



IV394 - November 2007

Public Again after 20 days of underground life

28 November 2007, by **Farooq Tariq**



According to the Musharraf dictatorship, on 28th November, there were only 37 political prisoners in different jails and rest are released. The 37 include most of the main leaders of the advocate's movement. I remained underground for 20 days and avoided arrest while still active in the movement.

This is a temporary interval. The dictatorship has got what they wanted. They wanted to get rid of the independent judiciary before they could announce the general elections and before general Musharraf final decision on his election as president in uniform. To do that, they had to arrest over 10,000 political, social trade unions activists and revolting advocates.

They had a positive decision by the hand picked judges of the Supreme Court on the issue of the president ship of general Musharraf. The dictatorship has even allowed **Nawaz Sharif**, the former prime minister of Pakistan, to return after seven years of exile. Saudi Arabian kingdom has played some mediatory role. The details of the deal have yet to surface.

On 27th November, **Labour Party**

Pakistan organized two events for the release of the political prisoners. At Karachi, over 60 activists of LPP were in front of Karachi Press Club for a vigil to demand release of political prisoners and solidarity with the journalists. The picture of the Karachi LPP vigil was printed all over Pakistan in front and back pages of most of the main newspapers. The majority of the sixty activists of LPP were women at Karachi vigil.

On the same day in Lahore, over 200 activists took out a rally to protest the ongoing arrest of the advocate leaders and to express solidarity with the struggling media. They went to Lahore Press Club and then to the office of GEO, the private television channel that is still off air under the direct orders of the military dictatorship. Surprisingly, there were no arrests at the two events. But in Lahore, a large contingent of police was accompanying the demonstrators. At Lahore demonstration, there were over 80 women participants.

I could not participate in Lahore demonstration as I was in **Toba Tek Singh**, my home town, for the filing of the nomination papers to contest election for the national and provincial parliaments. Although the Awami Jamhoori Tehreek, the left alliance, has decided to boycott the elections under the present conditions of

repression, but LPP wanted to make the boycott more effective.

The strategy was discussed and approved by the leading bodies of the LPP to file the nomination paper, get it accepted and then boycott the procedure after launching a mass campaign to boycott it. The Musharraf dictatorship has announced general election to be held on 8th January 2008 after the imposition of the emergency and after getting rid of the independent judges.

The elections are just a farce under the present repressive conditions. We had done some home work for my elections at Tobe Tek Singh including opening an office at one of the main area of the city. We had organized several meetings including one of the women where over 150 women participated. We had planned the fourth national conference at the city but had to postpone it for the second time. So it was not a good strategy to boycott the elections and do nothing.

For the national assembly constituency number 93, 12 candidates including myself have submitted papers to contest the elections. They are from Pakistan peoples Party, Muslim League Nawaz and Muslim league Q, Mutihida Muslis Ammal the religious parties' alliance, Labour Party Pakistan and several

independents. I went along with some of the senior leaders of the Left alliance to submit my papers to the returning officer who is an additional district judge. You had to be a graduate to contest the general elections. Less than one percent of the total population of Pakistan is graduates.

I was in Toba Tek Singh for two days and met some of the local party activists and friends to chart out the strategy. They all agree to boycott the elections.

Today on 18th November, I went to Lahore High Court to meet some of the leaders of the advocate movement. I met Sarfraz Cheema, the 32 year old secretary of Lahore High Court Bar Association who spent 17 days in jail and was released few days before. He told me about the brutalities of the police against the advocates. The police entered in their office to destroy the computer and fax machine on 5th November. Over 700 advocates were arrested on the day including him.

Later on the day, I spoke in one of [Action Aid](#) Pakistan seminar on poverty alleviation in association with Women Workers Help Line. The other speakers included Dr. Mubashar Hasan the former federal finance minister under Bhutto, Dr. Abdul Hai Baluch president of National Party, Rabia Bajwa advocate, Hasan Nasir from Revolutionary democratic Workers Committee, a part of Left

Alliance and Bushra Khaliq secretary Women Workers Help Line. Earlier, Fikre Zwadie, the country director of Action Aid Pakistan welcomed the speakers for this political session of the seminar. All the speakers were against the emergency and for a boycott of the general elections.

Dr. Mubashar Hasan commented in his speech that Farooq has been arrested all the times because of the repressive nature of the regime.

I must thank all my friends and family in Lahore who has helped me in the most difficult period of repression. Without their full scale help, I would have not been out of jail. I also thank LPP members and supporters for all the help they could lend.

I also must thank all those friends and supporters from overseas for reading my mails and some time commenting with encouraging words. They include [John Pilger](#) (UK), [Pierre Rousset](#) (France), [Tariq Ali](#) (UK), [Eric Toussaint](#) (Belgium), John Hunt (UK), [Phil Frampton](#) (UK), Peter Boyle (Australia), Sue Bolton (Australia), Marilyn Treasure (Australia), Silla Vriesma (Netherlands), Elisabeth van Hoal (Netherlands), Lidy Nicpal (Philippine), Srilata Sawminathan (India), Roger Silverman (UK), John Reiman (USA), John Throne (USA), Richard Miller (USA), Ahmad Shawki (USA), Roland Ekbohm (Sweden), Jan Hodann (Sweden), Toni Usman (Norway), Farooq Sulehria (Sweden), Asim Ali Shah (UK), Michel

Eggermont (Netherlands), Hans Van Heijningen (Netherlands), Joost Kircz (Netherlands), Sue Bolton (Australia), Saqlain Imam (UK), Pam Curry (Scotland), Comrade Shahid (USA), Roger Silverman (UK), Sandeep Chachra (Thailand), John Samuel (Thailand), Rashid Titumir (Bangladesh), Taimur Rehman (UK), Frank Hazur (India), Kuldeep Kumar (India), Mohan Kumar (Australia), Tarek Fatah (Canada), Alvin Dizon (Philippine), Chetan Patel (UK), Toqeer Ahmad (Canada), Dianne Feeley (USA), Qamarulah (UAE), Linda Waldren and Ray (Australia), Kenji Kunitomi (Japan), Dr. Mark (Russia), Silvana (Italy) and many more I like to mention but it is getting already a long list.

