

The most immediate task is to turn the demonstrations on 20 March into an opportunity to condemn the war and the occupation of Iraq and demand the immediate return of the Spanish troops, the breaking off of all agreements with the United States and a struggle for another Europe in solidarity with the peoples of the "South", particularly the Palestinian people.

## Mumbai: new ground for the WSF

17 March 2004, by Josep María Antentas

### The process of the WSF in India



One of the more significant aspects of the preparatory process for the WSF in India was the broad unitary dynamic generated between organizations and groups of a very different nature, consolidating and deepening a tendency that began with the preparation of the Asian Social Forum in the Indian city of Hyderabad in January 2003. According to

members of the Indian organizing committee who are familiar with the reality of this country, there has traditionally been a certain capacity for unitary work between similar organizations (trade unions, peasant movements and so on) but this coexisted with a strong division and conflictual relationship between different organizations, like for example between NGOs and trade unions, or between the popular movements of Gandhian inspiration not linked to any political party and the mass fronts of the left parties. The WSF process has allowed the generation of a unitary dynamic that breaks down the previous barriers and compartmentalizations. The spectrum

of organizations involved in the Indian organizing committee was very broad (peasant movements, trade unions, movements against the privatization of water, NGOs, dalits [untouchables] and the parties of the radical left, mainly of Maoist origin).

A small nucleus of peasant organizations linked to a sector of Maoism organized the event "Mumbai Resistance" next to the WSF enclosure, while another group of autonomous peasant organizations organized the Assembly of Popular Movements, both of modest dimensions.

Still, as Pierre Rousset, one of the

foreigners most directly involved in following the preparatory process, observes, it is too soon to know if the process of the WSF and this unitary dynamic has sunk deep roots in India, although there are indications that point in an affirmative direction, like the preparation of the March 20 day of action against the occupation of Iraq, or the decision of the Indian unions to issue a call for a nationwide general strike on February 24 in Mumbai.

## Profile and composition of the WSF

The profile and composition of this fourth WSF, which, with approximately 125,000 participants, was the biggest so far, displayed several new features in relation to previous editions. As nearly everybody has observed, this forum allowed a real fundamental qualitative leap in the process of internationalization of the WSF, whose participants were until now essentially Latin American, European and North American. Mumbai allowed the integration of the Indian movements and a broad number of Asian countries, mainly from the Southeast and East of the continent. This substantial change in the participation and composition of the forum was also reflected in the dominant themes. In addition to the problems already approached in previous WSFs, here developed under the form they take in India, the specificities of Indian and Asian reality were taken into account.

The format of the forum was similar enough to that of the third WSF, with some changes in the main conferences - a significant part of which were organized by the movements and the participant organizations in the forum, and not directly by the organizing committee of the WSF or the International Council.



Sometimes it appeared that the forum was more focused outside the conferences and seminars than inside,

given the continuous demonstrations, marches, and singing of the Indian and Asiatic movements from the first to the last moment. For many movements, this was the major form of self-expression during the days of the forum, more than attending the debates.

Another positive novelty was the high visibility of the Indian popular movements, the "poor" and the most underprivileged social sectors, like the dalits. There is a broad consensus that this was the social forum where the popular visibility of the "poor" and the popular sectors had been strongest. However, it was also the WSF with the lowest institutional profile of them all. Held in a city governed by the reactionary right, where the left is generally weak, the organizational, logistical and political effort to prepare the forum could not count on any aid from the Indian institutions. The Indian organizing committee nonetheless took some exemplary decisions, such as rejecting the financial aid of institutions like the Ford Foundation, a contributor to previous forums. Again, the much praised "unity and radicalism" of Florence entirely set the tone for the forum.

## The coordination of the social movements

During the forum, as every year, daily assemblies of the social movements were held, this time called "assemblies of activists", to avoid any misunderstanding with the Indian organizations, since in India the term "social movement" has a much more restricted meaning than in other parts of the world, referring only to a specific type of movement, has a more inclusive character, under which they recognize all the different realities, organizations and struggles existing in India. There were also important thematic coordinations like that of the international campaign against the war in Iraq, that brought together a broad spectrum of the existing antiwar coalitions across the world.



The movements that had decided last year to organize a World Network of Social Movements held three big debates. First, a balance sheet of Cancun, to analyze the weaknesses and strengths shown by the social movements on this occasion, with a view to organizing for the next Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in Hong Kong in autumn 2004. There was broad enough agreement that the process around Cancun was well prepared at the level of analysis, the pursuit of official negotiations and pressure on the national governments, but weak at the level of mobilizations, not only in Cancun, but overall at the international level.

The difficulties in organizing a day of global action against the WTO contrast, as Christophe Aguiton observed, with the strength of the recent mobilizations on subjects like the war in Iraq, or the rebirth of social struggles in many countries. The second debate turned around the operation of the Network of Movements itself. The necessity was noted of extending its composition and at the same time integrating new realities, beginning with the Indians and Asians, as well as opening an international space for strategic discussion between the movements, an aspect which until now has been very weak. Finally, the Assembly of Social Movements drew up a final declaration, outlining the main objectives of mobilization for this year, principally the March 20 day of action against the occupation of Iraq and the WTO meeting in Hong Kong.

The weak point of the coordination of the movements was the low attendance and participation of the Indian movements. Some of the members of the Indian organizing committee, like PK Murthy, told us that this was due to the organizational overload of the main people in charge of the Indian organizations during the forum, as well as the newness of the process of world-wide coordination of social movements for the Indian organizations, as yet little inserted in the international dynamic.

The international coordination of the social movements has in principle taken a step forward in Mumbai, but we have to wait for a time before we know whether the agreements made really allow an advance in the desired

direction. The challenges seem clear - to extend the network, to integrate the Indian realities and many other absentees, to open an international space for strategic debate, and to raise ourselves to the height of what is

necessary for the key events of the coming year. ..

\* This assessment was first published on [www.espacioalternativo.org](http://www.espacioalternativo.org) on January 23, 2004.

## New advances, old problems

17 March 2004, by James D. Cockcroft , Susan Caldwell

This radical position grew in part out of the Jakarta Peace Conference against the current total war situation, US imperialism, and the U.S. government's attempt to make the 21st century "the American Century". WSF 2004 condemned not just the Iraq occupation but also Israel's war against Palestine. There was strong support for the closing of all 875 US military bases in the non-U.S. world. People also advocated a "social war" against terror and against state repression of activists, that is, the use of the terrifying "war against terrorism" to criminalize popular movements. In addition, a network to stop buying from US war profiteers (Bechtel, Halliburton, Exxon Mobil, Pepsi and so on) drew support.



Retaining its pluralism as "a world village square", WSF 2004 featured incredible human diversity, partly because of the varied viewpoints and peoples represented but also because of a strong participation from India's many linguistic groups and lower castes, such as the Dalits (those of the lower castes, the "untouchables") and the Adivasis (indigenous peoples known as "tribals"). The Dalits arrived at Mumbai high spirited after a national march.

Women constituted close to 50% or even more of this year's participants, although most panels did not reflect this. Building on earlier meetings like the September 2003 one in Cancun, Mexico, that helped spark the collapse of the World Trade Organization ministerial meeting, women's networks were part of the Indian organizing committee (women always

having been a vocal part of WSF organizing committees). Two of Mumbai's 12 major forums were dedicated to women's issues. There were at least two hundred seminars on women's issues scheduled - many by the Indian women's organizations themselves. Women's international networks, such as the World March of Women, Women's Reproductive Rights and so on used WSF 2004 as an occasion to meet together as networks to look at the possibility of joint work and coordination.

This exemplifies the WSF process of advancing toward a collectivist, cooperative, and inclusive model of leadership instead of a reductionist and exclusivist model of a single [often male] leadership. Clearly the World Social Forum's process can and should play a key role in unifying struggles, networking networks and organizations, and moving the social movement process toward a political one capable of changing the world.

WSF 2004 showed that these annual meetings are not just ones involving elite jetsetter citizen activists and progressive NGOs but are anchored in local social movements such as those in India. Porto Alegre (Brazil) is by no means a WSF "headquarters", nor is the WSF Euro-centric - it is increasingly global.

Holding this year's World Social Forum in Mumbai was only possible due to the involvement of the Indian social movements and political groups who agreed to work together to create the event. This cooperation is one of the important achievements of the WSF - as well as bringing the world's attention to Asia, and the Asian Subcontinent.

WSF 2004 and the events leading up to it, such as the six-day 2003 Asian Social Forum (ASF) in Hyderabad attended by representatives of 840 organizations, 14,426 delegates and 780 foreign delegates, linked up political parties and social movements, especially in India. Together with the gigantic February 15, 2003, global mobilization against the planned US invasion of Iraq, Hyderabad's ASF helped show most of India's and Asia's sizeable lefts the importance of the WSF. Also gaining a hearing at the ASF was the view that the rightwing governments of India and Pakistan are "twin warmongers". Activists from India and Pakistan networked in Mumbai, changing the political culture of both.

Numerous WSF participants came from the rest of Asia (but only a handful from China). There occurred countless Asian rallies, including the Asian People's Rally against free trade agreements, oppression of migrant workers, and war. There also was more participation from the Arab and Islamic world, such as Palestine, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran.

WSF 2004's organizers included India's two largest communist parties and one representative from each mass organization joining the India WSF process. They proved you could convoke a WSF with minimal government funding, no direct corporate funding, and without a leftist party in power (as in Porto Alegre, where in the 1990s the PT had first introduced its famed "participatory budget"). Using much self-sufficient funding, they reduced by half the budget required for WSF 2003 in Porto Alegre. However, sixty percent of WSF 2004 funding still came from NGOs (reportedly from

Netherlands-based Hivos and Novib and UK-based NGO Oxfam).

WSF's process of debates and self-criticisms continued. Sticky funding issues remained - in poor countries you have to get funding from somewhere, and the least tainted sources are often a handful of progressive NGOs. Other old problems and questions persisted about the open forum format and lack of a unified WSF position on alternatives to capitalist globalization. Although WSF 2006 may be held in Africa, is there still not a need to incorporate more of the world's underrepresented peoples (e.g. China, indigenous peoples and migrant workers, and guerrilla resistance armies like those in Nepal, Mexico, and Colombia excluded because of the WSF Charter's commitment to "non-violence")? Is there any usefulness to the large "talking heads" forums or should there be more emphasis on the seminar-level meetings between activists? And innumerable other questions...



True to its initial call, WSF 2004 focused on support for world peace and opposition to imperialist globalization, militarism, India-style "communalism" (exemplified by the 2003 murder of more than 2,000 Muslims in Gujarat), religious fanaticism, sectarian violence, casteism, racism, work/descent based exclusions, discriminations, and patriarchy. Representatives from the world's social movements (but only a few from India) met every night to draft a "Call of the Assembly of Social Movements". Echoing the causes listed in the original WSF call, the social movements' call specified the rights of Dalits and the world's incapacitated, among others. It emphasized the March 20 anti-war mobilization and also called for mobilizing for March 8 (International Women's Day), March 30 (Palestinian Land Day), and April 17 (International

Peasant Struggle Day). It endorsed the ongoing campaigns against the WTO, FTAA, WB, IMF, G8, and ASEAN. Expressing solidarity with progressive forces in Cuba, Palestine, Venezuela, and Bolivia, it concluded: "Globalize the Struggle, Globalize Hope!"

Other major developments at WSF 2004 included intensified global campaigns:

- For cancelling the huge, unjust, unpayable "odious" Third World debt
- For an end to violence against women, including honour killings and dowry deaths
- For treatment and action against HIV/AIDS
- For reforming in-depth, or abolishing and replacing, international institutions like the World Bank, IMF, WTO, and UN
- For boycotting Coca-Cola (for its complicity in the murder of trade unionists in Colombia and destruction of indigenous peoples' water and land resources in Kerala state, India)
- For dealing with mass poverty, child labour, and sex trade
- For human dignity through struggle, including sexual orientation and gender identity
- For WSF's historic emphasis on both labour and ecological issues
- For spreading regional social forums, such as the 2003 ASF and European Social Forum, and the Social Forum of the Americas in Quito, Ecuador, July 2004
- Against privatization of water and other human necessities
- Against destruction of other nations' agriculture and the world's farmers through the use of transgenic seed varieties by corporations like Monsanto and Cargill
- Against using intellectual property

rights to strip people of their knowledge and sources of survival/resistance

- Against neoliberalism's conversion of life forms into commodities for sale

- For alternative media and internet software sources (22 of the 700 workshops)

A small coalition opposed to the WSF, the Mumbai Resistance (MR), conducted meetings across the street from the WSF that drew up to 5,000. Although the well-known farmers' organization Via Campesina brought to the WSF more than 180 representatives from outside India, its affiliate from India joined the MR. Other MR sponsors included the CPI(ML)PW, a combination of two of India's Maoist splinter groups known to have murdered rivals in the past. MR objected to WSF's NGO funding and exclusion of guerrilla movements and political parties (even though parties do play a role in the WSF).

Since India's left has traditionally been largely self-funding and based on "self-reliance", its more radical elements have criticized the rise of the NGOs as a combination of co-option and reformism - a kind of "Trojan horse" of imperialism. While it is true that most NGOs seek to control social movements or give capitalism a human face, many also help marshal forces opposed to neoliberalism, imperialist war and capitalism's ongoing destruction of ecosystems. MR backers turned down an invitation to address the huge and diverse audiences of the WSF, thereby isolating themselves from larger ongoing struggles.

Whatever its problems, the WSF, sometimes called "the other superpower", remains an unprecedented process of cross-cultural social activism and international movement building. Overcoming obstacles and networking networks, it keeps advancing in its call for "another possible world" of justice, equity, and peace.

