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A major social and political challenge

30 May 2007, by **Daniel Tanuro**



Katrina aftermath

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Although this picture of climate change effects is already more than worrying, three other elements should be added, whose importance should be clear to everyone:

- the agricultural repercussions. Beyond a 3Â°C increase in average surface temperature, it is very probable that the overall productivity of cultivated ecosystems will be affected. Below this limit, negative impacts will be felt (are already felt) in vast tropical and subtropical regions, in Africa and in South America mainly;

- the effects on ecosystems. Warming now has clear observable consequences, some of which will have serious implications for certain populations : an accelerated decline in biodiversity (-25% according to a study published in the magazine "Nature"), loss of coral reefs, increased fragility of mangrove forests and big forest groupings like that of the Amazon.

How will the capitalist system manage such situations? The question continues to be of concern if we consider the policies already implemented in certain concrete cases, like the Pacific islands, or New

Orleans after hurricane Katrina, or we examine the strategic scenarios of certain "experts".

Pacific islands

In certain small Pacific island states, the threat of warming is already experienced as a painful everyday problem. In early December 2005, the population of Lateu, a small village of around 100 inhabitants on the island of Tegua, in the Polynesian state of Vanuatu, was displaced to escape increasing frequent floods [1]: the coral barrier no longer provides sufficient protection from hurricanes, with the coast being eroded by 2 to 3 metres per year. Lateu is the first case of collective relocation following the rise in ocean levels. But Tuvalu, another Pacific state, already has three thousand climate refugees. Situated 3,400 km to the northeast of Australia, this country (26 km² of more or less firm land) is made up of eight atolls rising to 4.5 metres above sea level. It could well go down in history as the first country which has had to be completely evacuated because of climate change.

Conscious of the situation, in 2000 the government of Tuvalu asked Australia and New Zealand to undertake to take in its 11,636 residents if need be. Canberra refused, on the pretext that a collective agreement would be "discriminatory" in relation to other

refugee candidates. As for New Zealand, it only agreed to accept 74 people a year, on condition that they were aged between 18 and 45, had a "suitable" employment offer in New Zealand (paid work, full time, open ended), can prove their knowledge of English, are in good health and possess sufficient resources if they have a dependant. [2] To get a full picture of this policy, remember that Australia, for example, has three inhabitants per km², that its GDP per inhabitant is 29,632 dollars/year, [3] that it has refused to ratify Kyoto and that it is one of the biggest carbon users on the planet.

Katrina, New Orleans

"The poor will be the main victims of climate change", warns the IPCC The Katrina affair shows that this warning is also true for the developed countries. There is no basis for saying that the hurricane which devastated New Orleans in August 2005 was due to the increase in atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases. But the violence of hurricanes in the North Atlantic has doubled over the last thirty years, probably following warming. [4] Above all, the crisis management has been very revealing. Before, during and after.

Before? Whereas the threat weighing

on the capital of jazz had been known about for a long time, the federal state, to finance its bellicose adventures, had from 2001 slashed the budgets of the body charged with flood prevention, the SELA (Southeast Louisiana Urban Flood Control Project), whose management was responsible to the Army Engineering Corps. In early 2004, the administration granted barely 20% of what had been requested for the strengthening of the Lake Pontchartrain levees. At the end of the year, in spite of unprecedented cyclonic activity, the SELA received a sixth of what it had requested: 10 million dollars.

Meanwhile, in July, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had drawn up an emergency plan based on the cynical hypothesis that the poor (30% of the population, 67% of them black), would stay in the city in case of flooding “since they did not have the financial resources to pay for their evacuation. “The residents need to know they’ll be on their own for several days”, said Michael Brown, head of the FEMA. In July 2005, the city authorities warned the inhabitants that they would be “largely responsible for their own safety”. [5]

During? 138,000 of the 480,000 inhabitants without aid for five days, more than 1,000 dead, brutal repression of initiatives aimed at survival (characterised systematically as “pillage”)... These facts have been widely reported by the media. It is clear that they are not explained solely by negligence or disorder, but by a logic which was anti-poor, class-based, racist and arrogant, in which sordid real estate speculations seem to have played a not inconsiderable role. The statements of George W. Bush and his entourage provide numerous confirmations of it. [6]

After? Less known to the public, certain measures taken in the context of reconstruction are also very significant: minimum wage suppressed, public contracts granted to crony companies (Halliburton!) without tenders, hindrance of the return of poor populations to enable a remodelling of the city and so on. [7] In short: a good example of the

manner in which capital can use the ecological crisis to improve the conditions of its valorisation...

Threat of barbarism

The Pacific islands and Katrina shed light on what the neoliberals mean by “managing the consequences of warming”. If we project these examples to the global scale, there is no escaping the conclusion: in a few decades, climate change could serve as a prop to barbaric scenarios of a breadth as unprecedented as the disturbance of the climate by human activity.

Certain conservative “think tanks” make no secret of their projects in the area. In a study on the implications of serious climate change for the national security of the USA, two “experts” write coldly that “nations with the resources to do so” like the US and Australia “may build virtual fortresses around their countries, preserving resources for themselves”. All around these fortresses, “deaths from war as well as starvation and disease [due to warming] will decrease population size which, over time, will re-balance with carrying capacity”. [8] Too few commentators have drawn attention to the fact that the scientific value of this so-called “study” is non-existent (notably because, inspired by the disaster film “The Day After” it posits the dual threat of a new glaciation and that of a rise in ocean levels, which is nonsense). But of most concern is the absence of protest in scientific circles faced with the fact that the ecological concept of “carrying capacity” of ecosystems is used in support of an abject socio-political project: the massive extermination of the poor.

Unhappily, this report does not constitute an exception. The list of reactionary outpourings aroused by warming is in fact very long. Thus other “experts” envisage completing the market in greenhouse gas emission rights by a market in “rights to procreate” on the pretext that the “galloping demography” of developing countries is a major cause of climate destabilisation. Serious ideological

and social battles take place on these questions. We have seen it with the attempt - aborted “at infiltration of the most important US nature protection association, the Sierra Club, by far right moles, so that the halting of immigration should become the priority “ecological” demand. [9] The neoliberal management of climate change could be still more dangerous than this change itself.

Necessity of a mobilisation, need of an alternative

Numerous signs indicate that the struggle for the climate will increasingly constitute a major social and political issue. Beyond the Kyoto protocol (a first very insufficient step) the response of the capitalist system is in the process of being sketched out and refined under our eyes. It will consist notably in using the serious threat of warming to push an accentuation of neoliberal policies generating exclusion, domination, inequality and degradation of the environment. Another climate policy is then necessary. A policy which can save the climate in social justice, democracy and respect for ecosystems, on the world scale. A policy which redistributes wealth radically and puts an end to productivism. The imposition of this policy necessitates the broadest mobilisation, on a world scale.

In this perspective, information plays a role which is all the more important in that it concerns areas with which activists in the social movements are still not sufficiently familiar. In February 2005, the International Committee of the Fourth International decided to “devote growing attention to the climate question and climate policy, notably through the press of the sections and of the International”. This number of International Viewpoint is intended as a contribution to the necessary effort of consciousness raising, inside our movement and beyond. Although it was drawn up before the publication (on February 1st, 2007) of the fourth evaluation report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and it has

not integrated certain recent proposals (like the proposal for a new energy policy for Europe formulated by the European Commission in January of the same year) we hope that it will supply to the anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal left a first battery of tools allowing it to take its place in the great battle which has begun.

Climate and food self-sufficiency

According to a report by the FAO, "In some 40 poor, developing countries, with a combined population of two billion, including 450 million undernourished people, production losses due to climate change may drastically increase the number of undernourished people, severely hindering progress in combating poverty and food insecurity". The countries of sub-Saharan Africa would

pay the heaviest price. There are an estimated 1.1 billion hectares of arid land where the period of growth of cultures is lower than 120 days. Between now and 2080, this surface could increase from 5% to 8%. Beyond Africa, all the tropical and sub-tropical regions would be affected. The cereal production of 65 countries containing more than half of the population of the developing world could fall by some 280 million tonnes (or 16% of the agricultural GDP of these countries).

Source:

<http://www.fao.org/newsroom/FR/news/2005/102623/index.html>

Appendix

Brown wins without a contest

29 May 2007, by **Socialist Resistance**



Gordon Brown

Gordon Brown will now be crowned Labour leader and then Prime Minister on June 27. There was never going to be a Blairite challenge to Brown (despite massive media speculation) short of some dramatic and unforeseen development, even if some of the Blairites did keep their options open. There is nothing between them other than personal ambition and Brown was in an unassailable position. It's goodbye Blair, but Blairism continues.

The central issue for the left, however, is the failure of the Labour left to raise a challenge – the first time since 1931. Despite campaigning tirelessly up and down the country for months **John McDonnell** fell well short of the 45 nominations he needed from Labour MPs to stand. **Michael Meacher's** hopeless 'centre left' candidacy collapsed with even less, and most of those would not transfer to McDonnell.

It is a defeat of historic proportions.