I also like to thank all those who have spread the news to other email lists, addresses and website. I have seen dozens of websites that have pasted these letters written during my underground time.

Good Books intends to publish these entire letters in a booklet with the only one picture of mine in a change get up that was taken by one of my close friend when I arrived to spend the night at their place.

I wrote all these stories in a very light manner with personal incidents and some political points. I have met many friends during the last one week in Pakistan who have read all these stories and were happy that they were in picture what was happening.

Socialist Resistance: what next?

28 November 2007, by **Socialist Resistance**



SR is expected to relaunch as magazine

[Socialist Resistance](#) agreed to make the offer at a joint meeting of its editorial board and steering committee in early November which

was open to all our members. The proposal was agreed unanimously, and was accepted by the [Respect Renewal](#) conference. The first issue of Respect's paper will be on sale in December.

Socialist Resistance's support will be reflected through financial support, the use of our publishing systems,

volunteer labour, and by the participation of SR's editorial team in producing the new paper.

Our successful [pamphlet on the crisis in Respect](#) will be expanded, and published as part of a series of books intended for publication over the next months. We will also continue to hold major public events based on themes

of interest to our readers such as our day schools on the Middle East, [Ecosocialism](#) and Latin America. Details of the next one will shortly be available.

Supporters of Socialist Resistance will continue to hold monthly political public meetings on a wide range of international and British topics.

A national meeting of our members in early 2008 will review our ongoing ecosocialism project and decide on a proposal to relaunch SR as a

magazine. That will be the subject of further discussion over the coming months. Until Socialist Resistance is relaunched, our subscribers can choose whether to take the new paper instead, to extend their subscription period, or for a refund to be either paid to them or donated to Respect Renewal.

The new Respect paper is already set to have a much wider base of human and financial support than the monthly Socialist Resistance. The new paper will deepen our five-year struggle to build a broad and democratic

ecosocialist party that can give a voice to those effectively disenfranchised by [New Labour's](#) right-wing agenda.

Socialist Resistance has demonstrated the seriousness of its commitment to building Respect over a number of years. Our decision to make our paper available to Respect is further proof of this. We are equally committed to helping develop a strong, vibrant ecosocialist current inside Respect and the rest of the British labour movement and our continuing activity will remain dedicated to this aims.

At the crossroads

26 November 2007, by [Guillermo Almeyra](#)



The Venezuelan opposition media (nearly all of it) and the international media are seeking, in effect, to psychologically prepare a coup creating the false impression that Hugo Chavez is alone, isolated, with no other support than a few cronies who are as weak as he is. In this campaign the key moment will be the referendum on the constitution, as the right opposition, if the "NO" camp gets around 40 percent, tries to argue that in fact the majority is due to fraud, to drag a vacillating sector of the middle classes behind the oligarchy and, above all, to win support in the more conservative sectors of the armed forces, already prepared by the statements of the former Chavista Defence Minister, General Raul Baduel.

Popular power, the municipal councils, the handover of nearly 2 million hectares to peasants, are, from the point of view of the capitalists and, simply, rich Venezuelans who are racist and regard dark skinned workers as inferiors - intolerable actions. Not to speak of the multinationals, which, while still earning large sums, fear

expropriation.

There has been no lack of "theorising" that 21st century socialism would be undertaken in Venezuela with the support of the transnationals, using the most modern means of electronic control and with the active participation, in its leadership, of people like Baduel, supposedly "scientific". But the class struggle, without which the most basic foundations of socialism cannot be created, requires a leap in the political consciousness and the decision-making capacity of the workers (in the broadest sense of that word). It always passes through the construction of power at the base, which drives to the right to the big capitalists, like those leading multinationals, and the conservatives in the state apparatus, namely the Baduels, in the armed forces, and many governors and apparatchiks, in the civilian field.

This class struggle divides and subdivides all sectors: there are right-wing putschists, and there are others, more realistic, who fear that the failure of their adventure will radicalise further a regime where there is still space to be exploited, and there are sectors of the political centre which, under the pressure of events, move to the right, which will

use them. The rule in a revolution, therefore, remains that of [Georges Danton](#): *audacity, ever more audacity*. An alliance between the centre (Baduel) and the left (Chavez) would be fatal, however, because the centre is now the right and alliance with it is tantamount to capitulation, as was the case with [Juan Domingo Peron](#) in 1955 when he capitulated to General [Eduardo Lonardi](#), head of the coup but not a fascist, who soon afterwards was overthrown by the gorillas, who had until then used him as a front man.

[Fidel Castro](#) warns Chavez that it is dangerous to continue with his practice of the "bath of multitudes" mingling with the people who applaud him. Assassination is a very real possibility, especially because nobody doubts that Chavez will win the next referendum, as he has overwhelmingly won all previous elections (and, we must add, he will be powerfully aided by the repudiation of the arrogant Bourbon fascistoid that Franco educated and by the neocolonialism of the Spanish bourgeoisie).