# England: a new alternative

17 March 2004, by [Alan Thornett](#)

There was a standing ovation, in the convention, at the moment the political declaration on which Respect will be based was endorsed by an overwhelming majority of those present. The declaration had been amended and added to during a debate in the course of the day.

R.E.S.P.E.C.T. is an acronym. It stands for: Respect, Equality, Socialism, Peace, Environmentalism, Community, and Trade unionism. This summed up very well the main priorities of those present and the aspirations of many people today.

The convention elected an interim (18 person) executive committee which strongly reflects the anti-war movement - from which the initiative for Respect has emerged.



On the executive are: George Galloway, a Glasgow MP expelled from the Labour Party in October for his opposition to the Iraq war (in particular calling on British troops to disobey orders); the general secretary of the civil service union, Mark Serwotka; film director Ken Loach; two regional representatives of the fire-fighters union; Salma Yaqoob, an outstanding Muslim activist in the Stop the War movement in Birmingham; Dr Siddiqui, leader of the Muslim Parliament in England; and Nick Wrack, chair of the Socialist Alliance. From the far left there are four leading members of the Socialist Workers Party and myself.

The executive will run the election campaign and run Respect until October. There will then be a second conference where the formation of Respect will be completed, with the adoption of a constitution and more permanent structures.

The political need for an organisation like Respect has existed in Britain since the mid 1990s, with the rapid move to the right of New Labour,

creating a political space to its left. This space has presented a challenge to the left to break from its isolationism and build something broad and new.

In recent years the Socialist Alliance has addressed this issue in England, and the Scottish Socialist Party addressed it, more successfully, in Scotland. In England the Alliance found it difficult to make a breakthrough, but it was able to do some important groundwork on the creation of a left alternative.

A major new opportunity opened up with the emergence of the mass antiwar movement against the invasion of Iraq. The highly successful Stop the War Coalition (StWC) could not itself become a political organization and stand in elections - that is not its role as a broad united front. The Socialist Alliance, at its conference in May, recognised this and called for the formation of a new political organization out of the radicalization which had taken place around the war. There was, however, no obvious catalyst for such a development and the attempts of the Socialist Alliance failed to bring this into being.

The catalyst came with the expulsion of George Galloway. This dramatically opened up the situation and posed the possibility of a much broader political initiative. Moreover, to his great credit, within days of his expulsion, Galloway made a forthright call for a new political formation to fight in the European and London elections, saying that he was prepared to go on to its list if asked. As an ex-Labour MP, he was in a unique position to call for a new movement. In fact he is the first Labour MP in modern times to make such a break and call for a new party. When Ken Livingstone was expelled he not only rejected such a move but called on others to stay in the LP. In fact George Galloway says he has no intention of applying for readmission to the Labour Party, since this would be a betrayal of the

activists of the Stop the War movement.

Respect is potentially the most important development on the English left since the building of broad anti-capitalist parties was put centre-stage, in the mid-1990s, by the rise of Blairism.

The emergence of Respect cannot be understood without an appreciation of the success and vitality of the antiwar movement in England, and the unity it forged between a wide range of political traditions in the process. It did not stop the war, of course, but it was the most important and effective broad campaigning coalition which had been built in England for many years, and it had mass support - it was, and remains, a genuine mass movement.

It was clear from the first big demonstration in September 2002 in London that the anti-war movement was going to be something extraordinary. That demonstration was followed on February 15, 2003 by the biggest political demonstration in British history, with 2 million people on the streets. It was a movement which had a unique potential to reshape and revitalise the left - if the left was prepared to grasp the opportunity.

At the same time people were confronted by New Labour's increasingly reactionary social policy. This was the government that had introduced tuition fees in higher education, was privatizing schools and letting pro. t dictate what happens in the health service. It was the government that had stoked up racism, and strengthened the far right, by its continuous attacks on immigrants and asylum seekers.

Labour supporters were faced with the fact that today's Labour government is actually worse than its Tory predecessor on many of these issues. It was the potent combination of these factors - the war and Labour's

social policy - which prised open still further the gulf between New Labour and its traditional supporters, which has been growing for years.

The task now is to build Respect into a political organization in a short period of time. Today the need is for parties that can reach out to the wider working class by uniting revolutionary socialists with many others who want to fight against the right wing and reactionary policies of New Labour. We need parties that can function effectively at both the electoral and campaigning levels. All the signs are that Respect can become such a party.

Unfortunately the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) has voted at a special conference (held on January 21) not to

join Respect at this stage but to continue with its policy of seeking to reclaim the Labour Party for the left. This is regrettable, but it will not stop the momentum behind Respect. In fact the CPB is deeply divided on the issue, with its daily paper, the Morning Star, promoting Respect against the party line. In the days before the Respect convention it carried an article headlined "All aboard the unity express".

The important thing is that Respect does not remain as an election campaign, or a loose electoral alliance, but goes on to develop into a political party which will be there for the long term and which can provide an ongoing alternative to New Labour.

There is already a consensus that it will be a democratic and pluralist organization which will allow the far left organizations to affiliate and exist inside it as political platforms.

There is now about a month to construct Respect as an organization and launch its election campaign. The first meeting of the Respect executive, on Saturday January 31st, decided to call for Regional Conventions (on the basis of the European constituencies) to launch Respect at the regional level and elect candidates for the European elections. No one knows, of course, how many votes Respect will attract. But the feeling is that there is at least a possibility, if things go well, of winning a seat in the European Parliament.

## The founding declaration of Respect - the Unity Coalition

17 March 2004

The two most important statistics in contemporary politics highlight the growing chasm between ordinary working people and the political establishment - on the one hand we have participated in the greatest political demonstrations in modern history, and on the other hand the last general election saw the lowest turnout since universal suffrage was introduced.

This chasm is at its widest on the question of war and peace. Tony Blair's New Labour has taken us to war five times in the last six years, each time with calamitous consequences. The bloodshed, the waste of precious economic resources, the lying and hypocrisy that have accompanied the attack on Iraq have brought many to the conclusion that they must rethink their traditional political allegiance.

But the yearning for a political alternative is even wider than the anti-war movement. Pensioners, students, trade unionists, Muslims and other faith groups, socialists, ethnic minorities and many others have been

deeply disappointed by the authoritarian social policies and pro. t-centred, neo-liberal economic strategy of the government.

There is a crisis of representation, a democratic deficit, at the heart of politics in Britain. We aim to offer a solution to this crisis.

We stand for:

- An end to the war and occupation in Iraq. We will not join any further imperialist wars.

- An end to all privatisation and the bringing back into democratic public ownership of the railways and other public services.

- An education system that is not dependent on the ability to pay, that is comprehensive and gives an equal chance in life to every child no matter how wealthy or poor their parents, from nursery to university.

- A publicly owned and funded, democratically controlled NHS, free to all users.

- Pensions that are linked to average earnings.

- Raising the minimum wage to the European Union Decency threshold of Â£7.40 an hour.

- Taxing the rich to fund welfare and to close the growing gap between the poor and the wealthy few.

- The repeal of the Tory anti-union laws.

- Opposition to all forms of discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs (or lack of them), sexual orientation, disabilities, national origin or citizenship.

- The right to self-determination of every individual in relation to their religious (or non-religious) beliefs, as well as sexual choices.

- The defence of the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Opposition to the European Union's "Fortress Europe" policies.

- We will strongly oppose the anti-European xenophobic right wing in

any Euro referendum. But we oppose the 'stability pact' that the European Union seeks to impose on all those who join the euro. This pact would outlaw government debt, spending and reinforce the drive to privatise and deregulate the economy and we will therefore vote 'No' in any referendum on this issue.

- Support for the people of Palestine and opposition to the apartheid system that oppresses them.

- An end to the destruction of the environment by states and corporations for whom profit is more important than sustaining the natural world on which all life depends.

We want a world in which the

democratic demands of the people are carried out; a world based on need not profit; a world where solidarity rather than self-interest is the spirit of the age.

Let this be the rebirth of hope for those who have become disillusioned.

Join us!

## Statement by Socialist Democracy

17 March 2004, by [Democracia Socialista](#)

**2** The Conference considered it was important to defend the positive values of the PT's history (its programmatic contribution, the right to tendency and internal democracy, its feminist achievements, the ability to bring together the different forces and experiences of the left). In this context it also emphasised the need to reactivate the links between the party organisation and the broad social and political movement around the PT.

**3** The Conference decided to use the legitimacy of defending this historic project of the PT, and its strategy as a socialist and democratic party, to intervene in the dispute over the course taken by the party. Given this conflict within the party, the Conference agreed to try to develop a mass left current as a pole of reference for rebuilding the PT as a socialist and democratic party. Developing this current and struggling to rebuild the PT as a socialist party represents an alternative both to accepting the pressures towards programmatic adaptation, and to the sectarian project of a new party. Both the latter mean giving up on the whole experience of building a mass, socialist and democratic party.

**4** The Conference passed a specific resolution, "In Defence of Democracy. Against the expulsion of PT members of parliament", where we made clear that if our comrade Heloisa Helena were expelled, we would immediately appeal to the next PT National

Meeting, and even call for it to be brought forward. This initiative also sought to maintain our political links with comrade Heloisa, whilst strengthening the political framework agreed by the Conference to fight over the direction taken by the PT.

**5** On 14 December 2003 the PT National Directorate decided to expel four PT members of parliament. Of these, federal deputies Luciana Genro, Baba and Joao Fontes had already been promoting the idea of forming another political party. That was not the case with comrade Heloisa Helena. At the PT's National Directorate we succeeded in uniting all the PT's minority currents, plus senator Eduardo Suplicy, in voting against the expulsions. That same week, comrade Walter Pinheiro, on behalf of DS, presented an appeal to the PT's next National Meeting.

**6** Also in December. A few members of DS in Rio de Janeiro and Parana signed a manifesto saying they were leaving the PT and joining in the building of a new party.

**7** On 19 January 2004 in Rio de Janeiro, a few members of DS took part in a meeting and signed a manifesto in favour of setting up a new political party.

**8** The proclamation of a new left party and the tasks already scheduled for bringing it into existence are a legitimate political choice for those

who feel it is necessary. However, the National Co-ordination of DS considers this initiative to be in direct contradiction with the decisions of our recent Conference.

**9** The National Co-ordination of DS, a tendency in the PT, elected at its VII National Conference, at its first meeting on 7 February 2004, decided:

- to call on those members who have left the PT to rejoin, so that together we can carry out the resolutions of our VII Conference, strengthening and not weakening our current;

- to call on all these comrades to reactivate their links with our current and distance themselves from the creation of this new party;

- to help create a broad movement, in the party, in the government, in parliament and in society, that pushes the PT to recover its historic positions and the Lula government to carry out the social transformations that the workers and the Brazilian people desire.

- to explain to the Workers' Party as a whole that the actions and declarations of these comrades in leaving the PT and working for the creation of a new party do not represent the membership of DS, as expressed at our National Conference, nor do they have the approval of its National Coordination.

Sao Paulo, 7 February 2004

# Interview with Heloisa Helena

17 March 2004, by [Heloisa Helena](#)

*We publish here an interview with Brazilian socialist senator Heloisa Helena, recently expelled from the ruling Workers' Party (PT). The interview was published in "Jornal do Brasil", February 8, 2004. Heloisa has recently been involved in establishing a coordination for the creation of a new left party.*

## **How is the new party of the left doing?**



First there was a working meeting of some left groups to define common points, like internal democracy. Now, there will be plenaries of preparation for the forum of debates that will begin in March and will go on until June. There are many obstacles in the electoral legislation: for that reason I say that we are making a passage in the desert. We want to hold our first congress in the first week of June and, from that, we will have to get 500,000 signatures to obtain definitive registration. This law is recent and none of the existing parties have had to comply with it. It is a herculean task, but already I am used to the heat of the "hinterland" of Alagoas. [1]

## **What stage will be dealt with in tomorrow's meeting, in Rio?**

It will be the first plenary in Rio de Janeiro, in the University. A new party is not born by decree, nor by the will of a political personality. We are clear that the necessity exists to build an alternative party on the left that is not a prisoner of the impure jails of power.

## **What is the philosophy of the new party?**

We want to help in the construction of alternatives, to be a rallying point for the socialist and democratic left. We will defend the historical flags of the working-class. We will respect the right of tendencies. We are open to all, except neoliberals, nazis, racists, political delinquents. We could be

eating at the banquets of the powerful in the Palace of the Planalto<sup>1</sup>, but we prefer to build this option.

## **Is it possible to govern without making an agreement with the IMF?**

I have no doubt of that. I defend the programme of the party, that the relationship of Brazil to the international community is not one of submission to foreign capital, represented by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other institutions of multilateral financing. The IMF is not a philanthropic organization, sponsoring the "philanthropy" of the international bankers. It is no more than an annex of the US Treasury. Perhaps the Brazilian government itself, having already sponsored this whole dirty game with the IMF, will not renew the agreement in the coming year. There is nothing revolutionary in such an attitude. The Brazilian constitution says that national sovereignty is the unavoidable basis for economic policy.

## **Is it possible to suspend the payment of the foreign debt?**

Most of us defend an audit of the debt. Throughout the recent history of the country, parties of the left and many significant militants of the social movements went to the public with plebiscites and petitions, proposing, at the same time, an audit of and the non-payment of the debt. I do not understand, but for cynicism, dissimulation and political shamelessness, how these people think the opposite today. To be against the audit of the debt and to defend its payment is to be reactionary, conservative. Celso Furtado [2] has proposed to Lula that he prepare the country for the moratorium. We need to finish with this terrorism promoting fear. This alone serves to legitimize this failed, bankrupt model. This formula is not correct anywhere in the world. This model is correct for a minority of parasites that illegitimately appropriates the efforts

of the majority of people.