Failure to achieve a contest - after ten years of New Labour's policies – its war-drive, neo-liberal agenda, and sleaze – is a disaster. It means that the most right-wing and treacherous Labour leader since **Ramsay MacDonald** has been able to replace himself in his own image without a contest. Compare this with the time when **Tony Benn** missed the deputy leadership by a mere 0.5%. The change is staggering.

Brown won a clunking 318 nominations, including the support of several soft left MPs such as **Bob Marshall-Andrews** and **John Cruddas** – who nominated Brown. It was not even that MPs had to agree with everything John McDonnell said in order to nominate him. They could have endorsed him to ensure a political debate and a democratic process.

It was a huge vote of confidence from Labour MPs which will strengthen Brown's neo-liberal agenda and undermine potential opposition to his future actions.

Predictably the Labour left are in denial. The *Labour Left Briefing* editorial says: "Socialists outside the party will be quick to claim that this is the end of the Labour left. We beg to differ". John McDonnell says: "We're now in a stronger position to fight for socialist policies than we have been for years". **Geoff Martin** says that the campaign has: "dug a solid foundation for a revitalised left that we can build on in the future". This is whistling in the wind.

Geoff Martin argues that the problem was amongst Labour MPs, not party members. Every winnable seat which comes up for selection has a Blairite parachuted in, he says. **Alan Simpson** argues that the left was robbed of a contest by the threshold of 45 nominating MPs. He describes it as a "coup".

Of course Blair has been promoting Blairite MPs, and, of course, the election rules were not drawn up to help the left. But these things do not explain Brown 318, McDonnell 27. The fact is a strong grass roots left in the party would have resulted in more nominations. The left was not even a factor MPs had to take into account

when they decided who to nominate. There was a no price they had to pay for nominating Brown rather than McDonnell. On the Labour Party NEC, when a motion was moved to reduce the required number of nominations it got only two votes.

The problem is not just amongst MPs. In fact, after the MPs, it is inside the Labour party, amongst its declining membership, where the victory of new Labour has been most complete. Far more complete that amongst the electoral base of the Labour Party – much of which has been well to the left of Labour for a long time.

The fact is, the major radicalisations of the past 10 years from [Seattle](#) to the mass anti-war movement have found no detectable echo inside the Labour Party, all the development have been outside.

Of course Brown was lying when he said he would have welcomed a contest. He would have welcomed nothing of the sort. McDonnell could have done well in the unions, where ballots were held, and the last thing he wanted for the next six weeks was a continuous pressure from the left. That is why Brown ensured John McDonnell never got on the ballot paper. His claim that his principles stopped him giving the green light to some McDonnell nominations is nonsense.

McDonnell's defeat throws the Labour left into serious crisis. No spin can hide it. The project of reclaiming the Labour or the idea that the Labour Party is a fruitful arena for the left to work in have been dealt a devastating blow.

The only practical proposal John McDonnell makes as a way forward after all this is a call for people to attend the [Labour Representation Committee](#)

conference in October. But what is it going to talk about? It is unlikely to conclude, as the original LRC did at the start of the 20th century that the trade unions and the working class needed independent labour representation in the form of a new political party. It is more likely to say, "carry on regardless".

And what happened to the [awkward squad](#)? Many of them have become the Gordon Brown squad! John McDonnell failed to win the support of any major union for his campaign. McDonnell got the support of some smaller unions mostly outside of the Labour Party. But neither [Derek Simpson](#), [Tony Woodley](#), [Dave Prentis](#) or any of the general secretaries of the big unions were prepared to back him. They rushed to support Brown - despite the pay freeze, pensions crisis, and job losses he has imposed on them. They would rather seek crumbs from his table than back a left candidate.

Woodley and Simpson managed to get both wings of '[Unite](#)' to support Gordon Brown, having opposed support for John McDonnell. The [TGWU](#) section of 'Unite' declared itself "proud" to have nominated Brown saying that it will give him "our full support as Prime Minister in working to tackle social inequality". Meanwhile Brown was getting set to put the boot into the public sector unions.

All this has implication for [Respect](#), which should be taking the initiative to open or re-open a dialogue with those on the left who are currently not in Respect as to how they see the way forward.

The *Morning Star* and the [CPB](#) are a case in point. They are likely to find it increasingly difficult to cling to a policy of reclaiming Labour. Apparently a new discussion has already opened up on this internally in the CPB. The *Morning Star* had already called a

conference in June on "Politics After Blair" at which the issue will now be unavoidable.

This also has implications for the RMT-sponsored [shop stewards network](#) founding conference which is taking place on July 7th. The [Socialist Party's](#) Campaign for a New Workers party has already been promoting a debate around the crisis of the Labour left.

[George Galloway](#) put Respect's role well in his response to the situation in *Socialist Worker*:

"Over the coming weeks we will be seeking to discuss with key figures in the trade unions, on the left, in the Labour Party and across the progressive spectrum as a whole what initiatives might be taken to rally and unify our forces. Respect has aspirations to advance the whole left as well as our part of it".

He puts it very well. This is exactly the kind of situation Respect was created to address. But it is a pity he did not think of this over the last two years when he has opposed most proposals to make Respect more democratic and accessible to new people. He should have thought about it when he has refused to be accountable to Respect – like with his appearance on [Celebrity Big Brother](#) where he made Respect look ridiculous in front of the very people he is now quite rightly in favour of approaching.

He has opposed Respect being built as a political party and not a loose coalition dominated by the [SWP](#) and himself, which leaves little room for the individual non-aligned activist to function.

The fact is that the obstacles to building a viable left alternative are not all with those who retain illusions in the Labour Party. There are also problems in the failure of the left outside of the Labour Party to build a united and pluralist alternative which

can be attractive to them.

Respect must never-the-less rise to this situation. It may not be as well placed as it should be but there is no other organisation which can play this role. Its recent election results show that clearly enough.

But Respect needs to be open and

flexible in this situation to any new forces from the *Morning Star* or the trade union left. It should do whatever is necessary to ensure that new forces have space to make their influence felt. If it can do this it could break it out of its current impasse and open up a new stage of development.

Respect's task in this process is to turn the tide of politics back towards the left. Rebuild ideological and practical opposition to the market. Work with the left in the unions to build an independent pluralist left alternative alongside the struggle to regenerate the unions and rebuild trade union strength and organisation.

The Lessons of a War

23 May 2007, by **Michel Warschawski**



Tel Aviv anti-war march, July 2006

We did not need to wait nine months in order to demonstrate the extent of the fiasco last summer's war represented for Israel. We were able to do that as of August 2006, without having at our disposal the thousands of documents and dozens of depositions that were available to the Vinograd commission. It should nevertheless be recognized that we underestimated the extent to which the Israeli army is in bad shape, its general staff incompetent, its officers completely unmotivated and its soldiers badly trained.

The Israeli national commission of enquiry into the war in Lebanon has just published an intermediate report. The final document is expected only some months from now. It is already clear that, for the Vinograd commission - so-called from the name of the judge who chairs it - the second Lebanon war - that it is the official name which the Israeli government has just given it - was a fiasco.

That is one of the important lessons of the Vinograd commission. Admittedly, we had a presentiment of we it and we wrote along those lines throughout the summer, sometimes provoking sceptical reactions on the part of experts who considered that these analyses were seriously exaggerated.

The report proves, in fact, that we erred not by exaggeration but quite the contrary, by underestimating the gravity of the crisis of the Israeli military machine.

The Vinograd commission is extremely severe on the way in which the political and military decisions were made and, even more, on the irresponsible way in which these decisions were implemented. It does not have, on the other hand, a word to say about the war crimes that were committed during the Lebanon war: not a word of criticism of the bombardment of civilian populations, of the massacres in Tyre and Bint Jbeil, of the destruction of infrastructures and the criminal pollution of the Mediterranean following the destruction of the refineries in Beirut.

When, one day, the war criminals are judged, we should not forget Judge Vinograd and his two assistants who, by their silence, have become the accomplices of the criminals into whose actions they were mandated to inquire and make recommendations.

A Fiasco

If General Dan Halutz has resigned, it is not the case of his two accomplices, Olmert and Peretz, who announced that it was up to them to correct what did not function correctly, and that they were the only ones capable of doing it! The fact is that, in the Israeli

political world, there is indeed no one ready to take over from them. Benjamin Netanyahu puts himself forward as an alternative, but his party, the Likoud, is reduced to a small group in Parliament. To rebuild its political strength, Likoud needs new elections, which neither Peretz's Labour Party, nor Kadima, the party of Ehud Olmert, want.

There is however one political leader who would willingly take over, the man of all treasons, all defections, all chicaneries: Shimon Peres. At over 80, he says that he is ready to take on his responsibilities to save the fatherland. That says a lot about the state of decay of the Israeli political world and the depth of the political crisis.

However, throughout this crisis, share prices on the Stock Exchange did not fall! Because, contrary to its politicians, who have lost any *raison d'Être*, Israel is in fact doing very well: the economy is flourishing, exports are on the increase, the balance of trade is positive and the standard of living of the rich and the middle classes is above the European average. Apart from the student strike, all is calm on the social front.