But the real danger, more than assassination, is the "Baduel effect" in the senior ranks of the Venezuelan armed forces, and the influence of Chavez in the lower ranks is crucial. Indeed, if there have been no

pronouncements by other military leaders, as often happens in pre-coup periods, it is because there is a strong popular vigilance over the army, with the armed forces divided horizontally and vertically (between opponents and Chavistas, and between legalists and putschists), because a coup will automatically align Venezuela with the United States, and many military personnel are conservative but not agents of imperialism, and because many potential putschists fear the possibility of a clash which will involve Chavista civilian militias (i.e., a kind of Spain in 1936, but in Latin America today).

Unfortunately, the government of Chavez, which is paternalistic, hinders the autonomy of the bodies of popular power and, as it is top-down, does not want to break the discipline of the armed forces by calling on them to disobey any suspicious orders or to wound the prestige of the same by calling for stronger and better armed civilian militias. It continues imperturbably with its election campaign, which of course is necessary, although relatively of less importance, as if the fight was just a normal election.

No doubt Chavez, who is a soldier, wily and combative, will mobilize the military intelligence services and must

also be using Cuban intelligence. But the only real protection is preventive popular mobilization, which will also influence within the armed forces and put the low ranking cadres and officers on a state of alert, thereby impeding the action of imperialism (which can only buy a few senior officers) and blind adherence to vertical discipline.

Another powerful protection is the urgent mobilization of the peoples of Latin America against imperialist arrogance and in support of Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba and Ecuador. Both could be facilitated by a call from President Chavez.

Mass Mobilisation against Sarkozy

26 November 2007, by **Olivier Besancenot**

The 20 November public sector demonstrations in facts and figures

700 000 demonstrators in 148 demonstrations across France of which: 70 000 in Paris, 8 500 in Orleans, 5 000 in Brest, 3 000 in Quimper, 8 000 in Tours, 10 000 in Toulon and Saint-Etienne, 15 000 in Grenoble, 15 000 in Lyon, 60 000 in Marseilles, 30 000 in Nantes and Bordeaux, 35 000 in Toulouse, 25 000 in Rennes, 4 000 in Strasbourg, 19 000 in Lille, 20 000 in Caen, 18 000 in Rouen, 15 000 in Le Havre, 30 000 in Nantes, 5 000 in Saint-Nazaire, 15 000 in Grenoble, 1 500 in Réunion, 10 000 in Pau...



Strikes at Yoplait.

The employees of the three production sites of Yoplait France, in Le Mans (Sarthe), Monéteau (Yonne) and Vienne (Isère), struck massively, following the call of the CGT, to demand the reopening of the 2007 wage negotiations 2007 and a rise in

their purchasing power.

UNEF [the main student union] estimates at 40 000 the number of students and high-school pupils who demonstrated.

Approximately 40 000 university and high-school students demonstrated, on the one hand, in support of the public sector workers, while on the other demanding the abrogation of the Pécresse law on the universities, according to , which said it was "satisfied" with such a mobilization. The universities, in particular in Lille, Nantes, Rennes and Lyon, were particularly mobilized, notes the union.

Booed, Francois Cherèque takes to his heels and leaves the demonstration

The calls for the end of the transport strike launched on several occasions by the leader of the CFDT, Francois Cherèque, were not forgotten by the demonstrators. The general secretary was booed by a group of about twenty militants, some wearing CGT stickers saying "Cherèque is with the bosses!", "Sarkozy-Cherèque, on the same

side!" "Cherèque, stop stabbing us in the back !", they shouted, while Mr. Cherèque ran away from the demonstration, protected by his escort.

Strike strongly supported in the national education system, according to the trade unions.

Nearly six out of ten teachers in colleges and the high schools in strike on the day of the mobilization of the public sector. "We have an overall rate of 58 per cent of strikers in the colleges and high schools. The mobilization is particularly strong in the colleges, with rates of 60 per cent and peaks of 80 per cent ", declared a spokesperson of the SNES [the main secondary school teachers' union]. These figures were assembled by the trade union from a sample of 200 "test-establishments". The FSU [the main federation of teachers' union] indicates that an average of 65 per cent of primary school teachers and 58 per cent of teachers in colleges and high schools were on strike.

Besancenot: "There is something of the smell of 1995"

PARIS, Nov. 20, 2007 (AFP) - Olivier Besancenot, spokesperson of the LCR, estimated that the strikes and the demonstrations of public sector and rail workers on Tuesday have "something of the odour of 1995" and should not stop "as long as the government does not give anything". "The mobilization this Tuesday is even stronger than on October 18" at the time of the last big day of mobilization, Mr. Besancenot, who demonstrated in Paris with his post office worker colleagues, told AFP. In

addition, he stressed, "the railway workers are standing firm, in spite of the attempts at diversion and division by the government".

"There is something of the odour of 1995, there is something which is mounting", said the Trotskyist leader, in an allusion to the retreat of the government faced with the mobilization of the railway workers in December 1995. "As long as the government does not give anything, I do not see why it would stop", added

Mr. Besancenot. "There are people who are outraged by the policy of the government, there are people who are resisting and who do not want to submit", according to him. "On Wednesday morning, there will be general assemblies at the post office to see how we can continue the movement", affirmed the young postal worker.

Two thousand people attended the LCR rally in the Mutualite hall in central Paris on 23 November.

Howard's overboard - but the struggle continues

26 November 2007, by Peter Boyle



Kevin Rudd, new Labor
Australian premier

Most of all we have to celebrate the people's power that was mobilised to defeat the Howard government over the last three years.

There can be no doubt that it was the outrage at attacks on workers' rights and the resistance to "Work Choices" – that crude euphemism that was the official name for the biggest attack on workplace rights won over a century of workers' struggle – that helped finish off the Howard government.