The new party will have to overcome the [electoral] threshold clause, that will prevail in the 2006 elections. We know of the difficulties. We are surviving. We have to go through life swallowing our fears, but we learn to resist. After what happened to me in the state of Alagoas in order to build the PT, risking my life, being humiliated, being massacred, I can fear nothing. The threshold clause is a very little thing compared with the challenges that we have already faced.

## **Was it possible to draw anything positive from the process of expulsion from the PT?**

I sensed how the democratic sentiment has taken root in the soul of the Brazilian people, from the simplest people to the most sophisticated. The people who did not agree with my world view said that I had the right to defend what I believed. That was a balm for the wounds opened in my soul and my heart.



"Heard the one about the leftie who got in bed with the IMF?" - Nestor Kirchner (Argentina), Lula and Hugo Chavez

The public policies, including the social ones, reflect the economic option of the government, who resolved to devote 18% of the contribution intended for health to increase the budget surplus. There is no magic involved here. The economic policy is what determines the failure of Hunger Zero, of the agrarian reform, of education, of health. In order to fill the belly of the bankers it is necessary to empty the plates of the Brazilians.

## **How do you see the municipal elections?**

The PT will experience significant growth, since there has been a

general relaxing in the policy of alliances, allowing it to ally with the PT, the PMDB of Quercia and Jader, the PL and the PP of Maluf (well known for corruption). 2003 was a year of good services rendered to foreign capital. I believe that money will not be lacking for the campaign.

**Do you feel frustrated to be forced to give up the dream of being mayor of Maceio?** [3]

It was an extremely painful personal experience. I had already been forced to withdraw my candidacy for the post of state governor. [4] I was preparing to run for the municipality and they removed me from the official list. [5] They took the symbol, prevented my candidacy, but they did not take away what I believe I have that is better, namely my libertarian soul.

**Do you have something against the mayor of Maceió, Kátia Born?**

I do not have anything personal against anybody, no. Nor against Sarney, [6] who has dealt with me in a delicate and respectful way. I have political differences.

**What is your relationship to religion?**

I am ecumenical by nature. I have

friends in diverse religions. I respect all the tribes. I am Catholic. I always go to church. I have many friends in the interior who are priests. Over the last week I went to four masses in a single city, helping in the celebration. I rediscovered my faith some years ago, through pain, and am firmly resolved. My religious experience is with the comrade in the skies who has already given me much proof of love during the difficult times that I have had in life.

**Do you consider yourself a celebrity?**

That does not say anything, to be a celebrity. I feel happy with the affection and the solidarity of the people. That makes me happy.

**Did you experience hunger during the childhood?**

(long pause) For sure I didn't need to rummage in rubbish dumps, but I experienced great difficulties. All of which made me better. All the difficulties that I went through in childhood, even if marked by poverty or humiliation, are insignificant compared to what happens to people today. It hurts to see a girl in the street selling her body for a plate of food, or a child who, instead of being like my children, able to choose what to eat or have a computer in their

room, is destined for marginality. I am a survivor.

## Footnotes

[1] Brazil's presidential palace.

[2] Celso Furtado is a well known Brazilian economist of the "developmentalist" school.

[3] Maceio is the capital of the state of Alagoas.

[4] Heloisa Helena had intended to run as PT candidate for governor of the state of Alagoas but withdrew after the national leadership of the PT had made a deal with the Liberal Party that would have imposed a notoriously corrupt candidate as vice-governor.

[5] To run as a candidate for mayor it is necessary to be on a party list, and Heloisa Helena could not do so after being expelled from the PT.

[6] The reference is to the PT government's chief "enforcer" in Congress.

# Restructuring and resistance in the Canadian state

17 March 2004, by [Sebastian Lamb](#)



Canadian demonstrators against the FTAA, including the Canadian Union of Public Employees, attacked by armed Québec police

By trial and error, the Canadian ruling class went about trying to restore order. It went on the offensive on various fronts. It set out to discipline the working class, defeat Quebec

nationalism and create better conditions for investment and profit-making. This was not a conspiracy by unpatriotic CEOs and politicians to sell out the country to the US, as some English-Canadian nationalists allege; the Canadian state was and is an imperialist power dwarfed by its imperialist superpower neighbour to the south. The path taken by Canadian corporations and their parties, which dominate official politics, began as a response to capitalist crisis and has continued as capital aggressively pursues its class interests in the

context of the competitive pressures of the global economy.

## On the offensive

Labour militancy was the first target. Beginning in the mid-1970s, federal and provincial governments imposed wage controls and frequently used back to work legislation to end strikes. The federal government took on and defeated the most militant and radical pan-Canadian union, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), and

jailed its president. The combined impact of these attacks put the labour movement on the defensive. In a context of rising unemployment, working-class confidence was replaced by uncertainty and compliance.

In this climate, employers began to reorganize workplaces and jobs to boost profits. Early experiments evolved into extensive work reorganization. Workers across the private and public sectors have been subjected to schemes designed to intensify their work and increase management control in the workplace.

There has been a shift away from the norm (never a reality for most women and workers of colour, nor for many white male workers) that paid employment means a full-time, year-round, open ended job working for a single employer in return for adequate pay and benefits. The emerging new norm is full-time or part-time fixed-term contract work with few or no benefits, and involves changing employers. As a result of capitalist restructuring, the experience of wage work today is much more insecure and stressful than it was a generation ago.

Employers' efforts to reorganize workplaces and jobs have both been helped by and inspired the neoliberal state policy that gradually came to replace the post-war model of the broad welfare state (never as extensive as welfare states in Western Europe). The "free trade" deal between Canada and the US in 1989 and then the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994 have helped Canadian capital greatly to increase its foreign direct investment and exports.

The pace of cuts and neoliberal "reform" of unemployment insurance and other government programmes increased sharply after the Liberals under Jean Chretien returned to the federal government after nine years of the Conservatives in office. Billions of dollars of funding for state programmes were cut. Federal state spending as a percentage of GDP was reduced from 15.7% in 1993-94 to 11.5% in 2003-04 - its lowest level since 1949-50. This was the most dramatic reduction in the G-7. The

much-demonized deficit monster was quickly slain with the aid of a stronger than- expected recovery from the recession of the early 1990s. As a result of state restructuring, less than 40% of the officially unemployed now qualify for unemployment insurance, tuition fees for post-secondary education have grown dramatically, and levels of poverty and homelessness have risen.

Provincial governments of all political stripes have also embraced neoliberalism. They have implemented workfare and privatized services. Education is being "reformed". [1] The role of the federal government in cuts to provincially-administered programmes (which include health care, education and welfare) has often been obscured, since it has usually been able to get away with slashing transfer payments to the provinces and leaving it to the provincial governments to decide what to cut.



Jack Layton, federal leader of the NDP

The federal political system was stabilized by the defeat of the movement for Quebec independence in the 1980 referendum on the PQ's proposal for "sovereignty association" between Quebec and English Canada. The adoption of a new Canadian constitution without Quebec's consent followed in 1982. But Quebecois nationalism revived at the end of the 1980s as Quebec's right to determine its own language policy again became a hot political issue. Both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords, two failed attempts to accommodate Quebec within the constitutional order with token concessions, managed to draw the combined ire of the Quebec nationalist movement, anti-Quebec chauvinists, aboriginal activists, and many others who had come to hate a federal Conservative government widely-seen as unsympathetic to working people in hard times. Overconfident federalists nearly lost the next Quebec referendum in 1995. After that, they wasted no time in going on the offensive against the Quebec national movement, passing the "Clarity Act" to further restrict

Quebec's ability to determine its relationship to the federal state. Because the bourgeois PQ has severed the cause of Quebec sovereignty from the social-reform agenda with which it had been popularly associated since the 1960s, its populist appeal has declined and it has been unable to revive support for sovereignty.

The very existence of aboriginal land and treaty rights continues to be an obstacle to firms in resource industries and an affront to the widespread racist belief that aboriginal people should have "no special rights" (read: no compensation for centuries of colonial oppression). Unfortunately, the official leaders of most First Nations are, willingly or unwillingly, stuck in drawn-out negotiations that can at best produce small gains for aboriginal people. Flare-ups of aboriginal resistance have caused short-term problems for governments and corporations and drawn attention to oppression. There are signs of change in aboriginal politics as many give up hope that working through official channels will improve the lives of indigenous peoples. But we have yet to see the emergence of a new movement among First Nations.

## Resistance

On balance, the Canadian ruling class has been quite successful in carrying out its agenda. It has long benefited from the division of unions and social movements along national lines, and from sexism, racism (very real despite the image of a tolerant multicultural society promoted abroad) and heterosexism (highlighted in ongoing debates around same-sex marriage, which is currently available in two provinces). Since September 11, the state has been able to exploit racist fears about immigrant threats to "national security" to harass and intimidate people of colour and clamp down on militancy.

The ruling class also owes a large measure of its success to the fact that most of the working-class movement (unions, community-based organizations, and the social democratic New Democratic Party [NDP]) was completely unprepared for

the attacks that began to rain down in the mid-1970s. True, unionized workers have put up significant resistance, from the one-day pan-Canadian general strike against wage controls in 1976 through the Solidarity protest movement in the Pacific Coast province of British Columbia in 1983 to the "Days of Action" (a series of mass protests and political strikes) in Ontario from 1995 to 1998 and the December 2003 "day of disruption" in Quebec. By and large the unions haven't been devastated like those in the US. Support within the movement for feminism, anti-racism and lesbian and gay rights has increased. But while the level of struggle seen in the Days of Action and the recent "day of disruption" went further than previous efforts, it hasn't been enough to stop governments determined to implement capital's agenda.

Activists committed to the kind of militant, democratic, solidarity-building strategy and tactics needed to win struggles today are few in number and dispersed. Although the bureaucratic union officialdom has a left wing (chiefly the leaders of the Canadian Auto Workers and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, plus the smaller CUPW), there is not a single significant organized militant or left current rooted among rank and file workers. This is a critical weakness.

The mobilizations of other social activist groups, which in the 1990s included the Quebec and pan-Canadian Women's Marches, anti-poverty struggles and many student protests, have won few victories but have kept a spirit of resistance alive. The global justice movement showed real potential with the large, dynamic and militant protests in Quebec City in 2001 against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). It was hit hard by the political retreat that took place following September 11 2001 and has not recovered. Demonstrations against the war on Iraq swept the Canadian state, taking place in small towns as well as large cities and reaching mass proportions. This was particularly true in Quebec, where demonstrations in Montreal drew over 200,000. Regrettably, few anti-war activist networks have been sustained.

## Bitter fruits

The success of the ruling-class offensive has had important effects. Crucially for capitalists, it has boosted corporate profits. According to Marxist economist Fletcher Baragar, the average rate of profit of Canadian business in the 1960s and early 1970s averaged just over 8%. In the 1988-1999 period, it was 6.4%. The average for 1999-2001 was 9.1%. Although these high profit levels may well prove to be short lived, capital has increased its exploitation of labour, with profitable results.

Capital's victories have had many other effects on society. Crucially, they have weakened the working class as a social and political force. Inequality, competition and divisions among working people have deepened. The percentage of workers outside agriculture who are in unions has declined from its peak of 40% in 1983 to around 30%. Many individuals and families have adopted private and individualistic ways of getting by, reflected in support for right-wing tax-cuts in a time of stagnant or falling real wages. The number of workers who went on strike annually between 1993 and 2002 averaged around only 180,000. Dependency on wage-labour has been reinforced, with more people now forced to hold down more than one job. People of colour, aboriginal people, women and lesbians and gays are often blamed by members of dominant groups for the difficulties in their lives. All this makes for fertile ground for the "common sense" ideas of neoliberalism that dominate official politics.

The options represented in official politics have shrunk. Neoliberalism reigns unchallenged in three of the four major federal parties (the Liberals, Conservatives, and Bloc Quebecois). In the NDP, it is now dominant. At best, the NDP calls for more funding for some public services while accepting the parameters of capitalist discipline (such as balanced budgets). No wonder, then, that many people see the parties as basically the same and voter turnouts are falling.

## Hope and opportunities

At the same time, the ruling-class offensive has produced an important minority of people who are thoroughly disgusted by what they see as the "corporate agenda" or "globalization." They understand that public health care is being eroded. They oppose tax cuts tied to slashing social services. Some see that women are bearing most of the growing burden of care-giving caused by cutbacks. They have supported nurses' and teachers' strikes, cheered anti-poverty actions and marched against war.

The full potential of this layer is rarely realized. Most unions don't even try to mobilize and educate workers except in limited and controlled ways. The bureaucratic character of the unions is a major problem. [2] For many workers, unions are distant service providers rather than their own organizations. Traditions of rank and file self-organization are weak. There is no significant political formation that clearly expresses the sentiments of the anti-neoliberal minority, let alone one that argues for radical politics and builds movements.

Among union and social justice activists, there is much disaffection with the NDP. The party is a deeply-electoralist apparatus with a weakened activist base. The party's roots in the working class were never as deep as those of Western European social democracy, and its opposition to the Quebec national movement has kept it from ever becoming a force in Quebec; as a result, it has never been able to form the federal government. Since 1990, the devout compliance of NDP provincial governments in Ontario, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Manitoba with neoliberal economic orthodoxy has demoralized many supporters and reinforced right-wing "common sense" in the working class.

The federal NDP's new leader, Jack Layton, is noted for his media savvy and a talent for opportunistically appealing to those to his left (he vocally opposed the war on Iraq) and right (courting Liberals alienated by

their new leader Paul Martin, who has strong Bay Street ties [3] and as finance minister oversaw the massive cuts of the mid-1990s). In the federal election expected this year, the NDP will be up against the Liberals and the harder-right Conservatives [4] and Layton hopes to reap electoral gains as a result of Martin's ascendancy. Even if the prospect of more NDP MPs in the House of Commons is enough to mobilize more members in the election campaign, it will not reverse the party's acceptance of neoliberalism or change its political practice.