As for the "Palestinian problem", it is relegated to page four of the daily newspapers. Olmert prefers by far just to have dinner with President Abbas once a week, rather than proposing measures which would open the way to a resumption of negotiations on the end of the occupation. There remains,

nevertheless, the Iranian question, but even on this terrain, it seems that the voices of the warmongers - especially in the army - are increasingly giving way to those who count on Washington to negotiate with Tehran

a compromise on the nuclear question.

In any event, in order to undertake a new warlike adventure, whether it is against Iran or Syria, it is first of all

necessary to restructure the army and its general staff, so as to limit to the maximum the risks of a second fiasco, which would deal a death blow to the capacity of dissuasion of the Hebrew State. Which will take time.

The Challenge of Socialism in the 21st Century

18 May 2007, by **Stuart Piper**



It was of course the depth of Venezuela's structural reforms - its often noisy but nonetheless real break with the market-driven priorities of the Washington consensus - that first established the process as a beacon for the global justice movement and the international left. It was this consistent anti-neoliberal stance that lay behind the welcome given to Hugo Chavez at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in January 2005, even before the Venezuelan leader had made any commitment to the 'S' word.

That impact reached well beyond Latin America and the traditional solidarity circles of Europe and North America. A couple of examples are illustrative. One comes from Indonesia, where the new left party PAPERNAS repeatedly refers to the Venezuelan example to explain and justify its platform for re-asserting national sovereignty over the country's natural resources and economic development. Another comes from Egypt, where there is a tradition in the Cairo bazaar of giving the names of public figures to the dates on sale, as a measure of the quality of each batch of these dried fruit. Following last year's war in Lebanon, it was no surprise that the poorest, bitterest varieties were called 'Bush', 'Blair' and 'Olmert'. Nor was it much surprise to find that the very finest, sweetest dates were

called 'Nasrallah', after the leader of Hezbollah. But among the group of other tasty varieties, following up a little way behind, was one called 'Chavez'. The Venezuelan leader had of course withdrawn his ambassador from Israel in protest at the aggression.

All this merely illustrates the extraordinary resonance that Venezuela's bold opposition to Empire has had among tens of millions of those Fanon once called "the wretched of the earth" - a resonance that began to be felt after the defeat of the anti-Chavez coup in April 2002 and the development of the health and literacy 'Missions' from 2003, and which is unlike anything experienced for a couple of decades.

But more recently, something else has emerged to give the Venezuelan process a bigger, more profound impact still. This began with Chavez' invitation in 2005 to begin discussing 'socialism of the 21st century', a discussion which continues even more intensely today after the commitment he made in December 2006 that this is now the main challenge for the next period in Venezuela. Of course this is of critical importance for the struggle inside Venezuela. But it also transforms its international potential.

Firstly for those of us in countries where the word 'socialism' has been erased from most people's political vocabulary for the last 17 years or more, it has suddenly become possible to talk about

socialism without appearing to have just flown in from another galaxy. More than that, Venezuela is the first living laboratory - at least since Nicaragua in the 1980s - to test out what exactly socialist democracy might look like in the 21st century, and what strategies are available to get to it. Some of these strategic questions have begun to reappear in theoretical form in recent years. For example there has been an important debate in the pages of the French LCR's Critique Communiste, involving Daniel Bensaid, Antoine Artois, Alex Callinicos and others. Among the central questions they raise: under current conditions, does a socialist revolution and the building of a new kind of state necessarily entail one crucial, explosive moment when the old state apparatus collapses, some kind of 'storming of the winter palace', the result of an insurrectionary general strike or maybe a prolonged, popular, military struggle? Or is it possible to envisage the emergence of new state structures defending a new set of class interests, alongside or even within the old state which defends the old class interests?

This is probably the most decisive question now facing the Bolivarian movement in Venezuela. For at the risk of simplification, the political process in Venezuela can be described as a nationalist, anti-neoliberal, anti-imperialist revolution, within which there is a socialist revolution struggling to get out. And paradoxically, both aspects are crystallised in the personality of

Chavez himself. The socialist revolution is struggling to get out because this is a process which first developed out of a conventional (that is bourgeois representative) electoral victory in 1998, with the backing of quite a broad cross-class alliance, and which at least up until the failed coup of April 2002, did little to step beyond that institutional framework. Certainly the new Bolivarian Constitution of 2000 overhauled those institutions, and had many radical things to say about popular participation and the centrality of human needs and human potential. But it did not challenge the basic premises (either of delegated, representative democracy, or of private property relations). And to some extent it entrenched the class alliance that had backed it.

Since the uprising against the coup in 2002, and especially since the struggle to resist the employers' lockout at the end of that year, the popular mobilizations, the Missions, the urban land committees, some sporadic or partial experiences of workers' control, some of the rural and urban co-operatives, and most recently the emerging Communal Councils, have begun to move beyond the old framework and even to "defy" it. But still the central levers of power in Venezuela - including the office of the presidency itself - remain institutionally located, even "trapped", within the old administrative structures. The problem for the Bolivarian movement - and perhaps for most conceivable revolutionary situations in today's world - is how do you get around the existing apparatus, when you first came to power through it (ie. you were elected into office). In the case of Venezuela, this problem is connected to another: how can the movement develop a real collective leadership and free itself from the overarching dominance of one revolutionary "caudillo", however honest and able, as Chavez himself seems to recognise it must?



Two of the most recent developments in Venezuela, and one slightly older one, seem to point towards a possible

solution. The latter is the experience of co-management with workers' control developed in a few workplaces since early 2005, most importantly at the ALCASA aluminium plant in Ciudad Guayana. This experiment remains very limited in its spread, patchy in its application, and there are some worrying signs that it has fallen out of favour with the central leadership. Chavez made almost no mention of it at all in his keynote speeches of December and January outlining the priorities of the new period of the revolution. But it remains the most ambitious and inspiring example so far of a radical alternative to the old system. The two more recent developments are the call for a new United Socialist Party, as "the most democratic party Venezuela has ever seen", and the "revolutionary explosion of communal power" that Chavez identified as the fifth and most important motor of Venezuela's transition to a socialism of the 21st century.

Together these three seem to re-assert an old truth. The solution can only be democracy - the radical extension of democracy into every area of social life - because that, in the end, is what socialism is. Indeed 'collective ownership' of the means of production is pointless unless it means the extension of democratic, collective control over the economy.

This is how President Chavez described the challenge of communal power on 8 January as he swore in his new government.

"This year with the Communal Councils we need to go beyond the local. We need to begin to create, by law in the first instance, a kind of regional, local and national confederation of Communal Councils. We have to move towards the creation of a communal state. And the old bourgeois state, which is still there, still alive and kicking, we have to begin dismantling it bit by bit, as we build up the communal state, the socialist state, the Bolivarian state - a state that is capable of carrying through a revolution. Almost all states have been born to prevent revolutions. So we have quite a task: to convert a counter-revolutionary state into a revolutionary state."

This is indeed a far-reaching vision. The Venezuelan revolutionary and former minister Roland Denis - often a critic of Chavez from the left - is surely right when he says the communal councils - which are intended to bring together 200-400 families to discuss and decide on local spending and development plans - offer an historic opportunity to do away with the bourgeois state. In theory there are already 18,000 of them. This should rise to 30,000. In practice many of them have yet to get up and running.

But there are two related problems with the Communal Councils as presently conceived. One is that they are not entirely autonomous. They were created and are regulated by law, a law drawn up and passed by the "old state", even if an old state inhabited by chavistas. This is significantly different from the Participatory Budget of Porto Alegre and some of its other more radical manifestations elsewhere in Brazil, which to a considerable degree have inspired the Venezuelan initiative. There the PB was set up "informally" by a convergence of the social movements in the poor neighbourhoods and the party (the Workers' Party or PT) that was in local government, taking advantage of a loophole in Brazil's post-dictatorship constitution. One of its fundamental guiding principles was that it should be autonomous and self-regulated; there was never any legislation on the PB, it drew up its own rules and could modify them at will, and neither the representatives of local government nor of the party had any direct say in the matter.

Secondly, and again unlike the PB in Porto Alegre, the Communal Councils do not have sovereign decision making power over 100% of local budgets (another of the cardinal principles of the Porto Alegre experience, although one that was only partially exercised). In fact the money that Venezuela's communal councils discuss and spend comes in lump sums allocated directly by the Presidential Commission for Communal Power - a total of about \$ 1.6bn last year, and around twice that this year. They do not control existing public budgets and it remains unclear what relationship they will have with

resources and administrative structures that currently come under the elected mayors, governors and local assemblies – whether they will begin to absorb and supersede these or merely exist alongside them.

Both of these problems are partly a result of another. In spite of the explosion of all kinds of local mobilization in recent years, Venezuela has neither a tradition of strongly organised social movements nor a mass revolutionary, or even just class-struggle, party, which can organise such initiatives. To some degree the ‘Chavez phenomenon’ stands in for both.