The hundreds of thousands of people who took to the streets against Work Choices spoke for the majority of people. They were dismissed by Howard and they remembered his ruthless arrogance on election day. Many trade unionists spread out through the suburbs of the major cities to campaign against the Howard government during the election campaign in one of the biggest electoral campaign mobilisations organised by the trade union movement in many years, most

building the vote for Kevin Rudd's Labor.

The tens of thousands who marched on in the Walk Against Warming demonstrations on and around November 11 also helped bury the Howard government. The great majority of Australians who want serious action to address global warming was another majority arrogantly dismissed.

The thousands who defied the police-state conditions to take to Sydney's streets when US President George Bush came to Sydney for the APEC summit in September also symbolised the majority who dissent over the imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the associated war on civil liberties. This was another nail in Howard's coffin.

Such was the popular backlash that Howard looks set to lose even his own parliamentary seat in Bennelong to Labor's Maxine McKew, who won 45.9% of the first preferences counted on election night. The preferences from the Greens' 5.4% should assure Howard is ousted from the seat. It would be the first time a sitting prime minister has lost his seat since 1929.

But our celebrations should not blind us to the fact that the trade unions and other progressive movements will have to continue mobilising to push the incoming Rudd Labor government to deliver on its promises to rip up Work Choices, bring the troops home from Iraq and take action on climate change.

Already there is a gap between the promises Rudd has made and the reasons why people voted for Labor. On Work Choices, the Rudd version of "ripping up" will leave in place many elements of the Howard government's attack on workers and their right to organise. Labor has no serious program to tackle climate change and implement the kind of "renewables revolution" that we need – and Rudd's vision for sustainability includes a place for coal, one of the worst greenhouse-gas generating fuels. Rudd's policy is to maintain troops in the Middle East, withdrawing only combat troops from Iraq (and even that will have to wait until mid-2008). Moreover the US-led war in Afghanistan continues to have the blessing of Labor's leaders, despite most Australians wanting troops withdrawn.

Rudd has told us that he is an

"economic conservative" and experience tells us that economic conservatism = social and environmental vandalism. That's a lesson we cannot ignore after three decades of bipartisan support for the corporate profits-first agenda, demonstrated in action by federal and state governments (all of which are conservative Labor governments).

On election night Rudd congratulated Howard for his "extensive contribution to public service in Australia" and declared it time to "put aside the old battles of the past" between business and unions, between "growth and environment", "public and private".

"I extend our greetings tonight to our great friend and ally the United States", Rudd said in his victory speech and right-wing US President George Bush reciprocated by issuing a statement overnight congratulating Rudd on his victory.

"The United States and Australia have long been strong partners and allies and the President looks forward to working with this new government to continue our historic relationship", the statement said.

Labor's 6.3% swing was a strong endorsement for change but voters attached a note indicating which way

they want his government to move by delivering a strong vote to the Greens, the most progressive party currently represented in federal parliament. The Greens look set to win at least two extra Senate positions.

Socialist Alliance national coordinator Dick Nichols told GLW that it was movement's against Howard's policies, in particular those against Work Choices and the pulp mill in Tasmania, that made sure the Howard government was smashed. "The Socialist Alliance played a big role in building these movements, and did well in those seats where that work was most visible", he said.

Nichols said there had been modest increases in the vote for alliance candidates in the Sydney seats of Grayndler, Parramatta and Blaxland, the Wollongong-based seat of Cunningham and the western Melbourne seat of Gellibrand. This is a result of the alliance's role as a builder "on the ground" of the movements that helped defeat the hated Howard government.

The Socialist Alliance congratulated the Greens on their good result and pledged to continue to work as partners in building the progressive movements. Many progressive-minded

people gave their first preference vote to the Greens because they see them as having the best chance to win parliamentary seats at this time, said Nichols, but a number have sought to triple the value of their vote by voting "1" Socialist Alliance and "2" Greens.

More detailed reports on how the Socialist Alliance candidates did in the elections will be published in the next issue of GLW.

The election outcome was a massive rejection of Howard and everything his government stood for (regardless of Labor's unctuous "me-tooism"). One illustration of this was Mal Brough's failure to win re-election. Brough was Howard's notorious minister for Indigenous affairs who led the jackbooted military invasion of Northern Territory Indigenous communities (which, shamefully, was supported by Rudd Labor) – his defeat at the ballot box was a rejection by voters of the racist attack on Indigenous people and land rights. To make the changes that the majority of Australian voters have made clear they want is still going to take a fight – dumping Howard was just the beginning.

[From: Comment & Analysis, Green Left Weekly issue #733 28 November 2007.](#)

Strong resistance to Sarkozy's agenda

26 November 2007, by **Ingrid Hayes**



It was uncertain whether the team in power would try to go as fast as possible in inflicting that defeat, or if it would choose to buy time only concentrating on some specific categories hoping they would not be supported by the population (railway workers, students ...). With the economic crisis imported from the United States, the uncertainty was over: it would have to be everything at

the same time, especially as the government had started off by giving billions of euros to the richest among the rich and had nothing much left to deal with the situation.

Apart from the ruling classes, literally everyone is under attack. A few examples: on the pensions issue, workers are supposed to work longer to get less in the end, sick people will have to pay a "franchise" (fixed rate fee) to be allowed access to social security, immigrants are submitted to more restrictive laws, the possibility of

DNA testing of immigrants to prove family relationships was voted in Parliament, illegal immigrants' children are threatened, the right to study is put in jeopardy both by the loss of thousands of teacher jobs and the autonomization of universities, preparing the competition between them...