A realignment on the English-Canadian Left that could have an impact on a mass scale would have to attract the minority of NDP supporters who strongly oppose neoliberalism and support social struggles despite the party's accommodation to the former and distance from the latter. Yet despite the obvious failings of the NDP no left political formation has been able to establish itself as a credible alternative or even make some real gains. In one sense, this is a reflection of the global crisis of the Left triggered by the collapse of Stalinism and social democracy's embrace of neoliberalism. In addition, the politically and organizationally weak radical left that does exist was and is in a poor position to relate to disaffected NDP supporters.

The one effort that might have had a chance was the New Politics Initiative (NPI). Taking advantage of the spirit of hope and struggle generated by the global justice movement, in 2001 the NPI aimed to unite the left wing of the NDP with the left outside the NDP behind the project of building a new party on the basis of opposition to neoliberalism, enthusiasm for participatory democracy and a nominal commitment to combining electoral and extra-parliamentary politics. After its strong showing and predictable defeat by the party establishment at the 2001 federal NDP convention, the NPI proved incapable of taking advantage of the opportunity that existed to unite different radical left currents in a new political organization and soon foundered.

Prior to Sept. 11, 2001, the small anti-capitalist left, concentrated among students, youth and university-

educated workers, was growing but still ideologically divided (with anarchism the largest single influence in the new radicalization) and organizationally fragmented. Since then, many of its weaknesses have been reinforced and it has not progressed. [5]



### Quebec battle to disrupt the FTAA meeting, 2001

In Quebec, it has been the PQ's evolution that has been the main issue, not the NDP's. The PQ's "zero deficit" agenda in government and the large mobilizations against the FTAA in 2001 created the conditions for the launch of a party that supports Quebec sovereignty and opposes neoliberalism, the Union des Forces Progressistes (Union of Progressive Forces). The UFP has united many on the Left and accepts organized currents within its ranks, although the argument against "lesser evil" electoral support for the PQ against the Liberals is far from having been won in the labour and popular movements. Many radical Quebecois youth, among whom anarchism is particularly influential, have also stayed away from the UFP.

The UFP faces a crucial challenge: how will it relate to the fight against the newly elected Quebec Liberal government? The Quebec Liberals are committed to bringing unadorned neoliberalism to Quebec, attacking unions and public services and abandoning the consultative mechanisms of class collaboration (concertation) with representatives of business, labour and "civil society" that served the PQ so well during the 1990s. Pledged to be "a party of the ballot boxes and the streets," the UFP has supported popular mobilizations. However, as an organization it has failed to advance a perspective of escalating resistance, let alone fight within the movement for strategy and tactics based on this perspective.

Outside Quebec, prospects for repositioning and renewal on the Left have suffered setbacks. No force on the radical left had the social implantation and size to make a

notable contribution to the anti-war movement, except in limited ways in one or two cities (where the political impact was far from uniformly positive). It will probably take a resurgence of social struggle to create new opportunities for political realignment and organizational initiatives. Both anti-capitalists and the broader anti-neoliberal current made up of labour activists, the left union officialdom, left NDP supporters, the Council of Canadians "citizens movement" and other social justice groups are fragmented.

The next several years will likely see neither social peace nor a rising and spreading wave of struggle and radicalism, but sporadic flare-ups of resistance against aggressive employers and right-wing governments. These strikes and protests will present opportunities to strengthen grassroots self-organization and networks of activists committed to building stronger movements. There is also potential for building support among radicals for a non-sectarian, anti-racist and feminist revolutionary socialism.

## Footnotes

[1] See Alan Sears, *Retooling the Mind Factory: Education in a Lean State* (Garamond, 2003).

[2] Under a procedure known as the "Rand Formula" that dates back to the strike wave that followed World War 2, once a union wins a recognition vote conducted by the appropriate labour board (recognition strikes are illegal) and negotiates a collective agreement, the employer automatically deducts union dues from the paycheques of all workers covered by the agreement and remits them to the union. Workers do not have to join the union. Strikes are banned during the term of a collective agreement. Political strikes are also illegal. Union officials are legally required to ensure that workers abide by the collective agreement and to clamp down on unofficial action.

[3] Bay Street in Toronto symbolizes the heights of corporate wealth and power in the Canadian state.

[4] Recently created by a merger

of the Progressive Federal Conservatives (Tories) and the Canadian Alliance, dominated by the latter.

[5] David McNally's book Another

World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism (Arbeiter Ring, 2002) was written as a non-sectarian revolutionary Marxist contribution to the new radicalization.

## Green Bans and the BLF: the labour movement and urban ecology

17 March 2004, by [John Tully](#)



Jack Munday

It is one of life's great ironies that the same regime which brought us environmental disasters such as the Aral Sea and Chernobyl should also have continually re-published Friedrich Engels' informed and profoundly ecological writings, *Dialectics of Nature*. [1] Engels warned that unless we learned the laws of nature and recognised that we do not stand outside of nature like some conqueror, nature would wreak terrible revenge on us. [2] Given the ecological atrocities they presided over, one wonders if the USSR's Stalinist bureaucrats ever looked inside the book's covers. Certainly they seemed unaware that the fight to end humanity's alienation from the world is at the core of Marxism.

Clearly, Marx [3] and Engels had developed an ecological consciousness long before the term was coined, but alas, their keen insights were forgotten for many decades by the workers' movement. While this was particularly true in the "degenerated workers' state" of the Soviet Union, it also held true, by and large, for the labour movement in the capitalist world, much of which succumbed to a belief in the desirability of "progress" at all costs. As Jack Munday lamented, working class militants still often "have a high degree of ignorance about the seriousness of the ecological crisis". [4]

It is to the great credit of militant building workers in Australia that over

30 years ago they nailed their green colours to the mast and insisted that ecology was as much the concern of workers as wages and conditions. Munday asked "What is the use of higher wages alone, if we have to live in cities devoid of parks, denuded of trees, in an atmosphere poisoned by pollution and vibrating with the noise of hundreds of thousands of units of private transport?" [5]

The Green Bans movement, [6] as it came to be known, was perhaps the most radical example of working class environmentalism ever seen in the world. At its peak it held up billions of dollars worth of undesirable development and it saved large areas of the city of Sydney - streets, old buildings, parks and whole suburbs - from demolition. There is even evidence that the term "green" itself as a synonym for ecological activism came from those struggles. In 1997, the well-respected Australian Greens Senator, Bob Brown, [7] said:



Petra Kelly

"Petra Kelly...saw the Green Bans which the unions...were then imposing on untoward developments in Sydney...She took back to Germany this idea of Green Bans, or the terminology. As best as we can track it down, that is where the word "green" as applied to the emerging Greens in Europe came from". [8]

Jack Munday and the other leaders of the Green Bans movement were among the most effective and radical

of urban ecologists. Although they were eventually beaten by a coalition of corrupt union officials, rapacious developers, thugs and seedy politicians, their message has not been forgotten and in the final analysis their monument is the buildings, parks and bushland areas that they saved for future generations.

### The NSW Builders Labourers' Federation

The union at the forefront of the Green Bans movement was the Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF), and in particular its New South Wales (NSW) branch, [9] centred on the city of Sydney. In some ways this is surprising. For many decades before left wing militants captured control of the union in the 1960s, the BLF had been the small and despised poor cousin of the other building trades unions.

The union (which has since been amalgamated into a "super union", the Construction, Forestry and Mining Employees' Union or CFMEU) covered the unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the industry: labourers of various types; concrete finishers; jackhammermen; excavation workers; hoist drivers; steel fixers who placed the steel rods and bars for reinforced concrete; scaffolders; powder monkeys or explosives experts; riggers, who erected cranes and structural steelwork; and dogmen, who slung loads from cranes and, in Australia at least, "rode the hook"

hundreds of metres above the city streets in a spectacular, but hazardous aerial performance. [10] However, due to technological change in the industry, much of their work became at least as skilled as that of the traditional craftsmen, who were organised in separate unions.

In the years after World War II, millions of immigrants poured into Australia, many of them from southern and eastern Europe. Few made their fortune in the great island continent "down-under", though many had been lured with stories of streets paved with gold. Most of them became fodder for the factories, mines and mills that sprung up during the post-war boom. Many became construction workers and unless they had specific transferable skills, that meant working as builders' labourers, mixing concrete and carrying bricks or digging deep into the sandstone for the foundations of the new high rise buildings. Immigrants did the dirty, hard, and dangerous jobs that the "native born" were often reluctant to do. By the 1960s, around 70 per cent of the NSW BLF's members were foreign-born. [11]

## Struggle against gangsters in union

For many decades the NSW BLF was run by gangsters; corrupt elements including defrocked lawyers and apolitical thugs. One official was notorious for collecting the union dues then spending them on protracted drinking bouts. These characters had no interest in winning better wages and conditions for the members, nor did they want to see strong on-the-job organization, which would undermine their power. [12] Many of the union's members spoke little or no English, but bureaucrats who were in any case uninterested in their opinions did not see that as a problem and there was no translation of reports. As a consequence, BLF members were paid a fraction of the wages of the carpenters, plumbers, electricians and other skilled tradesmen in the industry. The gangsters too, were uninterested in health and safety issues. As Pete Thomas has written, in three years in the 1960s, there was

"an appalling total of over 61,000 compensation cases - some fatal, others creating permanent disabilities, others lesser but still cruel - ...in NSW building construction and maintenance." In one year in the early 1970s, 44 building workers died in NSW. [13] Fourteen dogmen died in another year. Nearly 250 Sydney excavation workers died from silicosis between 1948 and the 1960s, victims of the dust from the hard sandstone that they cut and blasted. [14] There was little change until after the militants began the hard battle to civilize the industry.

The militants gained control of the union only after a bitter struggle lasting over ten years. One of those militants was a young man called Jack Munday. Born into a poor Irish Catholic family in North Queensland, Munday came to Sydney in 1951 to play Rugby League for Parramatta. A little later, after spending time in other jobs, he started work as a builder's labourer and joined the union and then the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). In the 1950s and '60s, the CPA was still an industrial force to be reckoned with, although its star had waned since the heyday of the 1940s when it all but controlled the peak council of the union movement, the ACTU. [15] The CPA was a contradictory force. During the late 1940s and early '50s, when the Cold War was raging, it had identified itself slavishly with the Soviet Union and at the same time it had sunk to rigging ballots in elections to maintain its tight grip on unions under its control. [16]

Still, many of the best militants in the labour movement continued to look to the CPA for leadership and by the 1960s the party leadership had abandoned much of the old sectarian dogmatism, which had isolated them from the majority of trade union members who supported the ALP. Inside the NSW BLF and other unions, party members adopted the tactic of "unity tickets" with left wing members and supporters of the ALP. The tactic bore fruit and when the militants ousted the gangsters, a real unity had been forged between Communists such as Jack Munday and Labor Party members such as Bob Pringle and Mick McNamara. Munday became

secretary [17] of the NSW BLF in 1968.

## The growing potential power of the BLF

Although the union had pursued a militant course under Munday's immediate predecessors, this was stepped up once he took up a full-time position. The new leaders of the union saw that the traditional craft unions had been adversely affected by deskilling brought about by changes in the industry from the 1960s on. However, the skills of their own members had been enhanced and the old image of the BL as an unskilled tradesman's helper and general labourer was out of date.

While BLF members still did much of the hardest, dirtiest, most dangerous and least skilled work in the industry, the new construction techniques meant that they had become every bit as important as the tradesmen, particularly on high-rise city sites. This fact gave the union much more industrial clout than previously, but it was not reflected in BLs' pay rates, which lagged far behind those of the traditional craftsmen. Munday, Pringle and another key organiser called Joe Owens were determined that the situation had to change.

In 1970, the union embarked on a campaign of militant strikes, effectively shutting down the industry with mass picketing on a scale not seen before in the industry. The employers, not used to mass participation of the membership in industrial action, caved in after five weeks and granted large across the board pay rises and, most importantly, set BLs' wages at a minimum of 90 per cent of the craftsmen's rates; more for the highest skilled BLs. At the same time, the union experimented with the ideas of workers' control, occupying construction sites, electing their own foremen, staging sit-ins and "working in" in response to lock-outs, poor safety conditions and sackings.

The long-downtrodden BLs had found a new solidarity and dignity. Harry

Connell, a long-time militant, recalled that before the left's takeover of the union, builders' labourers would, if questioned about their occupation, reply self-deprecatingly, "Oh, I'm just a labourer". Afterwards, they would answer proudly, "I'm a bloody BL". [18]

## Involvement in social struggles

Under Munday's leadership, the union also began to involve itself in struggles that went beyond the traditional brief of wages and conditions. This was the period of the Vietnam War, when hundreds of thousands of people marched against Australian military involvement on the side of the US and its Saigon client state. [19] It was the period of the May 1968 upsurge in France, when young people around the world set out to "storm the heavens" in search of a new society. This radical mood was reflected inside the CPA, particularly after the Warsaw Pact powers invaded Czechoslovakia to end the "Prague Spring", which had sought "socialism with a human face".

Back in 1956, when the USSR invaded Hungary, the CPA had remained loyal to Moscow, despite the loss of many of its members. This time, the CPA publicly condemned the invasion. A small pro-Moscow group split away, but many party members welcomed the radical new direction and enthusiastically adopted the new ideas. [20] Munday himself pays tribute to the radical shift in the policies and attitudes in the Communist Party leadership: "I'm sure that none of our innovations would have been possible except for the changes in the Communist Party of Australia, even though we went beyond the CPA mainstream". [21]



Norm Gallagher

The BLF leaders threw their union behind the anti-war movement and into other causes such as the fight against apartheid in South Africa. They encouraged women to work in

what had hitherto been an all-male preserve, winning an important breakthrough at the Summit site after women "worked in" with the support of their male colleagues. In 1973, Denise Bishop was elected to the union and executive and became possibly the first female organiser of a construction union in the world.