This is why the call to build a new United Socialist Party (PSUV) is potentially such an important step. It might just be the best way of moving beyond the reliance on one central leader. But only on the condition that it is a genuinely open and democratic party, and not some monolithic instrument for relaying decisions that have already been taken. This is a big challenge for Venezuela’s several small currents and parties that already identify themselves as marxists or socialists. The most important of these from an explicitly revolutionary marxist tradition – the PRS or Revolution and Socialism Party which includes the central leaders of the currently divided UNT trade union federation – has just split over the issue, with some of its best known leaders opting to join the PSUV project, while others have decided to remain outside. In our view the former group are absolutely right to argue

that this opportunity must not be missed and that it is precisely because there are real dangers of the project being hijacked by some of the old bureaucratic elements that revolutionaries must fight to ensure that the PSUV is fully democratic and does not include representatives of the Venezuelan capitalist class or the new bureaucracy that has been undermining the Bolivarian revolution from within. This is very similar to the fight waged by comrades of the Brazilian section of the FI in the 1980s to develop the new PT as a “workers’ party without bosses” and one which had the maximum internal democracy, with full rights for tendencies, the proportional representation of minorities in the leadership, a 30% quota for women, and so on – a fight that was largely successful and played a key part in making the PT such a beacon for the international left for a decade or more.

To sum up, there would seem to be three immediate and medium-term challenges facing the revolutionary process in Venezuela.

- 1) Can the new party become a real, mass revolutionary party – which means can it provide a thoroughly pluralist, democratic space for organising and co-ordinating the activity of all sectors and currents of the Venezuelan working class (in its broadest sense) and other oppressed sections of society?
- 2) Can the exemplary experiences of workers’ co-management with workers’ control, begun in ALCASA and elsewhere, be extended through much wider sections of the public and private sectors? And can these begin

to link up with and involve the Communal Councils and other forms of popular territorial power in exerting democratic control over workplaces and the wider economy?

- 3) Can the new Communal Councils become real centres of popular power, taking on sovereign decision-making power over all aspects of local and regional budgets and development plans? And can these bodies link up nationally to build a new kind of state that defends popular interests.

In other words, the immediate challenges are democratic. They point towards the radical extension of participatory democracy beyond the formal political sphere into every nook and cranny of the social edifice. And that of course is what socialism – before, during and after the 21st century – was always meant to look like. An unprecedented deepening of democratic rights. Looked at in this way, the question of nationalizations and the expropriation of private capital becomes a natural consequence rather than a precondition. For as soon as capital ceases to be controlled by capitalists, but rather is submitted to the democratic decisions of the workforce and the community, locally and nationally, then it ceases to function as private capital and begins to obey a very different logic – that of human needs and potential, and just as urgently now, that of environmental survival. And the journey between these two points is also one of the things the theory of permanent revolution set out to analyse, some one hundred years ago.

On the foot steps of advocates, till the end of dictatorship

15 May 2007, by **Farooq Tariq**



But it was different this time. Immediately after the suspension, the 80,000 strong advocates’ community started agitation against the decision.

The peak of this agitation was on 14th May 2007. For the first time since General Musharraf took over the power in October 1999, whole of

Pakistan shut down. It was the first political strike in seven years. It was also the first political action that was not initiated by the religious fundamentalist forces.

On 14 May, Pakistan was united against military dictatorship and gangsters of MQM, (United National Movement) a linguistic party sharing power along with General Musharraf. From Karachi to Peshawar, all the shops were closed and there was very thin traffic on the streets. In Lahore, the largest ever demonstration since 9th March took place from Lahore High Court to Governor House on the main Mall Road. Over 15,000 participated.

The strike was a solid one and even traders associated with the military regime went on strike. A great anger was expressed against the killing of over 40 political activists who went to the reception of chief justice Iftikhar Mohammed Choudry on 12 May in Karachi. Over 200 were injured by the direct fire from the thugs of MQM, who had announced that they would not tolerate the reception in Karachi.

"Karachi is ours and we would not like the political parties to politicize the issue of chief justice" declared Farooq Sattar, the parliamentary head of MQM a day earlier. Karachi is in the control of this neofascist organization that bases itself on the immigrants of 1947 who speak Urdu. They control the local bodies and almost all the provincial and national seats from the largest city of Pakistan.

The 12 May saw some of the worst incidents of direct killings of innocent citizens and political activists from different opposition parties in Karachi. All the roads linked to Shahrai Faisal, the main road to airport were blocked by massive containers and trucks. The purpose was to stop people coming to the main road.

Although there was hundreds of Labour Party Pakistan activists present in different routes to the airport, fortunately none of them were injured or killed. They were bringing the injured ones to hospitals. Several busloads of LPP activists were snatched by the gangsters of MQM who dragged the activists inside with

their guns at their heads.

"I am at Awami Markaz hiding behind a pillar of the bridge. Firing is going on from different sides. Next to me are lying five people, covered with blood. They have been hit by bullets. There is no ambulance to take them to hospital. I am crying all the time. I can not help the injured one, and I may be hit as well" Azra Perveen, a Labour Party Pakistan activist told me on telephone on 12th May at 2pm. We tried to send the media and some ambulances, but no-one was ready to go that place. It was only after two hours that the injured were rushed to hospital.

Sadly, three of them died later. Azra has been in a state of shock for the last three days. She has seen the blood everywhere.

A private TV channel, Aaj, tried to show live the firing by the gangsters. So the semi-fascist groups when there and fired at the TV channel building for over six hours.

The local police and rangers had given a free hand to "deal" with the opposition. The chief justice was blocked at the Karachi airport alongside with 25 advocates. They were held for nine hours at the airport. The state authorities wanted him to go by helicopter to Sind High Court building to address the Sind High Court Bar Association. This was to avoid the reception of the people outside on the main roads. He refused to go by helicopter.

While they stopped the chief justice at the airport, the private army of the MQM opened fire on all those who came in processions to receive and welcome him. Thus a firing drama lasted for over 14 hours, resulting in the deaths of over 40 by midnight.

After the incidents of 12th May, the MQM is neither united nor national. They are many resigning from MQM in Punjab, and Karachi is not united anymore for MQM after nearly two decades.

The same night on 12th May, the conservative Muslim League Q had planned a "mass" rally in Islamabad in support of the sacking of chief justice. The Muslim League is in power with

General Musharraf. This was a rally planned weeks earlier to counter the growing sympathy for the chief justice and a growing demand for an end of the military regime.

All state employees were asked to attend the rally. All sanitary workers were forced to attend. The Muslim League had promised to give two to five hundred Rupees (\$3.50 to \$8.50) to everyone who attended this "historic" rally, along with free mineral water and food. They have been regular complaints printed for the last two days in the national media about ignoring promises of such a kind. Despite all the efforts, not more than 20,000 were in the rally. It was not a rally but a festival opportunity for many to see Islamabad.

Addressing this rally General Musharraf praised the MQM by saying that the people of Karachi has come out today. Yes, they came out to be hit by bullets of the supporters of General Musharraf.

It all went against the regime. Their rally in Islamabad was a failure. Their strategy to stop the reception of chief justice resulted in bloodshed. They lost their support among the middle class, the traditional support for the military regime and MQM. The representatives of over 480 markets of Lahore announced, and acted upon, the call for a shut-down strike on 12th May. It was mainly announced by former supporters of the Musharraf regime.

The movement of the advocates had been started by the bar associations across Pakistan after 9th March 2007. The advocates historically have been in the forefront of every democratic struggle in Pakistan. They were the main force behind the movement against General Ayyub Khan's dictatorship in the sixties; they were also responsible for keeping the movement alive during General Zia's dictatorship in the eighties. Some of them have been cooperating with the military regime of general Musharraf. Some of them had illusions of the nature of the regime. They thought it might be a progressive military regime. But all that is gone with the wind.

The movement has developed from nowhere to everywhere. It is everywhere. People are talking about it. They are very angry about the bloodshed. They have all seen it on the TV by the live coverage of competing private TV channels. Mostly they have mobile phones that have helped them to get immediate information.

There have been numerous hunger strike camps, protest camps, and small and big demonstrations mainly by the advocates during the first sixty days of the movement. The movement was built up slowly but steadily. The consistency in the protests by the advocates convinced many ordinary Pakistanis to give attention to the movement.

The movement to end the military regime in Pakistan is facing its second phase of repression. The first phase of repression was to suppress the advocates in the first week of the movement just after 9th March. Many advocates were beaten up by police and many were arrested. That did not work.

Then regime strategy was to exhaust the movement by opening up. They allowed the demonstrations to take place freely. That brought more people in the movement including the activists of political parties mainly Muslim League (Nawaz), Peoples Party, parties associated with Awami jamhoori Tehreek, the left alliance including Labour Party Pakistan, Awami National Party, National Party, Baluchistan National Party, MMA, the religious alliance and so on.

The second phase of repression has started from 4th May. This time it is mainly against the political activists. I was also detained for three days by Lahore police from 4th May to 7th May. This was to prevent political activists arranging the reception of chief justice while he was due in Lahore on 5th May to address the Lahore High Court Bar Association. He reached Lahore from Islamabad in 25 hours instead of normal five hours. This was due to the massive turnout on the main GT road to welcome the chief justice.