But the government is facing two major problems. First it is quite risky to carry out all the attacks at the same time. Second, Sarkozy was elected not only because of the absolute lack of

alternative on the side of the Socialist Party but also on a fairytale: he would increase buying power. And buying power is not increasing.

The *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* had said from the beginning that there would be some resistance to *Sarkozy's* attempt to deepen neo-liberal policies in France, and it had called for resistance when virtually everybody sank into depression, or got ready for the next presidential elections, or, as a good number of Socialist Party leaders, decided to join the government. The consensus was that nothing could be done because the president had the legitimacy of the vote. This consensus has been proved wrong. The resistance has now been active for a number of weeks, fishermen, junior doctors, judges and more recently (and more classically) railway workers, students, employees in the state public sectors, which is very broad and includes health services workers and teachers.

The major conflict has been between the government and the railway workers. They form one of the last categories of workers who do not have to have 40 years of contributions to qualify for a full pension, they are still

on a special regime (which is self-financing !) of 37.5 years.

This was the number of years every worker was supposed to work until the 1993 reform of the private sector and the defeat of 2003 concerning the state sector. These last special regimes are also the last deadlock left to break so as to force everybody to work 41, 42 or even more years. Therefore it is a priority reform for *Sarkozy*. The movement started on the 18th of October with a massive 24 hour strike among railworkers (75% of the workers were on strike, it hadn't happened since 1953!). Then the strike started again on the 13th of November and lasted for ten days, although the leaderships of all the main unions (sometimes even publicly) disapproved, and didn't even try to oppose the massive campaign waged against the strikers by the government and the media. The strike has now been suspended, but the railway workers are not defeated, they have already forced the government to make some significant changes, and the strike may start again in December depending on the results of the negotiations in process.

The students are still blocking a good

half of the universities around the country. This movement came as a surprise as the government had negotiated a deal during the summer with the main students union and the presidents of universities. But the deal didn't convince the students. They reject a reform meant to privatize university education by introducing private funding, disengagement of national government, submission of education to the immediate needs of the bosses. The movement is strong and radical, and seems to be spreading to secondary schools.

We must now build a convergence of all these movements. The perspective is that of a large movement, taking on all specific demands but also unifying on the key questions, wages, pensions and jobs. The strike on the 20th of November was a first step. The situation requires to go further. And more and more people see the need for it. Prices are rising, rent, food, petrol, health expenses, while *Sarkozy* has given himself a 172% rise of his wages! The pensions are under threat while the members of Parliament voted themselves a special regime of 22.5 years to qualify for a full pension! As we say in France, *"tous et toutes ensemble!"*

Red Green Alliance maintains parliamentary representation by narrow margin

26 November 2007, by **Thomas Eisler**



Asmaa Abdol-Hamid

Red Green Alliance candidate

It is the worst result for the RGA since it entered parliament in 1994. It expresses a huge drop in support in comparison with the last national election in February 2005 where 3,4 % was achieved.

In the opinion polls the RGA mainly lost support after choosing *Asmaa*

Abdol-Hamid as candidate in May 2007. Some former RGA voters give her candidacy as the reason for not voting for the RGA again. The RGA conference in May gave a position which meant she would be elected for parliament if RGA maintained its 6 seats.

She is a young Muslim woman who wears a *hijab* and who doesn't shake hands with men. Her religion and the way she expresses it has created doubt, to which the media has contributed, about the RGA's positions

on religion and rights. The RGA has never had as much media coverage as in the last six months: it has been all about *Asmaa* and whether she is really against the death penalty and religious fundamentalism. The RGA has not been able to regain credibility.

Asmaa's candidacy nevertheless can not be seen as the only reason for the RGA's decline in votes. The left reformist *Socialist Peoples Party* (SPP) was the big winner of the elections. It more than doubled its votes, from 6 % to 13 %, for two reasons. The new

chairman **Villy SÅ, vndal** seemed to be much clearer and more dynamic than former chairman Holger K. Nielsen in the 2005 elections. But it is also an expression of the radicalisation based on the big mobilisations for welfare in the last year and half. Furthermore, the RGA had no candidate with the same personal mass appeal as was the case with **Pernille Rosenkrantz-Theil** in 2005 elections.

However, Abdol-Hamid's candidature has provoked a combination of several arguments. In the **Red Green Alliance** constituency, and the general public, there is a tendency to identify her way of being Muslim (for example, wearing the hijab and not shaking hands with men) as being reactionary. There are several other Muslims who stood as candidates for parliament, including the leader of New Alliance **Naser Khader**. However, they are not questioned because their religion is less noticeable in public. In so far as the forced wearing of the hijab is seen as being being reactionary then the hijab is an expression of women's oppression: a candidate wearing a hijab is then seen by some as promoting women's oppression.

Although the idea that Islam is a reactionary religion has been promoted in Denmark, and has some influence, more people have a problem with her not shaking hands than being Muslim. This is often seen as being strange, disrespectful and against gender equality by being discriminative towards men.

Several articles in the press quoted her in a way that suggested ambiguous positions on death penalty and other positions. She responded and made it very clear that she is against the death penalty, as she is also in favour of Gay-Lesbian rights. This contradiction has created an image of her being unclear and untrustworthy.

There is also some who think say the RGA should be an atheist party.

Though this has never been the position of RGA it came up in discussions when we chose a Muslim as a candidate.

Abdol-Hamid is also less experienced and politically educated than most candidates, which the press have exploited. Almost all press coverage about the RGA has been about her candidacy, something which seemed a catastrophe to many RGA members.