The union also ensured that their largely immigrant workforce was provided with bilingual organisers—before this, the needs of non-English speakers were largely ignored. In another celebrated case, the BLF "blackbanned" work on a Macquarie University hall of residence when the Student Representative Council approached them on behalf of a gay student who had been expelled. This was probably the first instance of such an action in the world (and it was successful). Homophobia has deep roots in Australia and it is a measure of the leadership's calibre that they were able to convince the members to take industrial action on this issue, despite initial misgivings. [22] The union was able to involve itself in these kinds of issues because the leadership had won the deep respect of the majority of members through its commitment to improving their wages and conditions, and also by restoring their dignity as human beings in a dog-eat-dog system that had treated them as expendable slaves. Ominously, one of the most vociferous critics of this kind of action was the union's federal secretary, Norm Gallagher, a member of the Maoist Communist Party of Australia, Marxist-Leninist. [23]

## A radically new, democratic style of unionism

It is important to note that the leadership consciously sought not to impose anything on the membership. The NSW BLF had a commitment to radically democratic methods that had nothing in common with the rigid Stalinism of the CPA in the 1940s and early '50s, when they had ruled unions under their control with an iron hand. [24]

The NSW BLF had a horror of entrenched bureaucracy and introduced radical methods to ensure that control of the union stayed in the members' hands; Michels' famous "iron law of oligarchy" was not to apply here! In the NSW BLF, all actions and policies had to be decided on by mass meetings of the members. The union's officials were there to serve the members and not vice versa, as was so often the case with Australian unions. Australian union officials tended to keep the same hours as the employers; Munday insisted on keeping the same hours as the workers on the job. The wearing of suits and eating of meals with the bosses was frowned on.

"The only time I eat the boss's lunch is when I steal it," said one organiser after a sit-in in the site offices of a major builder. Perhaps more importantly, the salaries of officials were cut to the same amount as the members' wages, and the union introduced limited tenure of office; after a maximum of six years in a paid position, officials had to go back and work in the industry. Such measures often outraged the officials of other unions, who were fearful of losing their comfortable sinecures if such ideas were allowed to take root. Munday says that the policy "broke down the barrier between officials and workers". [25]

## The first Green Bans

Like its sister parties round the world, the CPA had no record of environmental activism. The same was true, more broadly, of the labour movement as a whole and indeed many sections of the movement, including some self-styled revolutionaries and Communists, depicted the bans as a "diversion from the class struggle" and as a capitulation to alien "middle class ideas". In one notorious outburst, Norm Gallagher, the Maoist federal secretary of the BLF dismissed widespread support for the NSW BLF as coming only from "residents, sheilas and poofers". [26] When ecological ideas began to emerge in the 1960s with the publication of such

books as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, they collided with deeply ingrained attitudes which viewed nature as a hostile enemy to be subdued, or mastered, and which was expressed in an ideology of limitless economic growth regardless of the consequences. Again it is to the great credit of the NSW BLF's leadership that they were able to gain support for the radical new ecological ideas from the union's membership.

The leadership realized that it would be wrong and self-defeating to try to impose industrial action in support of the environment on the members. By debate and argument at mass stop work or on-the-job meetings, the BLF officials convinced the members to support an all-out assault on the previously sacred right of the builders and developers to re-model the face of Sydney as they saw fit.

During the 1960s, Sydney, like many other cities in the world, underwent drastic change. There were fortunes to be made as old buildings and precincts were torn down and replaced, often with modernistic skyscrapers, for space in the inner city fetched astronomical prices. The NSW BLF's membership soared during this period, rising in one two year period from 4000 to 10,000 and peaking later at 11,000, partly as a result of the building boom, partly because of an intensive recruiting drive. [27]

In the course of this great boom, the developers were not concerned with what was destroyed; Georgian terraces, Victorian spires and domes, parkland, jewels of art deco all fell to the wrecker's ball. Scab labour would be used in nocturnal operations to pull down heritage-listed buildings. This was capitalism in the raw as described by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, where "all that is solid melts into air" in the frenzy for profit. [28] The BLF also realized that, as Leonie Sandercocock subsequently put it, "Modernist planners [had become] the thieves of memory" - "Faustian in their eagerness to erase all traces of the past in...the name of progress", they had "killed whole communities, by evicting them, demolishing their houses, and dispersing them to edge suburbs or leaving them homeless..." [29]

The union and its supporters did not oppose all change, recognizing that there was a place for urban renewal to make cities liveable for their inhabitants. What they did oppose was the unwarranted assumption that what was good for the developers was automatically good for the environment, the city, or its people.

## The Kelly's Bush bans

The BLF's actions were spectacularly effective. The *Manchester Guardian* considered that Jack Munday was "Australia's most effective conservationist" and claimed "Middle class groups are a little embarrassed at having to turn to a rough-hewn proletarian Communist to protect their homes (and values) from flats and motorways, and their theatres and pubs from office developers. But approach him they do..." In fact, it was often working class homes and precincts that were saved from the developers, but the union would respond to any genuine request for help.



### Plaque celebrating the 25th anniversary of the BLF's first Green Ban at Kelly's Bush

Probably the first time the union intervened in an environmental issue was in 1971, when it banned a new private housing development at Hunters Hill. Kelly's Bush, which the AV Jennings group wished to destroy for the project, was reputedly the last remaining piece of natural bushland on Sydney harbour. The local residents had campaigned strongly but unsuccessfully to save it, lobbying members of parliament, cabinet ministers and other persons with power. The NSW state (provincial) government was firmly behind the development and in desperation the residents turned to the BLF for support.

The BLF called a mass meeting of members, which voted overwhelmingly to "black ban" the project. Other bans quickly followed

and somewhere along the road, a union member coined the term "green ban" to describe union action to save natural bushland and parks. The term was expanded to describe bans to save historic urban precincts and significant buildings.

## The battle of the Rocks

Perhaps the greatest Green Ban of all was imposed on Sydney's Rocks area by the BLF and its allies in the union covering bulldozer drivers, the FEDFA. [30] The Rocks, situated just west of Circular Quay and under the southern abutments of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, is Australia's oldest urban precinct, dating from the 1790s. It is the site of many significant buildings and was also the home of a close-knit working class community who lived in rows of terraced houses, often at controlled rents. In 1972, the state government unveiled a master plan for the redevelopment of the suburb. The people would be evicted and their homes destroyed. In their place would rise a grotesque \$2000 million [31] commercial skyscraper development owned by wealthy corporate interests.

Had the government got its way, a community would have been killed, together with the collective memory of over 160 years, along with one of Australia's most beautiful urban areas. Encouraged by the success of the Kelly's Bush bans, the residents' action group turned to the unions. The union bans held, residents and BLF members picketed against scab labour, occupied buildings slated for demolition, marched, and were arrested in droves. In the end they won an impressive victory and The Rocks was saved.

Buoyed up by their success, the union imposed a string of other bans at the behest of residents and community and conservation groups frustrated by the authorities. These included Green Bans on development at Centennial Park - the "lungs" of the city's eastern suburbs - and at the Sydney Botanical Gardens on the harbour front. The latter ban prevented the construction of an underground car park by the

AMP insurance conglomerate, which would have damaged the park's trees, shrubs and plants and involved the immediate destruction of a number of giant Moreton Bay fig trees.

Other bans were imposed on demolition of a variety of public buildings, including the Theatre Royal, the fine old sandstone Pitt Street Congregational Church (which was to have been replaced by a multi-storey concrete car park); on a section of the proposed western distributor and the Eastern Expressway, both of which would have destroyed thousands of houses; and lastly on a monstrous redevelopment of the inner harbour-side suburb of Woolloomooloo, renowned as "the most Sydney-like place in Sydney".

## Battle lines drawn

By this time, in 1973, the battle lines were drawn and the union was faced by an unholy alliance of employers, developers, politicians and right-wing union officials, all outraged by the BLF's flaunting of the prerogatives of capital. At this stage, a well-informed article published in the Brisbane Courier-Mail claimed that the NSW BLF "has invoked an incredible 36 bans against using labour on projects worth a massive \$3000 million [over \$12,000 million in today's prices - JT] because the projects would mean the tearing down of historic buildings or could violate parklands within metropolitan Sydney". [32]

The residents and union pickets in Victoria Street, Woolloomooloo, were harassed and intimidated by police. Goons trained in karate and carrying weapons lurked in nearby streets, thirsting for blood. Juanita Nielsen, a prominent supporter of the union, vanished and it is an open secret that goons associated with dishonest developers murdered her. The BLF and its supporters had also run up against the corrupt state government, led by Premier Robin Askin, who has since been exposed as a swindler and a crook with interests in illegal casinos and other sleaze. In a period of 12 days in August 1972, the Sydney Morning Herald, the voice of the local ruling class, carried no less than five editorials attacking the NSW BLF. One

of these screamed about "a handful of unionists led by the nose by a member of a party dedicated to social disruption and the overthrow of democratic government..." and another claimed that "the mass of the unionists concerned are, of course, only dupes of their leadership..." Shortly afterwards, the Askin government charged Jack Munday with contempt of court. Earlier, Askin and members of his cabinet had called the BLF leaders "traitors to this country" and made hysterical forecasts of the union causing "rioting and bloodshed in the streets of Sydney". [33] The vultures were circling.

## Federal intervention

Left to themselves, the ruling class would have had a hard time to break the union. The Maoist leadership of the federal union did the job for them. In 1974, federal secretary Norm Gallagher decided to crush the NSW branch and replace all of its officials with his own stooges. The Master Builders Association (MBA) and the Askin government were keen to offer him every assistance, barring NSW branch organisers from sites and sacking BLs who refused to join the new branch. When crane drivers, members of the FEDFA, went on strike, Gallagher flew in scabs to replace them and there was a steady trickle of interstate "conscript" workers who came to "do the work of pro-Munday builders labourers." Gallagher declined to put his case to a mass meeting of BLs, declaring that it would be "full of residents and poofers".

It was later revealed that much of the cost for Gallagher's intervention was paid for by the bosses, and perhaps this included the wages of murderous gun thugs brought in to intimidate NSW branch loyalists. Some of these industrial mercenaries were lodged in the city's most luxurious motels at nightly rates far in excess of a BL's weekly wage. Unemployment was also rising in the industry during this period and it was clear that the NSW branch would not be able to resist for much longer. The coup de grÃ¢ce

came in March 1975 when the NSW branch office in the Sydney Trades Hall was burgled and its records stolen, on good information by a career contract criminal. Shortly afterwards, the NSW leadership advised its members to take out membership of the Gallagher branch and continue the fight from within. With heavy hearts, they agreed. Sadly, most of the NSW leadership was blacklisted and never worked in the industry again. Later, regretting what he had done, federal president Les Robinson admitted, "I think we destroyed a virile organization and it didn't do the federation any good either". [34]

## The BLF's legacy



Bob Hawke

The NSW BLF perished, but its exploits have become the stuff of legend and an inspiration to all who wish to rebuild the workers' movement as a thoroughly democratic, class-conscious movement, committed to social and environmental action as an integral part of the aim of building a better world. Since those rare old times, other unions have from time to time taken up ecological issues, although perhaps none with the sheer panache and militancy of the NSW BLF. During the late 1970s and early '80s the ACTU banned the mining and export of uranium "yellowcake", until officials linked to the right-wing Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke [35] undermined the policy from within. On occasions, wharfies have banned ships carrying cargoes of scarce rainforest timbers from Southeast Asia and construction workers have stopped the routing of oil pipelines through ecologically sensitive areas. More recently, in my own neighbourhood, unions imposed bans on the redevelopment of an old industrial site heavily polluted with arsenic, until it was declared clean by independent experts. Such actions are not uncommon today. Munday is convinced that union environmentalism would have spread even further but for the destruction of the NSW BLF.

Looking back after some thirty years, the NSW BLF story still amazes and inspires those who hear it. Capitalist ideology holds that working people are brutes with no interests beyond satisfaction of their most immediate needs. The Green Bans prove them wrong; here is a clear example of a union composed of blue collar workers - many of them immigrants, most of them lacking formal education, all "battlers" up against the odds - who stood up and counted themselves citizens in the fullest sense of the word. Bertolt Brecht once had a worker wondering whom it was who had hauled up the lumps of rock to build Thebes and other massive cities of antiquity, given that the books only gave the names of kings. [36] Throughout history, building workers have been viewed as beasts of burden who had no right to concern themselves with what they built or demolished. The Green Bans movement challenged that, and for a few years we had a glimpse of what workers, unalienated from the products of their labour, might be like; of a truly human future. "We are not just animals who put things up or tear them down," insisted Joe Owens. [37] Today, when we declare that "A better world is possible" in the struggle against dehumanising and environmentally rapacious neoliberalism, we should not forget the struggles of the NSW builders' labourers. Jack Munday should have the final word:

"Ecologists with a socialist perspective and socialists with an ecological perspective must form a coalition to tackle the wide-ranging problems relating to human survival... My dream, and that... of millions... of others might then come true: a socialist world with a human face, an ecological heart and an egalitarian body". [38]

*This article is a contribution to the discussion inside the Fourth International on the importance of the ecological question in the labour movement.*

## Footnotes

[1] Frederick Engels, 1934,

Dialectics of Nature, Progress Publishers, Moscow. Revised 1954 and reprinted a further five times to 1976.

[2] Ibid. "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man", p180.

[3] See, for instance, John Bellamy Foster, 2000, Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature, Monthly Review Press, New York.