Labour Party Pakistan saw the potential of the movement just after 9th March. It became part of the movement from the very beginning. Its poster "on the footsteps of the advocates till the end of dictatorship" was the hit poster among the advocates. It has printed leaflets in thousands to distribute among the communities appealing to them to join the movement. It has organized public meetings and rallies to make people part of the movement.

Who is this chief justice of Supreme Court of Pakistan who has initiated the movement? The chief justice Iftikhar Choudry was no exception to the other judges who helped to sustain this regime. But in his two years of office, he took many 'sue motto' notices regarding ordinary Pakistanis who were subject to human rights violations. He particularly helped women victims of rape, and conservative reactionary customary practices, that make women half of man.

He also took notices of the irregularities of the privatization process of Pakistan Steel Mills in Karachi. He in fact stopped the privatization of this massive industrial unit of Pakistan. On the other hand, he has also given decisions against trade union rights and so on and he has banned some strikes of the public sector.

So he was not a hero worthy of the ordinary people of Pakistan, but someone who helps sometimes. He earned respect when he refused to resign on 9th March, when he was called to the Army House by General Musharraf in the presence of five military generals. The military generals immediately removed him from the post and put him under house arrest. This resulted in an absolute anger among the advocates who termed this act as an attack on the judiciary.

The movement is gaining momentum among the masses day by day. This is because of the implementation of

neoliberal agenda at a faster speed. The privatization, the deregulation, the so-called free market policies meant an upsurge of prices of every day things at a level never seen before. People were fed up of the regime but had no trust in the main political parties. So they were angry, but not part of the movement.

The religious fundamentalist MMA, who had street power, used this to gain more and more concessions from the regime including power in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and power sharing in another province, Baluchistan. But they had come out to save the regime whenever it was in trouble.

Now the religious fundamentalists are trailing behind the advocate's movement, in the hope of hijacking the movement. They have lent their support to the advocates but they are not trustworthy. They can go along with the military regime any time.

Neither is the Pakistan People Party trustworthy. Benazir Bhutto admitted last month that it is in contact with the military regime and is ready to share power with General Musharraf as president. This sparked a great anger among the advocates who are mainly led by supporters of PPP. But the deal with the PPP melts away in the heat of the movement. Benazir does not say anymore that she is willing to share power with General Musharraf.

The movement of the advocates is mainly led by a young generation. It is their first experience and they are up to the mark. They do not act upon the advice of their seniors to go slow. That is the strength of the movement.

How and when Mushraf will step down, who will take over, will it be another general to hold general elections or a transitional government of some alliances, these are some of the question discussed in the movement. One thing is absolute sure that Musharraf is weaker to an extent never seen before. He can not last long as he had planned. Many have started counting the days. He is a General on his last leg.

Conflict in Tallinn after Soviet statue torn down

13 May 2007, by **Ilya Budraitskis**



There were very few political demands, slogans or any kind of organised groups. Young people (some of them were about 13-14 years old!) just wanted to demonstrate their anger against the state, smashing expensive shops, casinos and banks. During these days the police looked completely unable to control the situation. On the evening of the 26th they began to arrest some of the protesters. One young Russian was killed – it was not clear by whom.

On the morning of April 27 the president of Estonia, Henrick Ilves, made a special statement on TV, where he condemned the youth as “vandals”, and called for “peace and order”. I was in a café, where Estonian people were watching Ilves’s speech – they looked really shocked and disappointed. A few days before, no one could have imagined such a revolt in Tallinn! In the evening of the 27th the revolt continued. I was at that time in the Square of Freedom, the central square in Tallinn. About 3000 young people moved into the square, without any particular target. Some of them were carrying Russian flags, some had home-made banners saying “Ansip Out!” (Andrus Ansip is the Prime Minister). The nature of their feelings was very contradictory – it was like a mix of great Russian chauvinism and social protest.

I have read that Russians treat the Estonian authorities and the Estonian nationalists as “fascists”. Is that so? Is there some element of truth in such insults?

Of course, that is really just propaganda. The problem is that from the beginning of the present Estonian state, from 1991, it was based on the

idea of direct continuity with the Estonian republic which existed from 1919 to 1940. According to this idea, only people whose parents were citizens before 1940 can be full citizens of the new Estonia. That means that the 30% of the population who are non-Estonian need to pass special exams to become citizens. The official version of Estonian history calls the Soviet period “occupation”, and presents Estonian participants in SS divisions in World War II as “fighters for freedom”. At the same time, it has to be remembered that at the end of the 1940s more than 100,000 Estonians (about 10% of the Estonian population) were deported or shot by the NKVD. That means that now, in every Estonian family, you have somebody who was repressed by the Stalinist state. I think that because of this, the nature of Estonian nationalism is very complicated – on the one hand, it is a typical nationalism of a “small nation”, on the other, it has a very strong anti-communist and far-right element.

What do you think about the question of the monument to the Red Army? Isn’t it rightly seen by Estonians as a symbol of their national oppression by the state authorities of the Great Russian dominated USSR?

I think the question of the monument was put forward by the Estonian government for political reasons, mainly to provoke a strong and sharp reaction from Russia. The monument was a traditional meeting place for the old Russian-speaking veterans of World War II every 9th of May, and over the last 15 years only a marginal far Right in Estonia came out against it. Only in 2006 did the Reform Party, one of the major parties in the country, begin to speak about the monument. Over the last six months

there was growing hysteria about the monument in both the Estonian and Russian media, which to my mind had a very little to do with historical questions and people’s real feelings.

How do you characterise the main parties of the “centre-left” government and the parliamentary opposition in the Estonian Rikikogu (parliament) today?

Now, after the last elections in March 2007, you have three parties in the government: the Reform Party – right-of-centre, neo-liberal and extremely pro-EU, whose leader Andrus Ansip is head of the government; then the “Pro Patria and Republic” party, a right-wing, conservative and nationalist force, which now controls the Education and Defence ministries; and finally the Social-Democratic Party, official descendant of the historical Estonian Social Democracy, but which really looks more like a liberal pro-EU party. So, in Estonian politics this government is right-of-centre. The main opposition force in parliament is the Centrist Party, which is traditionally more “social” than the Reform party and its partners. Its leader, Edgar Savisaar, who is now mayor of Tallinn, was from the beginning against the idea of moving the monument to the Soviet soldier. The Centrist Party is also more than the others orientated towards seeking “Russian votes” in the elections.

Could you briefly say something about the labour movement in Estonia (trade unions, working-class political parties, the unemployed movement, etc.)?

At present there is one union, the Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions (EAKL), which is a little bit active only in the public sector, and which also defends Estonian workers

in other countries of the EU (now there are about 100 000 Estonians who live and work in Finland, Sweden, Ireland, etc.). At present there is no working-class party in Estonia. All the left groups are very small and have no influence in the labour movement.

In Moscow there are people protesting in front of the Estonian Embassy. Who are these people? The Russian state-owned railway company has announced that the delivery of fuel to Estonia might be interrupted "because of repair works". How do you judge the relations between the two states and their governments?

Over the last few weeks we have seen a growing campaign against Estonia, organised by the pro-government Russian media, the "United Russia" party and some youth organisations linked to it. These youth organisations, which are closely connected to the Presidential Administration, organised a blockade of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow and collected signatures "to drive the Estonian Embassy out of Moscow". I think that this campaign has a mostly internal aim - to focus public opinion on the very abstract question of "fighting Estonian fascism", which has nothing to do with the real political and social problems in Russia, including the problem of growing Russian nationalism, which is supported by the state. The Russian diplomatic offensive against Estonia also plays the role of putting pressure on the EU prior to the Russia-EU summit which will take place in

Samara next week. In this conflict the Estonian government is also trying to play a game with the EU, demonstrating the danger from Russia in order to get more support from the EU.

What is the social situation of the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic republics? What is your opinion about the political moods and forces among the Russian-speaking citizens of Estonia?

According to official figures from 2000, there are a bit less than 1,4 million inhabitants of Estonia. Of these, 65,3 % are Estonians and 28,1 % Russians, and then you have some small minorities of Ukrainians, Belarussians and Finns. 67 % speak Estonian and 30 % Russian. In Latvia, there is nearly the same national balance. In these two countries you have a real situation of communally divided societies - separate Russian schools, Russian-dominated areas in big cities, Russian bars and clubs, a separate Russian political spectrum, from right to left. In Latvia, for example, Russians vote only for "their" parties.

The biggest one of them, the Movement for Civil Rights, now has one member in the European parliament. This situation has its origins in the old Stalinist policies, when in the 1950s and 1960s a lot of Russians moved to Latvia and Estonia to work in the factories, considering these republics just as another part of

one big Soviet country, never being interested in learning the Latvian or Estonian language. After 1991, the Latvian and Estonian governments did nothing to integrate these people into the new society. More than that, they did everything to make it impossible. Now Russian-speaking people are mostly the poor sector of society; A lot of young people feel that they have no perspectives in life. This situation also gives the Russian government an opportunity to use the problem of the Baltic Russians - to put pressure on the EU, for different political manoeuvres, etc.

Do you know anything about progressive or radical groups in Estonia, both anti-capitalist and anti-Stalinist? Are there cultural and political movements in Estonia that are anti-chauvinist and not pro-Western? Are there currents working together with similar Russian groups?