The situation continued with negative press coverage and internal debate about her candidacy. Leading members of the RGA like myself came to the conclusion that it would have been better to give her a less prominent position as had been proposed by a minority of delegates at the May conference. The National Leadership decided to call for an extraordinary conference to be held on 17th November. Just as the conference planning got underway, the Prime Minister decided to call for elections on the 13th November.

Looking ahead, the discussion is what the RGA could have done to avoid its loss of support. There is no doubt that the candidacy of Asmaa was the main reason of RGA's loss. With hindsight, it was a mistake to have given Abdol-Hamid such a high position on the RGA's candidates in this election. She should have been a candidate in a position where she would become an alternate MP. Most delegates at the RGA conference in May didn't get to know her or her points of view.

Being Muslim is not a reason in itself to become a candidate, though should it be no hindrance.

The RGA has the problem after the election that the reaction to Asmaa's candidacy is a sign of the division in the working class concerning ethnic and religious minorities. The candidacy of a Muslim believer happens in a situation where, on the national and international agenda of the rulers, the enemy has changed from communism to Islam: And the

ruling ideas tend to be the ideas of the ruling class.

Furthermore to this general view two other factors are relevant when making the balance sheet of Asmaa's candidacy. First of all, a part of the core voters for the RGA asked if it's possible to be both deeply religious and socialist. That relevant question wasn't clearly answered. The other point was that the positions of Asmaa - those she actually expressed and those she was attributed to have - created further confusion. That's why it's not that surprising that the candidacy of Asmaa had a certain influence on the electoral result.

The RGA is faced with a difficult discussion about this background and it is decisive that it doesn't lead to a split of the party. Our position is that being religious is in itself not a reason to discard people as candidates for parliament or other positions in the RGA. But at the same time we underline that there is room in the RGA for members who disagree.

Electoral results %

Party	2007	2005
Liberal Party	26,2	29
Social Democrats	25,5	25,8
Danish Peoples Party	13,9	13,3
Socialist Peoples Party	13	6
Conservative	10,4	10,3
Social Liberal Party	5,1	9,2
New Alliance	2,8	-
Red Green Alliance	2,2	3,4
Christian		

Three Meanings of Ecosocialism

25 November 2007, by **Ian Angus**



Let's begin with a big question â€” what is ecosocialism?

ANGUS: Ecosocialism has grown out of two parallel political trends â€” the spread of Marxist ideas in the green movement and the spread of ecological ideas in the Marxist left. The result is a set of social and political goals, a growing body of ideas, and a global movement.

Ecosocialism's goal is to replace capitalism with a society in which common ownership of the means of production has replaced capitalist ownership, and in which the preservation and restoration of ecosystems will be central to all activity.

As a body of ideas, ecosocialism argues that ecological destruction is not an accidental feature of capitalism, it is built into the system's DNA. The system's insatiable need to increase profits â€” what's been called "the ecological tyranny of the bottom line" â€” cannot be reformed away.

With that said, it is important to realize ecosocialist thought is not monolithic â€” it embodies many different views about theory and practice. For example, there is an ongoing debate about the view, advanced by some ecosocialist writers, that social movements have replaced the working class as the engine of social change.

Finally, ecosocialism is an anti-capitalist movement that varies a lot from place to place. In the imperialist countries, it is a current within existing socialist and green-left movements, seeking to win ecology activists to socialism, and to convince socialists of the vital importance of ecological issues and struggles. In the

Third World there is a growing mass pro-ecology movement that incorporates socialist ideas â€” that's especially true in Latin America, where anti-imperialist governments headed by Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and Fidel Castro in Cuba, are pressing for strong anticapitalist, pro-environment measures.

What is the Ecosocialist International Network?

ANGUS: The Ecosocialist International Network was formed in October 2007, at a meeting in Paris that was attended by ecosocialists from 13 countries. Its main goals are to improve communication and coordination among ecosocialists worldwide, and to organize a major ecosocialist conference in Brazil in January 2009, in conjunction with the World Social Forum.

The EIN is a very loose and open organization. Its only organizational structure is a steering committee to plan the Brazil conference. Anyone who supports the broad goals of the ecosocialism is welcome to participate â€” more information is available on our [website](#).

How do you respond to socialists who argue that there is no need for specifically "ecosocialist" ideas or activity?

ANGUS: In a certain sense they are correct. Marxism embodies a wealth of profound ecological thought, far more than many green activists realize.

But while concern for ecology was a fundamental part of Marx's thought, and the Bolsheviks were certainly aware of the issue, the sad fact is that the Marxist left ignored this issue for many decades. It's important to correct that â€” and to do so publicly and explicitly.

Using the word "ecosocialism" is a way of signalling loud and clear that we consider climate change not just as another stick to bash capitalism with, but as a critically important issue, one of the principal problems facing humanity in this century.

But there is more involved. Marxism is not a fixed set of eternal truths â€” it is a living body of thought, a method of understanding society and a tool for social change. Socialists whose views don't evolve to incorporate new social and scientific insights become irrelevant sectarians â€” we've seen that happen to many individuals and groups over the years.

Just as Marx and Engels studied and adopted ideas from the scientists of their day â€” Liebig on soil fertility, Morgan on early societies, Darwin on evolution, and many others â€” so Marxists today must learn from today's scientists, especially about the biggest issues of the day. Ecosocialism aims to do just that.

Can capitalism solve global warming?

ANGUS: The depends on what you mean by "solve."

Dealing with global warming includes two components â€” mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation means reducing greenhouse gas emissions so that global warming slows down and eventually reverses. Adaptation means making changes that will enable people to survive in a world where some climate change is inevitable, and where climate chaos is increasingly likely.