[4] Jack Munday, 1981, Green Bans and Beyond, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, p148.

[5] Ibid. p143.

[6] Books on the Green Bans and the BLF include Munday's semi-biographical book cited above; Pete Thomas, 1973, Taming the Concrete Jungle. The Builders Labourers' Story, NSW Branch of the BLF, Sydney; and Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann, Green Bans, Red Union. Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 1998. The former book is long out of print. There is also a film about the BLF and the Green Bans; Pat Fiske, 1985, "Rocking the Foundations : History of the New South Wales Builders Labourer's Federation, 1940-1974", Bower Bird Films, Sydney.

[7] Bob Brown, a Green Senator from Tasmania, was a leader of the struggle to save the Franklin River from being flooded in the early 1980s. He has spoken out strongly against imperialist war and he is a passionate supporter of the human rights of refugees, Aborigines and other oppressed groups.

[8] Cited in Burgmann and Burgmann, op cit pp9- 10. One can argue this point. The term might have been used in the 1960s, however, there can be little doubt that Brown's claims contain a lot of truth.

[9] The BLF, or to give it its full name, the Australian Building Construction Employees and Builders Labourers' Federation, was a "federal" union, with branches in each of the states (or provinces) of Australia. The union also had a federal council, which by the time about which we are writing, had fallen into the hands of Maoists led by Norm Gallagher, the Secretary of the Victorian branch, based in Melbourne.

[10] Dogmen are known as banksmen in Britain and Ireland, but I am not sure that the practice of riding the load ever existed in those countries.

[11] Munday, op cit p56.

[12] For information on this period, see Paul True, 1995, Tales of the BLF : Rolling the Right, Militant International Publications, Parramatta, NSW.

[13] Thomas, op cit p12.

[14] Ibid. p14.

[15] Australian Council of Trade Unions, to which the great majority of Australian unions are affiliated, regardless of political affiliation.

[16] Most notably the Federated Ironworkers' Association (FIA), where it lost control to the Right by the early 1950s.

[17] In Australian unions, the secretary's position has often been the most powerful.

[18] Cited in True, op cit.

[19] Australian unions have a long history of political and social involvement. During World War I, for example, they waged a dogged fight against conscription. In 1938 dockers - known as wharfies in Australia - refused to load scrap steel aboard the SS "Dalfram", bound for Japan, arguing that it would end up as bombs and bullets for use against the Chinese people.

In the 1940s, wharfies and seamen were in the forefront of the movement of solidarity with the Indonesian Revolution against Dutch colonialism, successfully black-banning Dutch shipping in Australian ports. After the Australian government committed troops to support the US in Vietnam in 1964, the maritime unions refused to load or sail any vessels to Indochina.

[20] Even earlier, in 1966, the CPA leadership had roundly condemned the trial of the Soviet dissidents Daniel and Sinyavsky. (Mundey, op. cit. p. 48). Significantly, Pat Clancy, the leader of the main building craftsmen's union, the BWIU, was a member of the pro-Moscow breakaway. Clancy refused to support the NSW BLF when the Maoists moved to destroy it. See below.

[21] Ibid. p79. Looking back, the present author is convinced that young anti-Stalinist militants who came into politics at this time and shunned the CPA missed an important opportunity to link up with radicals inside the CPA and build a qualitatively stronger and united organization.

[22] Mundey, op cit p106.

[23] The CPA-ML was a small and secretive group that had split away from the CPA during the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s.

[24] Ernie Thornton and Jack McPhillips, the principal leaders of the CPA-controlled FIA between the late 1930s and early 1950s, actually imposed a "democratic centralist" (i.e. bureaucratic centralist) constitution on what had been a loose, relatively democratic federalist union. McPhillips remained a hard-line Stalinist to the end of his days, with nothing good to say about radical experiments such as the NSW BLF. Thornton was a much more sympathetic character.

[25] Mundey, op cit p56.

[26] Burgmann and Burgmann, op cit p54. "Sheilas" is a derogatory Australian term for women; "poofers" is a homophobic slang term for homosexuals.

[27] Mundey, op cit p44.

[28] This, of course, is the theme of Marshall Berman's book inspired by a famous passage in the "Communist Manifesto"; *All That is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity*, Viking, New York, 1988.

[29] Leonie Sandercock, "Towards cosmopolis: utopia as construction site" in S. Campbell and S. Fainstein (eds), 2003, "Readings in Planning Theory" (Second Edition), Blackwell, Oxford, p402.

[30] The Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association.

[31] \$500 million in the prices of the time. As a rule of thumb, I have multiplied prices by a factor of four to give approximately current values.

[32] Thomas, op cit p54.

[33] Ibid. p119.

[34] Burgmann and Burgmann, op cit p274. Ironically, the Gallagherites were themselves some years later driven out of office by rivals in collusion with governments and employers. Gallagher served a prison term for accepting secret commissions from employers and rival unions absorbed the BLF.

[35] Hawke is also a former president of the ACTU. We called him the "fire brigade" in those times because of his habit of dousing industrial "fires" to save the boss.

[36] Bertolt Brecht, "Questions from a Worker Who Reads", in John Willett and Ralph Manheim (eds), 1976, *Bertolt Brecht Poems 1913-1956*, Methuen, London.

[37] In Pat Fiske's film, "Rocking the Foundations", op cit.

[38] Mundey, op cit p148.

## Women's oppression in globalization

17 March 2004, by [Stephanie Treillet](#)



Gender oppression cuts through all other forms of domination and exploitation in human societies. In particular, it extends beyond class conflicts, but it also cuts through all collective social realities - ethnic, national, religious, local. Moreover, it is closely tied up with the private

sphere, individual and daily life, making awareness of its existence and the emergence of a collective emancipatory project particularly difficult. Finally, it is a socially constructed oppression, producing an ideological representation of differences often perceived as natural, and confined to the field of biology or psychology.

Furthermore, although gender

oppression did not emerge with private ownership of the means of production or capitalism, [1] it has linked up dynamically with the different stages of the latter. Capitalism implies a growing separation of producers from the means of production, and a separation between the spheres of production of goods and reproduction of the labour force. This gave rise to what is known

today as “housework” in its current form: tasks falling primarily and at times exclusively on women’s shoulders.

So, neoliberal globalization must be examined as a particular stage in capitalism as it relates to gender-based oppression. By bringing about a forced march of capitalist production relations and the destabilization of former hierarchies, especially in the dominated countries, at a speed never before encountered, the capitalist mode of production never stops engendering itself.

This is truer still if we take into account the sexual and social division of labour on which gender oppression is based. The capitalist means of production benefits from free reproduction of the labour force to increase the rate of surplus value. But at the same time, it has a vital need to have a reserve army of labour at its disposal, so it can extend wage work massively at any time, “forming a flexible labour market, on the international level, in which women occupy a strategic opposition in terms of their position both through their insertion both in wage labour and the informal sector is on the agenda” (Hirata and Le Doaré, 1998).

The question of the consequences of globalization on the oppression of women is at the heart of this contradiction. So, we can make the following observations:

- because there is a sexual and social division of labour, the consequences of neoliberal globalization on men and women are not the same;
- simultaneously, neoliberal globalization cannot take the blame for all cases of heightened oppression of women in the contemporary world. Some of these have much more complex and often far older causes.
- Finally, due to its very nature, neoliberal globalization causes upheavals and destabilises prior social relationships and the traditional forms of domination.

We must understand that these trends are aspects of the same contradictory and dialectical process.

## **Liberalization and structural adjustment: increased inequalities**

Liberal globalization - and the economic policies implementing it - are contributing to stepping up the super-exploitation and oppression of women, in most cases. Throughout the world, we are observing the feminization of poverty. In the North, women make up the majority of poor workers, underemployed and unable to survive on their wages. This situation, which has existed for a long time in the English-speaking countries, appeared several years ago in France with the extension of part-time work, most of which is done by women. Women also make up the bulk of unemployed workers, whatever their age and skill level.

They are also the first group affected by structural adjustment strategies and economic liberalization, in many ways. They are affected since they bear the primary burden for reproducing the labour force. Measures partially socializing these tasks are under attack: elimination of day care centres in the Eastern bloc, privatization of schools and health care systems in the South, decline in quality and increased costs for all heretofore public systems, such as access to tap water, electricity, public transport, elimination of subsidies for basic needs. Women are the first to pay for these measures entailing harsher living conditions and a significant increase in the free labour they must perform. They also suffer the consequences of their subordinate position within the family: when education and medical care have to be paid for in the Third World, girls are taken out of school first, or first deprived of vaccinations.

Women are also affected due to their specific place in the labour market: layoffs in the public sector, education, health, and the civil service, remove a lot of the jobs they held beforehand.

Finally, they are disadvantaged due to

the systematic discrimination they encounter in terms of farm production: access to land, credit and training. The decline in subsistence agriculture with respect to export crops is a catastrophe for women. They face threats in terms of food security, access to land (men leave women the least fertile land), a consequent increase in their workload both on the land to which they have usufruct rights and sometimes on their husband’s land, in particular in Sub-Saharan Africa. More generally, in all the rural regions of the Third World, their subordinate position in the social division of agricultural labour means that capitalist modernization of agriculture has worsened their situation, whether in terms of access to land or jobs, income, workload and control over the latter (Agarwal 1985).

Finally, the extension on the world scale of commodity relations reinforces the system of prostitution and other forms of human trafficking (new forms of slavery) of which women are, of course, the foremost victims.

## **Contradictory changes**

The contradictory nature of the relations between globalization and the oppression of women seem even clearer in Third World economies. Indeed, beyond the diversity of societies and situations, we can observe that the upheavals due to globalization have occurred following the development strategies that, from the 1950s to the 1970s, were completely blind to women’s place, in particular in farming. Training programmes and land reform only targeted “heads of households”. These changes also played a part in destabilizing social structures that were far from the “original” state of these societies. They had undergone in-depth changes due to colonization and were reconfigured by capitalism. Nevertheless, they called upon tradition to justify certain forms of persistent subjection of women in the family, the community and so on.

Almost everywhere, we have observed an increase in the rate of women’s

labour force participation over the last thirty years, even in Third World regions such as North Africa where it was traditionally low (Talahite 1998). This growth in labour force participation, in wage work and the informal sector alike, generally follows direct foreign investment flows oriented towards export industries (Treillet 1999). Many studies, in particular the study carried out by the Gedisst [2] on the “paradoxes of globalization” did note an increase in paid skilled (industrial) employment opportunities for women in certain Asian or Latin American countries (Hirata and Le Doaré 1998). However, “this new reality is contradictory”: even in jobs relating to new technologies (computer systems, electronics) and which are not limited to assembly work, “women are limited to the worst maintenance service work”. Trade liberalization in different countries, in particular in Latin America, led to the bankruptcy of many industries protected beforehand by customs barriers and mostly employing men, while labour-intensive export industries had first hired women. The workers in these industries are subjected to all the worst aspects of super-exploitation: unhealthy and often hazardous working conditions, not counting sexist violence, harassment, and often interference with their private lives.

We can also observe the contradictory effects of the extension of individual property rights to farmland; in Africa, and in Mexico with the reform of the Ejido [3] (Katz 1999). In effect, this development, of which we have seen the overall negative consequences described above, sometimes impinges on certain rights that had been granted to women by custom, but always subordinate to the whims of men or male community-based authorities. We find the same contradictory aspect in situations of economic and social crisis. A study of the consequences of the Asian crisis in 1997-98 in the Philippines (Lim 2000) shows that this brought about a general impoverishment of the population, a greater increase in the hours of paid and unpaid employment among women than among men and a growth in the number of women working in the informal sector. But it also meant unemployment growing

more rapidly among men than among women, due to the very segregation of the labour market in which women are over represented in the informal sector and in service and commercial jobs, less affected by the crisis.

Sometimes, on the contrary, women’s jobs are the first to experience the consequences of reversal of growth. The garment industry in the Philippines was hard-hit by the WTO’s elimination of import quotas. In many cases, the development of export industries, in particular in electronics, led to the expulsion of women: production units became more capital and technology intensive, and began to prefer hiring men.

Finally, at times transnational capital can benefit from tradition. This is what we have observed in recent years with the growth of subcontracting which develops work in the home, supposedly allowing women to simultaneously take charge of “their own” household tasks and child-rearing in places where there are no day care centres and sometimes not any schools, and in societies where women were traditionally confined to the home, as in South Asia. This allows for a reconciliation of the capitalist order and the patriarchal order, with the latter given the responsibility of ensuring industrial discipline on behalf of the former.

## Potentialities for struggle



Despite all of this, the elements of instability brought about by globalization can contribute to a change in the status of women in the society, albeit to a limited extent. Many examples have shown that this is the case in Latin America when women are the only family members who can keep a paid job. In India, the expansion of footwear industries in a town in Tamil Nadu since the 1980s, drawing mostly upon young female workers, has led to an upheaval in terms of traditions: women working

alongside men and a social mixing, challenging the caste system, greater freedom of movement in the public space for young women who have thereby succeeded in delaying their marriage age, or no longer consider that they must necessarily marry (Venou 1999).

But above all, the massive entry of women into the wage labour force, even if it is flexible and casualised, and more generally in paid economic activity outside the domestic space, opens up to them, in these very difficult economic conditions, the possibility to begin organising, to have their rights as women workers recognised. So, while even multinational firms are counting on the extension of subcontracting and work in the home to intensify the super-exploitation of women workers, in India, since the beginning of the 1970s, the Self-employed women’s association (SEWA) has been striving to organise them and to win recognition of their employee status (Verschuur 2000). In Mexican maquiladoras, working women are taking part in the struggle for independent trade unionism (Valadez 1998). So there are two traps to be avoided while understanding the development of women’s oppression under globalization: on the one hand, seeing a kind of linear, unconditional progress for women. This is the outlook of the World Bank that is making use of a gender perspective from a neo-liberal outlook (globalization provides greater opportunities to individuals) - while continuing to count on women’s free labour to cushion the most brutal impacts of structural adjustment. It is just as important to avoid, on the other hand, a nostalgic view of traditional societies in the name of the struggle against imperialism and the commodification of the world, while glossing over their fundamentally oppressive aspects for women. To get out of this dilemma, we must see women’s struggles as an integral part of all facets of struggle against neo-liberal globalization.