Answer: There are just a few left groups in Estonia. There is the Left Party, reformed ex-Communists, which is a full member of the European Left Party. It does not have a strong position in Estonian politics - in the last elections the party won less than 1% of the votes. There is also a new anti-capitalist/anti-globalisation youth group called Red-Black (Punamust in Estonian). It is a mostly Estonian-speaking youth group, which tries to do some anti-capitalist and anti-fascist activities. Unfortunately, there are no real links between them and the Russian Left.

The Scottish elections and the SSP

12 May 2007, by Murray Smith



These elections were a triumph for the Scottish National Party (SNP), which won 47 seats out of 129 (20 up on last time) to Labour's 46 (4 down). Any idea that they were essentially a

defeat for Labour rather than a victory for the SNP does not resist an examination of the facts and figures. In a rather confused article in this week's Socialist Worker, Neil Davidson writes of "a serious desire on the part of voters to punish Labour for its many crimes". But later in the

same article he notes that "the great majority of new SNP seats came from the smaller parties, not from Labour", which is much more relevant. In fact the Labour vote fell, in the constituency section, from 659,879 (34.6 percent) in 2003 to 648,374 (32,2 per cent) in 2007. Hardly a

severe punishment.

And in the regional lists it actually went up from 561,379 (29.3 per cent) in 2003 to 595,415 (29.2 per cent) in 2007. In fact the big drop in the Labour vote was between 1999 and 2003, when it lost 250,000 votes in the constituencies and nearly as many in the regions. The SNP on the other hand went up from 449,476 (23.8 per cent) in 2003 to 664,227 (32.9 per cent) in 2007 in the constituencies and from 399,659 (20.9 per cent) in the regional lists in 2003 to 633,401 (31 per cent) in 2007. That brings the SNP in votes to its level of 1999, though its percentage is higher because of an 8 per cent less turnout in 2007 compared to 1999.

So the main reason for the SNP's victory is that a lot more people voted for them in 2007 than in 2003, and those votes did not come from Labour to any significant extent. In fact there was a real polarisation between the nationalist vote and the unionist vote, and specifically between the SNP and the main unionist party, the Labour Party. Where did the SNP's extra votes come from? Well, Labour's coalition partner the LibDems lost 40,000 votes in the constituency section. Maybe some of those went to the SNP, probably not many. But the combined SSP, Green and Solidarity vote in the regional lists was 150,000 down on the SSP-Green vote in 2003 and since the SSP didn't stand this time in the constituencies, there were 117,000 votes looking for a home. Add in a 2.4 per cent increase in turnout, which perhaps favoured the SNP, and you start to make up the difference in the SNP vote between 2003 and 2007.



SSP convenor Colin Fox

There was of course in this election the scandal of, according to the BBC, 142,000 spoiled ballot papers, about 7 per cent of the total. This was due to the extremely complicated voting system and seems definitely to have damaged the smaller parties, probably not unintentionally. In particular it seems to have confused voters who wanted to vote one way in the regional lists and another in the constituencies.

Who would those be? To a very large extent, those who voted SSP/Solidarity/Greens in the regions and SNP in the constituencies. Probably it wouldn't have had much effect on the result this time, nevertheless it has to be independently investigated and changed for the next elections.

So you have a situation where the of the three main unionist parties, the Labour vote held pretty steady, the Conservatives went up slightly, the LibDems down slightly. On the other hand the SNP went up to a very large extent thanks to Green and Socialist voters who are pro-independence but well to the left of Alex Salmond. Why did they choose the SNP? Probably partly because of the party's position on issues like council tax, Trident, Iraq. And very probably because they thought an SNP victory would at least bring independence nearer. Because of the three parliamentary elections held since the Parliament was set up in 1999, this was the first one where the national question was well and truly at centre stage. Contrary to those who impressionistically approach the national question from the angle of the last by-election or opinion poll, beyond these ups and downs Scottish national consciousness has been steadily developing over the last 40 years, and its logical conclusion is independence. And not an independence in the abstract, but the desire of the Scottish to have control over their own affairs, their own national wealth and how it is distributed, issues like war and peace and nuclear bases on the Clyde. From that point of view, the SNP's campaign, concentrating less on independence and more on concrete issues, was quite intelligent. Because if there is not yet a solid majority for independence (the polls go up and down, sometimes there is over 50 per cent for independence) there is now a very solid majority for extending the powers of the Parliament.

So what happens now? It appears at the moment far from certain that the SNP will manage to have a coalition government with the LibDems and the Greens. So we are very possibly heading towards an SNP minority government. As Alan McCombes points out, that may be no bad thing

for the SNP. It would avoid the kind of horse trading and shoddy compromises that coalition implies and the SNP could present itself as trying to apply its programme but being blocked by the three big unionist parties.

What might an SNP minority government do? Probably two things at once, as it did in the election campaign. On the one hand, he will give guarantees to the banks and big business that an SNP-run Scotland, or even an independent Scotland, will be good for them. During the election campaign the SNP proudly paraded the bankers and businessmen who supported it and revelled in the fat cheques they gave the party. So on basic economic policy, there is likely to be no significant change, no reversal of privatisations and private-public initiatives. On the other hand, Salmond will seek to consolidate and enlarge his base by engaging in confrontation with London on a series of issues - oil revenues, Trident, Scottish troops in Iraq, council tax - pushing autonomy to the limits, demonstrating that he cannot do this or that because of control from London.

This will open up a very interesting and eventful period in Scottish politics, and it makes the absence of socialist MSPs from Holyrood even more regrettable. For the SSP, to be absent from Parliament in the new political period that is opening is a severe defeat. It will also have financial consequences. But there is no other choice but to rebuild its influence. By engaging in extra-parliamentary campaigns and struggles as it has always done, but also by making its voice heard, which will now be more difficult from outside Parliament, on the central political questions that will arise.

So what happened to the SSP? As we have pointed out above, the left electorate got squeezed by the Labour-SNP polarisation. The Greens had no Sheridan affair, no damaging publicity, no split, and they still went down from 6.9 per cent to 4 per cent and from seven seats to two. Even without the Sheridan affair, the SSP would have had a hard fight on its hands, would perhaps have lost some

of its six MSPs. But it is reasonable to think that it would have survived at least as well as the Greens.

But of course the SSP it fought these elections in very particular circumstances, less than a year after the Sheridan affair reached its apogee. In order to win a controversial case against a newspaper that had published details of his private life, Sheridan unleashed a public campaign of lies and slander against the leadership of the SSP, which continued before, during and after the case, which against all expectations he won. Having then failed miserably to win the support of a majority of SSP members, he split the party and created Solidarity, supported by the SWP and CWI factions.

The split was especially damaging because there was no way of explaining it by fundamental political differences. There were problems in the SSP, mostly flowing from the difficulty of adjusting to the new situation after 2003 with six MSPs. The only way to avoid such problems is to stay small and marginal. Mistakes were made, there were differences, there was even an incipient left-right divide, with Sheridan and his ally Rosemary Byrne on the right. But that was not what caused the crisis and the split. What caused the split was Sheridan's ill-advised court case and his willingness first of all to lie and then to slander his party colleagues who would not lie for him, in order to

win it. That was what was so destructive.

The SSP kept the bulk of the cadres of the party, and recovered from the split better than many people expected. It was much more visible on the streets than Solidarity. The SWP seems to have concentrated, up until the recent election campaign, on recovering its own public profile after five years in the SSP. Nevertheless, it is clear that the scandal and the split left strong traces on the electorate. That was predictable. What was not so predictable was the scale of the defeat – the SSP lost all its four MSPs and got 0.6 per cent of the vote. What was also not so predictable was that Solidarity would do significantly better, with 1.5 per cent, though it also lost its two MSPs. Clearly, in spite of everything, the name of Sheridan – the name he acquired as a public representative of the SSP and its predecessors, going back to the poll tax campaign – still attracted some of the socialist electorate.

The SSP will survive, it is politically solid enough to weather the storm, though hard times are coming and there will inevitably be some demoralisation. What of Solidarity? It is much less politically homogenous, above all on the national question. Sheridan and his allies still defend more or less the traditional position of the SSP. One is tempted to say that the SWP have no understanding of the national question in Scotland. But they do have one, developed in the writings

of their main Scottish theorist, Neil Davidson, on the question. But it leads to them to underestimate the importance of the national question and to consider that the issue of independence is a "tactical question".

The *raison d'être* of this strange coalition was that only with Sheridan could they get elected. They were less wrong about this than many people thought, they were not so far off in Glasgow, but the gamble failed. But Solidarity is unlikely to last long enough to break up under the weight of its political contradictions. Between now and the end of the year Sheridan is likely to face court appearances which will expose the full extent of his lies and slander. Ironically, having used the courts and the bourgeois media to slander the SSP, he is likely to be brought down by those same courts and those same media. It is difficult to see Solidarity surviving that.