In my opinion, capitalism's insatiable need for growth, combined with its massive dependence on fossil fuels as the dominant energy source, mean that it is very unlikely that we will see an effective mitigation program from any major capitalist country.

Scientists say that if the average temperature rises more than 2 degrees, dangerous climate change becomes very probable. There is no sign that any of the industrialized countries will implement measures sufficient to stop such a temperature increase – anything they do will be too little, too late.

But if we do not succeed in bringing this system to an end, capitalism will undoubtedly adapt to the new climate. It will do what capitalism always does – it will impose the greatest burdens on the most vulnerable, on poor people and poor nations. Climate refugees will multiply and millions will die. The imperialist powers will fight against the global south, and amongst

themselves, to control the world's resources, including not just fuel but also food. The most barbaric forms of capitalism will intensify and spread.

In short – yes, capitalism can “solve” global warming, but the capitalist solution will be catastrophic for the great majority of the world's people.

2007 - Year of Climate Change Catastrophe

25 November 2007, by **Phil Hearse**

Against the hard-core climate change deniers no amount of evidence will make much difference. But evidence aplenty there has been in 2007 that environmental damage is accumulating because of global warming, and doing major damage to communities, nations and continents. As ever, it has been the poor who have been the most vulnerable, and who have lost most in terms of lives, possessions and livelihoods; in most places it is women and children who bear the brunt.

Most of all, 2007 has been the year of the flood. But it has also been the year of the forest fire on several continents, most notably in Greece and the United States.

Mega floods

Increased rainfall in many areas (although not all) is indeed one of the obvious consequences of global warming. This year we've seen:

- Two waves of massive flooding in China in June and September-October in the centre and south of the country that have killed more than 1000 people.

- Connected with the same storms over southern China, Vietnam suffered widespread flooding in October and November which by the time this was written (early November) had killed more than 120 people.

- The worst floods in living memory in

Central Africa, stretching from coast to coast, devastating crops and drowning hundreds.

- Unprecedented flooding in north and central England in June.

- What the Mexican president called the “greatest natural disaster of the country's history” as the state of Tabasco was submerged for the second time in a decade, leaving dozens dead and making 100,000 homeless.

- Hundreds died in India in several waves of flooding from Mumbai, where 500 died, to Bihar where a similar trail of devastation occurred.

- Several waves of flooding in the south east of Australia that wrecked the wine crop in many areas.

Much of this catastrophe has hardly been reported in the Western media; the fire risk to homes of Malibu celebs is of course of much more interest to the right-wing media than millions of workers and peasants in Africa or Asia!

Africa

Twenty-two African countries are experiencing their worst wet seasons in decades, and experts say that global warming is to blame. Devastating rains and flash floods have affected 1.5 million people across the continent, killing at least 300 since early summer.

West Africa has seen its most severe floods in years, as torrents swamped the Democratic Republic of the Congo's capital of Kinshasa in late October, killing 30 people in less than 24 hours. In northern Ghana, more than 300,000 people have been uprooted by devastating downpours.



In East Africa, meanwhile, hundreds of thousands have been displaced and scores killed in Uganda, Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia.

As the rains continue, African meteorologists are warning that these events may be fulfilling predictions that the continent will suffer some of the worst effects of global warming. “Africa will be the hardest hit by climate change,” said Grace Akumu, director of the Kenya-based nonprofit Climate Network Africa. “This is happening even faster than expected.”

China

The China news agency says more than 1300 people HAVE DIED IN China this summer as a result of flooding. Another 332 missing; crops on at least 15.43 million hectares of farmland have been destroyed and 1.22 million houses ruined.

Direct economic losses were estimated to have amounted to 155.8 billion yuan (US\$19.3 billion), according

Vice-Minister of Water Resources E Jingping .

The middle and downstream of Xijiang River in the Pearl River basin suffered a disastrous flood, and Hunan and Heilongjiang were hit by serious mountain torrents, mud-rock flows and landslides.

The hardest-hit areas include the provinces of Fujian, Anhui, Zhejiang and Hainan in southern and eastern China, which have also been plagued by seven typhoons and cyclones that claimed 221 lives.

However, continued heavy rainfall during the National Day holiday has caused the biggest flood in a decade along the lower reaches of the Weihe River and the middle reaches of the Hanjiang River in Shaanxi and Hubei provinces.

Sections of the rivers running through Shaanxi in northwest China overflowed, forcing 359,000 people to be evacuated.

More than 4.6 million people in 61 counties were affected by floods and mud slides, which ruined 79,800 hectares of crops and destroyed 39,200 houses.

India and Bangladesh

Floods in the monsoon season are normal in the sub-continent, but this year have been particularly severe, with hundreds killed in Bihar and Mumbai. In Bangladesh two-thirds of the country is submerged and 164 people died in flooding this year. The monsoon rain is getting heavier because of warming oceans, but the human impact on the poor is made worse by poverty, the caste system and state corruption and indifference.

In Bihar more than 2 million people were forced out of their homes and overwhelmingly it was women who had to take the responsibility for finding food, firewood and shelter for themselves and their children. A high proportion of the worst affected were Dalits - so-called 'untouchables'.

According to the Dalit campaign for Human Rights, relief was least likely to reach the low-caste villagers:

"The relative neglect of low-caste villagers was a reflection of how, even at a moment of shared hardship, the

rules of caste dictate how Indian society operates, he added. The culture of discrimination which runs through Indian society intensifies in times of crisis."

Aid distribution is often done in town centers, where well-off, upper-caste groups are more likely to live. Those who are geographically marginalized in low-lying, remote villages, far from the national highways, find that supplies dwindle by the time they arrive in town, if they are able to make the journey.