*This article first appeared in Critique Communiste, the theoretical journal of the LCR in France.*

# Footnotes

[1] See on this subject “Engels et l’émancipation des femmes”, analysis by Josette Trat (1997) of Engels’ work The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the

State and the debates on this subject.

[2] See on this subject “Engels et l’émancipation des femmes”, analysis by Josette Trat (1997) of Engels’ work The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State and the debates on this

subject.

[3] Communal use of land, dating back to the revolution and challenged by the reform of article 27 of the Constitution, which in the early 1990s put these lands on the market.

# International situation

17 February 2004, by François Ollivier

Before approaching the new developments in the world situation since the 15th World Congress, let’s recall the reference points that mark the general framework of our analysis of the period, noted at the last Congress of the International:

- The deepening of neoliberal counter-reforms and their socio-economic and political effects.

- The non-stabilisation of a “new world order” and the emergence of new contradictions in the international capitalist system: the armed dimension of capitalist globalization, economic contradictions linked to the domination of financial capitalism, inter-imperialist contradictions, “national” social and political crises.

- Crisis of legitimacy of neoliberal policies, social resistance and structural changes in the traditional workers’ movement and the bourgeois nationalist parties.

- New spaces for the construction of parties of the radical anti-capitalist left and revolutionary Marxist currents or organizations.

## 1 The war in Iraq

### 1.1 A war which structures the world political situation

The war in Iraq has confirmed:

- Neoliberal globalization: inextricably, organically, linked to armed globalization, it is reflected in the recourse to armed force as an ordinary mode of management of

international affairs, hence the notions of “pre-emptive war” or “unlimited war”.

- The strategic stakes for US imperialism: oil, occupation of strategic areas in the Middle East and at the gates of Asia, new forms of colonization, realignment of imperialist powers around US interests.

- The military supremacy of the USA, boosted by the increase in the arms budget. For the USA, in a world where forms of domination are more than ever differentiated and hierarchized, it is about dominating the processes of creation and appropriation of value and wealth.

### 1.2 The Iraqi quagmire

But this enterprise of domination comes up against contradictions.

The US military occupation in Iraq is currently heading for chaos. If oil production has increased to 2.8 million barrels, more than the level of production under the embargo, Iraqi society is disintegrating: 70% of the population is unemployed, there is an explosion of poverty, the disappearance of food aid, resistance from political-religious parties and the development of forms of military resistance.

Currently, the most probable hypothesis is that of a quagmire for the USA. While taking account of the differences with the US intervention in Vietnam, the US press is beginning to invoke the “spectre” of a new Vietnam. The development of the

situation in the USA itself in terms of popular public opinion also goes in this direction; there is concern about the duration of the military occupation, numbers of soldiers killed, fear of a new conscription to send new contingents and so on.

## 2 The development of inter-imperialist contradictions

### 2.1 The war in Iraq: a turning point?

These contradictions exploded during the war in Iraq. They trace the broad tendencies of a redefinition of world relations, between states and peoples, the relations between Europe and America, the relations between the US, Russia and China.

On the US side, it amounts to challenging what is convenient to call “multilateralism”, a certain type of international relations, through international institutions - the UN, UNESCO, WTO, World Bank, IMF. These bodies underpin the world relationship of forces to the profit of the imperialist powers and constitute instruments of their domination. But some are gripped by the contradictions internal to the system.

On the European side it is not a case of resistance from “old Europe”, but, schematically, of an opposition between two axes - the first around the Franco-German alliance which is opposed to the US and the second, around Great Britain, Spain, Italy,

Holland, Denmark and the countries of eastern Europe supporting the US. A schematic opposition because the lines can shift, but the contradictions between the USA and Europe combine with these inter-European contradictions.

## **2.2 Meaning and limits of these tensions**

These contradictions go beyond the conflicts that appeared during the Iraq war. They express, under the imperatives of neoliberal counter-reform, the sharpness of the economic contradictions, as much in the key sectors of the economy - iron and steel, the aeronautics industry, the agro-alimentary sector - as in the relations between the dollar zone and the euro zone. They also reflect the geopolitical conflicts between US domination and the European positions.

New oppositions appear between the USA, Russia, and China but also between the USA and the new emergent "powers", such as Brazil or India, without forgetting the armed oppositions between capitalist powers with the "nuclear capacities" of certain states.

The new world situation is heavy with centrifugal tendencies that were contained for many years by a system of equilibriums between imperialism and the Soviet bureaucracy.

They express one of the contradictions internal to the capitalist system. They do not have the importance of the contradictions between imperialist powers on the eve of the first and second world wars. It is not the first time that we have seen conflicts between capitalist states during international crises (for example, the opposition between US policy and that of De Gaulle in the 1960s). We should not overestimate the significance of it because these contradictions are contained by a well-understood sense of the fundamental interests of all. Thus, if the USA has acted unilaterally in Iraq, if France and Germany have opposed the US plans for the reconstruction of Iraq, the Bush administration cannot exonerate itself from cooperation with the other imperialist powers, under the aegis of

the UN in particular.

However, contrary to the world vision of those who, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, looked to the construction of a new world order, on the basis of a socio-economic and political stabilization and a diminution of contradictions of every kind (between classes but also between states), the world situation is marked by the increase of conflicts and disorders of every kind.

The world has become increasingly ungovernable for the dominant classes.

The war in Iraq has revealed the erroneous character of any vision of the world political situation as a new period of historic stabilization. It invalidates notions like that of "super-imperialism" - a domination without contradictions of a single imperialism, US imperialism - or that of "Empire", a network of financial multinationals which substitute themselves for states. The war in Iraq has confirmed the reality of imperialist states, of the domination of US imperialism but also of inter-capitalist contradictions.

The latter are not the principal contradictions. They result from the fundamental contradictions, between the peoples and the imperialist powers, between the interests of the dominant classes and those of the popular classes.

Taking these inter-capitalist contradictions into account is functional, mainly for the two following reasons:

- To understand the space opened up by the conflicts and crises for social mobilisations. The contradictions inside the WTO, for example, have allowed the movements for global justice to redeploy their mobilizations. During the war against Iraq, the contradictions between the US, on the one hand and Germany and France on the other, opened up new space for the anti-war mobilizations.

- To fight against any policy of sacred union around the dominant classes who, on account of their own capitalist interests, oppose those of the dominant imperialism. It is

particularly important to oppose any policy of support from the workers' or trade union movement to a European power that would be a counter model of democratic civilisation opposed to the US or other models. While utilising the contradictions internal to the system, our objective remains a policy of unity and independence of the popular classes vis-à-vis their dominant classes.

Finally these oppositions create fissures, tensions and re-evaluations. The next US presidential election will be a good time to analyse the level of these tensions. The policy of neoliberal counter-reform and armed globalization began before the Bush administration. Let's not forget that the US congress - Republicans and Democrats voting together - approved the US intervention. But the counterproductive effects, the dead-ends and risks of destabilization of the policy of the Bush clan are today being denounced by sectors of the US dominant classes. Will these tensions lead to re-evaluations, changes of administration or will they be swept aside? That will be one of the key issues at stake in the US election.

## **3 The deepening of the capitalist offensive**

We will approach this question through the developments of US economic policy, European construction and the Latin American situation.

### **3.1 Some remarks on the US economic situation**

The figures indicate a resumption of growth in 2003. This new phase of growth has some limits. It does not create jobs. The restructurings linked to the search for new productivity gains, like the uncertainties of this upturn, do not lead to the massive creation of jobs. Industrial and IT investment is not forthcoming. But primarily this new phase of growth is modelled by the fundamental disequilibria of the US economy. US growth is linked above all to the USA's ability to attract the brunt of world

capital flows to Wall Street.

This allows the US to compensate for enormous deficits in its current account, budget and indirectly in household consumption credit. The US foreign debt remains at very high levels, nearly 30% of GDP. Deficits are increasing under the pressure of military budgets and a tax policy at the service of the wealthiest.

This capacity to attract world capital is linked to a political-military relationship of forces favourable to the US. Also the US model of economic growth cannot be exported. More, this financial pressure on the US economy implies, abroad, strengthening competition to the benefit of US industrial and financial groups, and, at home, sharpening the exploitation of the workers to ensure an optimum rate of profitability. Hence a growing pressure on wages, a reduction in public budgets, restructurings leading to layoffs in strategic sectors like cars or the development of sub-contracting.

### **3.2 The acceleration of neoliberal counter-reform in Europe**

The imperatives of the dominant classes in the European countries and the effects of international competition, in particular between Europe and America, force the European governments to carry out new attacks against the wage earners and the unemployed - dismantling of the social state, break up of social security in France and in Germany, pensions reform, deregulation of social relations, a challenge to the labour code in France.

This policy is being pursued today by right wing governments - like those of Raffarin in France, Aznar in Spain, Berlusconi in Italy - but also by left social liberal governments -the Blair government in Great Britain and Schröder's SPD-Green government in Germany.

This new attack intensifies the conditions of the class struggle. It leads to less social state and more penal state, more repression against workers, immigrants and their organizations and associations. It impels the coalitions of right wing parties to deploy authoritarian

policies. In a situation of global retreat for a traditional workers' movement that has adapted to capitalist neoliberalism, fascist or neo-fascist parties are experiencing a notable development. In a series of countries like Italy or Austria, their recycling in the coalitions of the authoritarian right strengthens the policy of attack against the popular classes.

On the political and institutional level, the European bourgeoisies are currently evaluating the type of instruments necessary to ensure their domination. The failure of the discussions of the Giscard convention demonstrates the difficulties in unifying the projects of all the bourgeoisies across a total of 25 countries. It also demonstrates the will of some bourgeois sectors to advance in the construction of a "European power" around the Franco-German axis (see annex on Europe).

### **3.3 The Latin American crisis**

The Latin American situation is marked by a deep instability, the brutality of neoliberal policies, the explosion of struggles and social movements, the illegitimacy, in the eyes of significant sectors of the population, of neoliberal counter reform and "national" social and political crises, in the sense of generalized crises.

The pressures of the US administration combined with those of the international institutions - the IMF and World Bank - force the governments to deepen adjustment policies and neoliberal restructurings. The imposed framework of "FTAA or FTAA light" favours the US in production and inter-American trade, the demands for payment of the foreign debt lead to reduction of social budgets, dismantling of public services and generalized privatisation.

The last meeting of the FTAA saw all the Latin American governments align themselves with the USA, with the exception of Chavez's Venezuela.

The Lula government has confirmed the continuity of the Brazilian state's commitments to the IMF. It is even considered one of its best pupils.

In Argentina, the IMF continues its blackmail over economic aid, demanding new restructurings of the administrative apparatus seeking greater profitability!!

In Bolivia, the privatization of one of the main natural resources, natural gas is at the centre of the agenda.

The chaos in Haiti shows, in a particularly striking manner, how far the combined consequences of centuries of imperialist domination, a decomposition of the state, and the recent effects of the ultra-neoliberal politics can go.

This pressure aggravates corruption and parasitism at the summits of the dominant classes and states. Political-financial racketeering, supported by mafias, is an integral part of this type of domination.

This new inter-American governance, under the pressure of the USA, implies, once again, gigantic transfers of diverse types of resources towards the big imperialist groups and their subsidiaries. The rejection of these transfers is one of the themes of the popular mobilizations, whether in Bolivia (rejection of the privatization of gas) or in Venezuela (control of oil production).

Finally the instability produced by the effects of neoliberal policies involves a turning point in the political-military strategy of US imperialism, with a strategy of counter-insurrection in Colombia and Venezuela, the preparation of a coup d'état in Bolivia, and destabilization in Argentina and Brazil. Here again, the economic and strategic imperatives of US domination increasingly narrow the spaces and margins for manoeuvre of the governments, in particular for all experiences of the "social-liberal" type.

## **4 The evolutions of the traditional left or of bourgeois nationalism**

### **4.1 Social liberal changes in the workers' movement**

The changes in the mode of capitalist accumulation and the acceleration of neoliberal counter reforms have provoked and continue to provoke structural changes in the workers' movement and in the traditional nationalist parties.

The internal logic of world relations and the interests of the dominant classes of each country exert such pressure on states and governments that the parties of the governmental left have adapted to neoliberalism. There is no choice - if these parties wish to manage the economy and the capitalist institutions, they must accept the new rules of the game.

In government, they are the relays of the policies of the dominant classes and their commitments to the international institutions or structures like the European Union or the FTAA.

#### **4.2 Reduced room for manoeuvre**

The socio-economic room for manoeuvre is narrowing. There is no space for new Keynesian policies, or a combination of the development of public services, increased wages and the stimulation of household consumption to revive demand.

The Jospin and Lula governments - even if the French PS and the Brazilian PT are not of the same nature - have adapted to the logic of neoliberal counter-reform: reduction of public budgets, tax policies favouring the wealthiest, privatization, reform of social security and pensions, agreement of the Lula government with the criteria imposed by the IMF, notably in the repayment of the foreign debt.

Peronist nationalism, beyond this or that initiative against the Bush administration, integrates its policies within the framework of the demands of the IMF.

In this process, these parties are undergoing qualitative changes, changes in their social base, disengagement of sectors of the popular electorate, increasingly strong interpenetration with the summits of financial capital and the state. These structural changes do not however erase them from the political map.