But the SSP will survive and though it will be a hard road back, it represents the only way to put socialism back on the agenda of Scottish politics. On the electoral level the chance may come sooner than expected. If the SNP does form a minority government, it is unlikely to last four years before new elections are called. But in the meantime, all those, in England, in Europe and beyond who have supported the SSP and who stood by it in last year's crisis, should more than ever stand by it now.

The day Scotland's rainbow parliament turned grey

12 May 2007, by **Alan McCombes**

The wipe out of the socialist left was made all the more bitter by the final electoral arithmetic of the new parliament.

Last Thursday marked the end of Labours monolithic stranglehold over

Scottish politics at national and local level. The emergence of the SNP as the biggest party in Scotland by the narrowest possible margin will not lead to instant independence, the removal of nuclear weapons from the Clyde, or even the demise of

the Council Tax.



But it is likely to open up a new,

turbulent phase in Scottish politics, a time of strife, which could accelerate the ultimate break-up of the United Kingdom and pave the way for the resurgence of socialism.

After the horrendous internal strife within the left over the past year, and with the socialist movement bitterly divided, the SSP went into this election in a brutally realistic frame of mind. This was a damage limitation exercise. At best, the party hoped to maintain a fragile foothold in Holyrood in preparation for better days to come.

Yet no-one expected the sheer scale of the collapse of the socialist vote, down by 100,000 votes from 2003. The final tally of votes appeared completely out of synch with the attitude of voters on the streets and at polling stations, which was open and receptive to the politics of the SSP.

The Greens too were stunned by the scale of their losses. On the morning after the election, shell-shocked Green MSPs admitted that they had been expecting to win nine seats.

Although Solidarity polled more votes than the SSP, the failure of Tommy Sheridan in Glasgow was the biggest shock result of the night, leaving Solidarity activists visibly traumatised.

At the start of the campaign, the bookmakers William Hill had offered odds of 100-1 on Sheridan being re-elected the kind of odds that might be offered on rain falling in Glasgow sometime in the next six months.

Every media and academic commentator predicted that Tommy Sheridan would retain his seat in Glasgow, while the SSP would be wiped out.

As the political pundit, Professor Bill Miller, admitted on Scottish Television the day after the election, We all expected the SSP to lose all its seats, but none of us expected Tommy Sheridan to lose.

Sheridan, the most famous celebrity

politician in Scotland, even enjoyed the open sympathy of the mass circulation local newspaper in Glasgow, the Evening Times.

As well as forecasting his certain victory - and the defeat of the SSP - the paper even carried a sycophantic double page spread in the final week, headlined the House of Sheridan festooned with photographs of the Sheridan family.

This election has been a serious setback for socialism; it would be futile to pretend otherwise. It is also a tragedy for the thousands of people who had come to rely on Scottish Socialist MSPs to deal with their problems.

In Glasgow, for example, Rosie Kane and her caseworker met with queues of asylum seekers facing deportation. These cases are often a matter, literally, of life and death.

Other MSPs have tended to hide behind the coat-tails of Westminster, refusing to deal with asylum because it is a reserved issue. Sadly one of these MSPs was Tommy Sheridan, who refused to dirty his hands with asylum casework after leaving the SSP to form Solidarity.

Within the parliament too, the SSP has provided a voice for workers in struggle, and for others who were too poor or marginalised to be of any interest to the big mainstream parties. Holyrood will be a poorer place without the Scottish Socialist group of MSPs.

There is no single explanation for the debacle of May 3rd. The incineration of the left was the product of a combination of inflammable ingredients.

In the first place, all of the smaller parties and independents were mangled in a classic political squeeze, in which two parties were running neck and neck. In this election, the drama was heightened by the fact that one of the two parties stands for dissolution of the United Kingdom, thus polarising Scotland into two camps: pro and anti-union.

These two juggernauts had vast propaganda resources at their disposal. While the SSP was forced to fight this election on a shoestring budget of just £30,000, the SNP had a war chest of £1.5million - ploughed in by big business, including a £500,000 donation from the reactionary Stagecoach tycoon, Brian Souter.

Labour, meanwhile, was gifted literally millions of pounds of free advertising from Scotland's mass circulation tabloid press, notably the Sun and the Daily Record.

Despite the party's cosy rapprochement with elements of Scottish big business, many left wing voters - including it appears most of those who voted SSP in 2003 - swung behind the SNP in this election.

Alf Young of the Herald - one of Scotland's most incisive and experienced pro-Labour analysts - pointed out the irony behind that shift:

The far-left took out its anger over New Labour, Blair and Iraq by backing a party which, while sharing their goal of Scottish independence, has even less interest than Gordon Brown in bringing the pillars of modern capitalism crashing down.

The small print of Alex Salmond's economic policies were drowned out by the headline promises of an independence referendum, the removal of nuclear weapons, Scottish troops out of Iraq and more immediately, the scrapping of the Council Tax.

Labour, the LibDems and the Tories have all been tested in government in recent times, either at Westminster or Holyrood level, while the SNP is as yet untarnished by power.

As we go to press, the LibDems have spurned Alex Salmond's advances to form a coalition. That means that the SNP are likely to form a minority government, possibly with the involvement of the two Green MSPs.

However, with the SNP up against the

much larger bloc of unionist MSPs, it is unlikely that an independence referendum can be achieved before 2008.

The other key flagship policy of the SNP replacing the Council Tax with a three pence rise in income tax may also have to be shelved.

The economics of the policy do not add up. It would leave a black hole in council budgets of half a billion pounds, forcing cuts elsewhere. Moreover, although a deal could possibly be reached with the Liberal Democrats over the scrapping of the Council Tax, the Greens have in the past voted against an income-based tax which means that the policy could be scuppered by the narrowest of margins, even with LibDem support.

Paradoxically, a minority SNP government could potentially create a more favourable climate for a future surge towards independence. A stable SNP-led coalition would involve backdoor deals, horse-trading and shoddy compromises with the LibDems, allowing Labour the opportunity to recapture some ground.

In contrast, a minority SNP government could allow Salmond to portray the SNP as a party which is trying to introduce radical changes, but is being blocked and obstructed at every turn by the three unionist parties.

Either way, the sands of Scottish politics are shifting. The socialist left may have been marginalised for the time being, but that can change rapidly and dramatically in the future.

It is not much more than year ago that the political obituaries were being written for the SNP after the Dunfermline West by-election the SNPs worst by-election performance since 1982.

A procession of political pundits pronounced the terminal decline of the SNP and the unstoppable march of the Liberal Democrats

As one commentator, Chris Deerin, expressed it in Scotland on Sunday: Nichol Stephen is youngish, moderate and attractive. Salmond, in contrast, wears a sullen air& the perception that they have failed to develop as an alternative government, makes him, and them, an unattractive prospect. The LibDems are succeeding where the SNP have repeatedly failed& The SNP cannot turn second place into first.

Even within the SSP at the time, some members (who later left to join Solidarity) drew the conclusion that the SNP was finished, the LibDems were now the main opposition force in Scotland, and the idea of independence was all but dead and buried.

Fifteen months later, and the SNP are now Scotlands biggest party and about to form a government.

As sure as the sun rises in the morning, the socialist left will be back with vengeance in the future. And whatever the arithmetical breakdown last Thursday, the only socialist party with the capacity of coming back from this defeat is the Scottish Socialist Party.

The SSP fought this election with dignity and restraint. We also fought a highly political campaign, with a 450-point manifesto, including the boldest and most radical policy of any party in this election free public transport.

In contrast, Solidarity exposed itself as an embittered personality cult around Tommy Sheridan.

The 16-point manifesto of the breakaway party, along with its other election material, prominently featured photographs of Sheridan, his wife and his two year old daughter. His name appeared on every ballot paper, including even for the local council elections.

A large part of the Solidarity vote was an expression of sympathy for Tommy Sheridan based on confusion and misunderstanding of the facts that led to the split in the socialist movement, rather than a conscious socialist vote.

Tommy Sheridan himself, in his manifesto, on TV, and at public meetings repeatedly accused the SSP of lies, dishonesty and backstabbing.

That is the prospectus upon which Solidarity was created: that Tommy Sheridan was the victim of a plot to remove him as party convenor; that the SSP leadership manufactured allegations about Sheridans personal life to justify his removal; that the party leadership forged documents to back up these allegations; that members of the SSP conspired to pervert the course of justice and in order to destroy Sheridan.

The entire Solidarity edifice has been built upon this fairy tale, and will come crashing to the ground as the lies unravel and the truth emerges.

In the meantime, for wide sections of the public, including for many ex-SSP supporters, there is no smoke without fire. The allegations against the SSP have not yet been disproved. At the very least, people are inclined to lay the blame equally on both sides.

The events of the last two years have been complex and labyrinthine. But the stark facts are these.

Like Jeffrey Archer and Jonathan Aitken, two top Tory politicians who served lengthy jail sentences for their actions, Tommy Sheridan took out a libel action based on a fraud: at least some of the material published in the trashy tabloid News of the World was substantially true.

The SSP did everything it could to dissuade Sheridan from this insanely reckless legal case. We predicted that this grotesquely selfish and deceitful course of action could lead to the destruction of everything that had been built over decades by hundreds and thousands of socialist activists.