These parties can come back or maintain themselves in power in the face of the crisis of the traditional right. They continue to represent sectors of the popular classes, which continues to pose problems of unity of action in struggles and in the social movements. But these parties constitute, in the framework of bourgeois alternation, one of the instruments of domination of the dominant classes.

#### **4.3 A growing pressure on the Communist parties and other "anti-neoliberal" currents**

This pressure is also exerted on the Communist parties, which have a tendency to experience an inexorable decline. The PCF, the PCE, the German PDS have now accepted a "strategic satellization" by social democracy. This tendency is encouraged by the policy of integration of the ETUC (European Trades Union Confederation) in the construction of a neoliberal Europe. A new factor is that this pressure is also exerted on Italy's Party of Communist Refoundation, whose leadership is in the process of defining a policy of integration in an eventual centre-left governmental coalition led by Prodi, president of the exceedingly neoliberal European Commission. Finally, we should note the negative evolutions of currents or leaderships that identify with "anti-neoliberalism" without identifying with an anti-capitalist policy of unity and independence in relation to the economy and the capitalist institutions. These currents, faced with the question of government or power, have a tendency to adapt to the logic of "capitalist governability". This is the case with the Lula government in Brazil, Lucio Gutierrez in Ecuador who went so far as to support Bush's war in Iraq, and now the oscillations of Evo Morales in Bolivia.

## **5 Social resistance persists**

Despite the capitalist offensive, social and democratic struggles remain one of the key factors of the world political situation. We can note a series of mobilizations and social struggles that

have weighed on the situation.

### **5.1 Struggles which have marked the political situation**

- February 15, 2003 constituted one of the key days of mobilization against the war in Iraq on a world scale. More than 10 million people demonstrated across the planet.

- Mobilizations against the consequences of neoliberal reforms have taken place in numerous countries, with strikes against pensions reform in France and in Brazil, mobilization for the defence of social security in Germany, against the deregulation of the labour market in Spain and in Italy, semi-insurrectional strikes in San Domingo for a wages increase.

- Mobilizations of peasant movements, like the Brazilian MST for the occupation of land, of unemployed movements like that of the piqueteros in Argentina.

- "National crises" in Bolivia on the questions of the privatization of natural resources or of land, in Venezuela around the Chavez regime, in Haiti to overthrow Aristide.

- Development of mass movements in Iraq against the US military occupation, in most cases under the leadership of Islamist reactionary political-religious parties, development of other forms of social resistance.

- Maintenance of the Palestinian resistance to the Israeli military occupation.

- Finally, we should stress the repeated successes of the World Social Forums. In an international political situation which is difficult for social movements as a whole, the Social Forums remain a reference point for international popular mobilizations, a place of anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist, anti-war, convergence, the practical demonstration that one can resist capitalist globalization. The success of the last Forum in Bombay attests to this. From a certain point of view, these forums express, in a deformed manner, the more global relations of force between the classes, the will of a

series of sectors of the social movements to resist capitalist attacks.

## **5.2 Strength and limitations of social resistance**

This social resistance indicates the capacity for reaction of the popular classes in the face of counter reform. They reflect and in their turn sustain a crisis of legitimacy of the dominant classes, their states, governments and international institutions, but this resistance does not reverse the underlying tendencies of the world relationship of forces. These social movements can “jam the machine”, but for the most part they end in setbacks or political and social defeats for the workers’ movement. These struggles are decisive for the reorganization of the social movements but they do not produce organic growth of trade unions, associations or “reformist” or “revolutionary” parties.

There are key elements of reorganization in these struggles but they are not yet in a position to create conditions to bring about deep changes in the relationship of forces inside the labour movement or between the fundamental classes. Spaces are opening up, left free in particular by the neoliberal evolution of social democracy, the nationalist parties and the accelerated decline of the ex-Stalinist parties, but the radical forces still face difficulties in occupying them fully. We continue to pay the price for the defeats of the past century; the process of reconstruction is a long one.

# **6 Some tracks for our political tasks**

These can be organized around three axes:

- a policy of unity of action;
- elements of an anti-capitalist programme;
- some proposals for rallying the anti-capitalist and revolutionary left.

## **6.1 Unity of action**

Our policy of unity of action of all

workers and their organizations should be a permanent dimension of our intervention. Integration in the mass struggles, the associations, trade unions, in short integration in the “real movement of the masses” is the first condition for acting politically. That also presupposes ensuring the autonomy of the mass movements in relation to the political parties so as to preserve their unity and their effectiveness. We should, on this point, draw lessons from the Argentine experience, where each political party, including and above all the organizations identifying with Trotskyism, has its own projection in the mass movement (in particular in the movement of the piqueteros), thus aggravating the division inside the popular forces.

## **6.2 Combining anti-capitalist responses**

However, it is necessary to go beyond the indispensable intervention in the resistance struggles and in the leadership of the social movements. It is necessary to advance more substantial responses at the programmatic or strategic level. The conditions of this debate have been modified in recent years. In the movement for global justice, it is necessary to simultaneously combine the construction of unitary movements and anti-capitalist responses, notably when faced with “reformist”, “regulationist” (which have as their objective only the correction of the excesses of the capitalist system) or nationalist currents. It is necessary to promote a radical and internationalist response. We want another world, says the movement for global justice... it is necessary to say which.

That involves a programme which prioritises the social question and the class struggle, which pushes to the limit social and democratic demands, against layoffs, for wage increases, for another distribution of wealth, against privatisation... and this logic poses problems of incursions on capitalist ownership, workers’ and peoples’ control. In France, we put forward an emergency anti-capitalist plan as electoral platform and programme of social struggle.

The Argentine experience poses the

problems of the occupation of workplaces, of resuming production after the owners have abandoned them, and of workers’ control.

In Venezuela or Bolivia, the social and political crises of these countries put on the agenda demands against privatization, for the public and social appropriation of natural resources - gas, water, oil - and for the affirmation of national and popular sovereignty against the pillage of wealth by US imperialism.

This orientation should rest on unitary proposals and the self-determination and self-organization of the popular classes. In situations of sharpened struggle or crises, putting structures that anticipate the construction “of a power from below” on the agenda is decisive in order to advance towards a positive outcome to these crises.

This general orientation has also its projection at the level of government and of power. We oppose all formulae of management of the state and the capitalist economy, we defend the perspective of a workers’ government resting on the mobilization of the workers and their organizations. This position allows us to reject the policies of support for or participation in “social liberal” governments while genuinely posing the question of government or of power, unlike those currents which wish to contain mobilizations in counter-power or in the illusion of “changing the world without taking power”, the positions of Holloway and others, in a series of countries or in the movement for global justice.

## **6.3 Pursue our policy of anti-capitalist unity**

Recent developments in the international political situation have placed on the agenda the clarification of certain debates - the evolutions of the Lula government or the leadership of the PRC in Italy - and, on the other hand, the willingness of a series of revolutionary or anti-capitalist currents to discuss, exchange, act in common, as reflected in the conference of anti-capitalist parties in Mumbai. We should continue along this road both at the level of the conference of the European anti-

capitalist left and the international conference, which held its first meeting in Mumbai, even if the forms, rhythms and political forces concerned are different. We should stress the two criteria that have guided our work until now:

**A** anti-capitalist conferences whose centre of gravity is a class struggle orientation, combining radical demands, internationalism, clear demarcation in relation to social liberalism and support to governmental coalitions of this type;

**B** open and representative meetings with political formations that are in transition or seek places of exchange or of action. In this sense, while preserving the class-struggle centre of gravity of the conferences of the European radical left, these conferences are a place of discussion

with forces like the PRC or whatever CP seeks discussion.

Parallel to this, we must increase the relations between revolutionary or anti-capitalist organisations, organizations on the basis of a radical but non-sectarian orientation, integrated in particular in the movement for global justice. Indeed, our orientation is not that of the unity of revolutionaries on the basis solely of abstract references to the revolution, but convergence on the basis of a "common understanding of events and tasks". It is in this sense that organizations like Scotland's ISM, the Australian DSP and the ISO from the USA have participated in this International Committee. It is also in this sense that we pursue work with other organisations like the Greek DEA or the Pakistani LPP. Finally, on another level, we pursue our relations with other organizations like the

British SWP and we will establish relations with the organizations from the international conference.

To conclude, the new space for the radical left, the realignments in the workers' movement, the political and strategic issues put on the agenda the perspective of broad anti-capitalist parties, as key elements of leadership of the mass political processes, in the conditions of intensification of class struggle, in the months and years to come. That involves strengthening the class struggle content of the parties or broad formations being built, notably through drawing all the lessons of social liberalism, and that also involves continuing the process undertaken at the last congress of the International - revitalizing our organizations, rallying revolutionary Marxists, building our sections, in order to enrich these broader processes.

## The present moment of the movement in Europe

17 February 2004

The working classes have been remobilizing, notably through general strikes, above all in order to defend central objectives (such as pensions). At the same time the new social movement (the European Social Forum) is consolidating itself and confirming its role as a lever, a framework of convergence, and the bearer of a perspective of emancipation. We are witnessing a transition from resistance to the counter-offensive, in the sense that demands, campaigns and struggles are being propelled forwards by a strong desire to change society ("another world is possible").

**2** However, this turning point remains very contradictory. The offensive of capital is continuing, and brutally, but without the ideological hegemony and political coherence that the neoliberal monolith had secured for itself during the preceding 20 years. The traditional trade-union movement is still on the defensive; the living and

working conditions of the working class are continuing to decline on every level. Nor is the new social movement succeeding in attaining the goals around which it was founded, even though it is continuing to grow stronger as its internal dynamism pushes it onwards. The extraordinary new element is that, by contrast with the do-nothing trade-union bureaucracy, the new social movement appears to be the motor force, taking the initiative and representing the future. But the historic defeat of the traditional workers' movement, under social-democratic and post-Stalinist leadership, has not been wiped out. The trade-union movement is far from having recovered its old position of strength. A new major defeat for the wage earners could demoralize the new social movement, despite its (legitimate) growing popularity in the trade union movement.

**3** The brutality of the bosses' policies

limits the space available for the class-collaborationist currents (social-democratic parties as well as the "big" post-Stalinist and green parties) that are at the head of the unions or of centre-left governments. Over time a multiplicity of numerous, spectacular political and social experiences, growing self-activity on the ground, and political events that make a big splash in the media in a world situation in ferment are leading towards a clarification without any precedent in recent history. In terms of political orientation, no intermediate option exists between the neoliberal system and a radical improvement in the situation of the lower classes, which implies an abandonment of neoliberal principles and their replacement by anti-capitalist measures. The rising, assertive self-activity in society is subjecting the traditional social-liberal leaderships to a practical test on a grand scale. As long as the social movement keeps going at its current

level, the social-democratic currents are incapable of recovering ideologically and programmatically or of finding a new social base. That does not mean that they cannot survive as electoral apparatuses.

**4** For the first time in 30 years, the beginnings of a practical, attractive left alternative with a presence in society are taking shape, at least in some European countries.

The ESF, with the capacity it has to take initiatives, is at the heart of the rebirth of an emancipatory social movement on a European scale. It made a spectacular leap forward towards a European social movement between Florence and Paris/St. Denis. Without giving up its global justice equipage, and remaining connected with radical organizing against the policies of unlimited warfare, it took on the dual social question of exploitation at work and women's oppression as well as the fight against the EU as an imperialist state under construction. From this starting point it will be able to move on from a propagandist movement (1) to a mass activist movement that (2) puts down roots in each country by (3) taking up working people's concrete demands.

However, for the moment it remains very much a minority force within the labour movement. It is beginning to influence trade union organizations but, without exception, it is not in a situation to draw behind it a significant sector of the working class.

**5** A new stage is beginning in the

rebirth of an emancipatory movement. Its dynamic will be determined, as in every historical epoch, by concrete social conditions, its trajectory, its forms of organization, its content, etc.

The traditional trade-union movement is still an important factor in Europe, but it is clearly weakened and very internally petrified. The future will show what kind of dialectic between the new social movement and the traditional labour movement will be at work in the coming mobilizations of the world of labour and in response to the impact of the social movement. There are already some very instructive, but also very varied and uneven, experiences from one country to the next, particularly in countries like Italy, France, Britain and Germany. The key question is undoubtedly the relationship between "movement and party".

**6** In the context of this new perspective for emancipation, we are seeing an enormous gap between a new left that is very strong on the social level and very "political", on the one hand, and the virtually universal rejection of organized politics - parliamentary elections, political parties and governments - on the other. Most striking is the rejection of the political parties that are most active in building the movement. There are doubtless many reasons for this: the deep discredit into which institutional political life has fallen and its degradation in the media; the connivance of the leaderships of some big movement organizations with the

traditional parties; the policy of subsidizing NGOs; the sectarianism of revolutionary organizations, etc. This is a major difficulty.

At the same time there is a vacuum and therefore a space left free by the existential crisis of the big social-democratic and post-Stalinist parties (as well as some big green parties), which have neither the capacity nor the will to take up the movement's demands.

In this context of global events and an activist movement, general elections take on a different kind of importance as indicators than they have in a totally dead-end political situation. Our task is to be in the thick of these big political and electoral battles: against the right and far right, but focussing above all on fighting against neoliberal policies, war and the EU. Our goal is not primarily to have a visible presence as revolutionary Marxists, but to bring together a credible anti-capitalist, pluralist and European political force. Such a force can take different forms: a pluralist party like the SSP, a bloc like the LCR/LO, or an ad hoc convergence (that could organize itself as a movement afterwards) as in England.

Our task is to give this perspective a certain political coherence and organized form, while remaining aware of the big difference between the national level and the European level. Our goal is to move forward towards an anti-capitalist formation capable of playing an effective role in society and in the social movement.