But Sheridan carried on regardless. He dragged scores of people into a legal toxic waste dump against their will. These included innocent

people who had been in the wrong place at the wrong time, and have since had their lives destroyed to protect Sheridans right to hypocrisy.

The SSP was also dragged into the Court of Session. Our response was to defy the courts and face down a jail sentence.

In the weeks that the SSP was under siege, dragged through the courts, having its offices raided, Sheridan effectively went into hiding, failing to turn up to any of the meetings to decide tactics.

The rest of the SSP stood valiantly against the courts.

Finally, Sheridan emerged to argue that the SSP should now buckle under and surrender the party's

internal documents to the News of the World and the courts. His capitulation was backed by those who went on to found Solidarity. So far, so dishonourable.

But worse was to come. In an abysmal display of cowardice, Sheridan told the courts and the media that the documents had been forged by the SSP as part of a plot to fit him up.

To salvage his fake reputation, he denounced the SSP leadership as liars, perjurers, forgers and conspirators, before walking out to split the left and wreck the socialist unity project, built up over a decade and more.

The mainstream press, cowed by the courts and the threat of libel action and perhaps also by the fear of

jeopardising an ongoing police investigation into perjury and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice have never been prepared to bring out these facts.

As a result, the SSP was fighting this election under a cloud of suspicion. To pretend otherwise would be to run away from reality.

However, two or three years down the road, the events of the past year will have begun to fade into the mists of history. With the removal of Tommy Sheridan from Holyrood, the Solidarity bubble will burst.

That will be a massive step forward for the left, allowing Scottish socialism to be rebuilt under the clean banner of the SSP.

Four years of debates in the Fourth International, a summary

11 May 2007, by **Jan Malewski**



PSOL deputies, Heloisa Helena centre

PSOL deputies, Heloisa Helena centre

The Brazilian organization Socialist Democracy (DS), which took part from the very start in the building of the Workers' Party (PT) and was organised as a tendency within it, was from the 12th World Congress in 1985 an important component of the Fourth International. It took a large part in the political and theoretical development of our organization. However, since the constitution of the Lula government in January 2003, the political positions of the immense majority of the Fourth International and those of the National Coordination (leadership) of the DS have diverged, and increasingly so.

While considering from the start that there was at least "a doubt about the capacity of the new [Lula] government to fulfil its fundamental commitment, which consists of transforming the country in favour of the interests of the mass of the people" and stressing that "threats to the process of democratic discussion" [10] had appeared within the Workers' Party, the comrades of the DS judged that they could not refuse to take part in this government and that Miguel Rossetto should accept the post of Minister for Land Reform, all the more so as the Movement of the Landless (MST) and the agrarian sector of the CUT supported his nomination.

In February 2003, this orientation was discussed during the 15th World Congress. Many speakers insisted then on the dangers of such a choice for the DS itself, as on the one hand

the economic guidelines announced by the Lula government left very few means for carrying out a land reform that corresponded to the needs of the Brazilian people, and on the other hand the integration of very many comrades into positions within the state institutions could not but exert a strong material pressure on the DS. But the argument that the left wing of the PT would not be understood and would risk being marginalised if it refused to enter a government that was formed following the victory of their candidate for the presidency and which "bore great hopes, which were clearly expressed during the celebrations when it took office" [11], was also taken into account.

The World Congress confined itself to this oral debate and had confidence in the Brazilian section. But at the end of this debate, as well as during the meetings of the executive of the

International in which the leaders of the DS took part, there seemed to be agreement that, when the first confrontation arose between the government and sectors of the masses opposed to its policies, i.e. as soon as the rupture could be understood by even one sector of the masses, the governmental participation of the comrades of the DS would be called into question, because a real left tendency of the PT could only be opposed to political measures that went against the interests of the masses.

Heloísa Helena saves our honour

That is, moreover, what Senator Heloísa Helena, member of the leadership of the DS and of the International Committee of the Fourth International, did from January 2003, by opposing the nomination as head of the Central Bank of Henrique Mireilles, former international president of the Bank of Boston, who was the candidate of the IMF and of international finance. That is what Heloísa Helena did again, in July 2003, by joining the demonstrators opposed to the counter-reform of pensions and by voting against this law in the Senate.

But whereas the attitude of Heloísa was approved by the majority of the leadership of the DS in January, in July, that is after six months of the government, that was no longer the case, some of the DS members of Parliament going so far as to vote in favour of the law on pensions... Within the Brazilian section of the Fourth International, a division, which was to become ever greater, appeared. Whereas the comrades of the DS had analyzed the Lula government as being "in conflict" between the interests of the workers and those of the bourgeoisie, it clearly appeared after six months that this conflict did not divide the government, but on the other hand was starting to divide the Brazilian section.

In December 2003 the national leadership of the Workers' Party took the decision to expel from the party Heloísa Helena and other members of

Parliament who had voted against the law on pensions. Socialist Democracy was opposed to this internal trial, and was supported in that by the whole of the International. However, we were extremely surprised when, after the expulsion of Heloísa, and when she announced the need for a new party to defend the workers, for "a socialist rebuilding of the PT" [12], the majority of DS informed her in January 2004 that she could no longer claim to belong to... "an internal tendency within the Workers' Party", in other words that she was no longer a member of Socialist Democracy! On the other hand, Miguel Rossetto, although he did not have the means of carrying out the announced land reform, remained a minister and a leading member of the DS. And this despite the fact that the 7th National Conference of DS in November 2003 had adopted a resolution stipulating that: "the first eight months of the Lula government have been marked by the building of a set of alliances including broad bourgeois sectors, by a thoroughly conservative economic policy and moreover by limited progress in promoting change" [13].

In February 2004, the International Committee of the Fourth International discussed the Brazilian situation at the end of the first year of the Lula government - characterized in the international report as "having confirmed the continuity of the commitments of the Brazilian state to the IMF" and "even being considered as one of its best pupils" [14] - and after the repression of the opponents within the PT. Comrades Joaquim Soriano (representing the majority of the direction of the DS) and Heloísa Helena took part in this meeting, which quite naturally confirmed the status as members of International of the comrades who had been expelled from the PT by its bureaucratic and right-wing leadership and of those who had followed them out of solidarity.

However the leading body of the Fourth International refrained from voting on an orientation for Brazil, considering that that was the task of the Brazilian comrades, even though during the oral debate the idea that predominated was that it had for several months become essential to

assert the distance of the Brazilian Left from the policies of the Lula government, and thus to no longer take part in this government. A written discussion on the political situation in Brazil was opened within the International and throughout the next year documents amounting to several hundred thousand characters, translated into four languages - English, Spanish, French and, exceptionally, so that all the Brazilian members take part in the debate, Portuguese - were placed at the disposal of the sections.

In January 2005, before the Social Forum in Porto Alegre [15] three of the leaders of the Fourth International who had been, since the creation of Socialist Democracy, engaged in its policy debates - Daniel Bensaïd, Francisco Louça and Michael Löwy - addressed a letter to the members of Socialist Democracy [16] In it they analyzed the evolution of the PT, noted that the bureaucratic measures taken illustrated the transformation of the party into a conveyor belt for transmitting governmental decisions to society and that the constitution of the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSoL) should be considered as an "act of self-defence". They suggested organising the left of the PT around a clear alternative programme, that those who wished to should contribute to building the PSoL, and especially that a dialogue should be established between the Left within the PT and the small independent forces like the PSoL. Finally, they insisted: "the electoral calendar will oblige us to make, as from 2006, clear choices", 2006 being an electoral year.

In contradiction with our principles

In February 2005, the members of the majority of the direction of the DS did not take part in the meeting of the International Committee, for the first time since the DS was recognized as a section (whereas the comrades of the minority of the DS had for their part come to the meeting). In spite of this absence, the IC continued the discussion on the Brazilian situation, adopted the general line of the letter addressed to the members of the DS

by the three above-mentioned comrades, and adopted a resolution.

It affirmed: "Since the formation of the Lula government there have been in the International reservations, doubts and disagreements concerning the participation of the Socialist Democracy tendency in the government and the modalities of this participation (...). Nevertheless, once the decision had been taken by the DS, and taking account of the arguments put forward by the majority of the Brazilian comrades, the International had decided, at the beginning of the process, not to adopt a resolution and to accompany the

experience (...). The International thus avoided posing the question of participation in the Lula government in dogmatic terms, without taking account of the characteristics of the country, of the history of the Workers' Party and of its links with the social and trade-union movements. After the experience of these last two years (...) there is no longer any doubt that occupying positions in the Lula government, either at ministerial level, or through other politically responsible functions, is contradictory with the building of an alternative in Brazil that is coherent with our programmatic positions" [17].

Concerning the divisions that had

emerged within the DS, the IC took a position "for the maintenance of relations with all the components of the Fourth International in Brazil - all of these components remaining members of the International, with full rights - with the objective of encouraging dialogue, relations and the unity of action of all these components, with the perspective of building a political alternative to the Lula government " [18]. After a period of silence, the majority of DS reacted in December 2005, by publishing on the web site Inprecór, publicación de la IV Internacional para América Latina y el Caribe [19] a polemic by Joaquim Soriano [