A heart rending account of the misery suffered by in Bihar State came last week with the story of an upper-caste police officer accused of drowning two lower-caste girls in the river after they stole firewood from his orchard.

Dry tinder has become a precious commodity in Bihar, vital to survival in the damp post-flood period. According to a villager who complained to the police, when the police officer found Chandani Kumari, 6, and Kamali Kumari, 13, taking wood from his property, he threw them into a fast-moving river. Neither of the girls could swim.

The officer was suspended and a compensation payment of 100,000 rupees, or \$2,400, was given to the girls' parents S.L. Das, the local police superintendent, said, adding that he believed the girls were chased, not thrown, into the river.

In Bangladesh flooding relief put big pressure on the national budget. The World Bank has insisted that to improve national finances the government must put up the price of heating fuel - and thereby deal a cruel blow to the vast majority of poor families who depend on it for heating and cooking.

The Bihar experience shows how wrong flood-control strategies, unscrupulous politicians, unresponsive bureaucracy and corruption have left thousands displaced and economically ruined. Since Independence, successive Bihar governments have sold embankments as an answer to floods, despite warnings that these earthen structures only exacerbate the problem.

The reason behind this pro-embankment policy is easy to understand: it helps perpetuate the well-oiled politician-technocrat-contractor nexus. Cuts and kickbacks are the order of the day, as politicians get a rake off from the construction company firms, who receive large amounts of aid money for rebuilding the embankment levees, which again make the problem worse.

Mexico

In 1998 the Mexican state of Tabasco was inundated and in late October this year it happened again. The worsening of tropical storms in central America and the Caribbean is the direct result of sea warming in the Gulf of Mexico. In addition 16 rivers overran their banks in the rebel state of Chiapas. The effects of this flooding are still ongoing as this article is written. According to the BBC (4 November):

"Beyond Mexico's borders the effects of the tropical depression have been felt in other Central American states. Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador have already suffered from three weeks of heavy downpours.

In total more than 50 people have been killed and 100,000 have been forced to evacuate.



Some large areas are facing epidemics and food shortages .

Millions of dollars worth of crops across the region have been ruined and outbreaks of malaria, cholera and dengue fever have been reported in some of the worst hit areas."

The floods completely wiped out crops in the region, and a farm association estimated losses at 480 million dollars.

Health officials have meanwhile started to fret about looming health risks from open sewage and the spread of disease-carrying mosquitoes. Dengue, cholera and diarrhea outbreaks now are very real possibilities.

What has really animated the state and national government is that the

hungry people of Villhermosa, capital of Tabasco have started to loot supermarkets to get food. Thousands of desperate and hungry people cannot be allowed to breach property laws for the mere purpose of getting something to eat!

Firestorms

Many parts of the Greek countryside burnt with savage ferocity this summer as temperatures reached 460 C, and more than 60 people were killed in cut-off villages. Even if some of these fires were started by arsonists, they widespread effect can only be explained by global warming. The ecology of Greece is changing permanently. An arid country is threatened with becoming a desert if Mediterranean countries continue to experience routine temperatures above 40o in the summer.

Brush fires are normal events in California, part of the natural cycle, but events like this year's fires are not. According to American writer Mike Davis:

"Th Los Angeles Times had an article that said climate change wasn't a factor in the fires. This is probably balderdash. Everything that's happening, including the dramatic number of mega-fires in the rest of the West, accords with the simulations generated in the climate models used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Not only are extreme events becoming more common, but it's possible that the base climate of the Southwest and most of the rest of the West is itself

changing."

Davis also points out how an alliance of Republican politicians and property developers have been responsible for continued house building in the fire-prone backlands, despite repeated warnings about fire dangers. He also showed how the media had highlighted the danger to the houses of celebrities like John Travolta and Sting, rather than the much worse plight of poor people in areas like San Diego.

Capitalism Collides with Nature

There have always been floods and forest fires. But the intensity and widespread nature of these events is vivid evidence of the impact of climate change. No one can now possibly believe that climate change is a victimless crime; thousands of people are dying each year from its effects, many thousands more are being made ill, being made eco-refugees or losing their livelihoods.

Each of the floods and fires referred to above has its own unique causes. But behind each one of them is increasing global temperatures, and in particular rising sea temperatures. It's rising sea temperatures off West Africa which start many of the tropical storms that end up as hurricanes in the Bay of Mexico; it's the warming of the same seas that triggered the floods in central Africa this year. Sea warming is worsening the monsoons affecting the sub-continent and South East Asia.

In each cases it's the poor, living in flimsy houses in marginal areas near dangerous dams, levees or mountainsides that are the victims of

the flash floods and the mudslides. In each case it's the poor who are the victims when disaster relief money is siphoned off by the rich and corrupt officials. And it's the poor who have no back-up resources when their fields and crops are damaged, their homes are destroyed.

Climate change is not a danger, it's a reality. Its effects are hitting the poor now, and the rich and powerful are making things worse. Whether it's war, earthquake or climate change, the poor pay the price.

Climate change experts have long warned that global warming could have devastating consequences:

â€¢ More than a billion people may face freshwater shortages by 2050, especially in Asia, where rising living standards for the middle class will lead to increased water demand.

â€¢ Millions more will be threatened by floods due to rising sea levels, with island inhabitants and populations in large river-delta regions in Asia most at risk.

Dry areas may become drier, with crop yields dropping by as much as 50 percent in sub-tropical regions by 2020.

â€¢ Higher rates of climate-related illness, including malnutrition, malaria, dengue fever, and heatstroke could take effect.

Capitalist productivism, the incessant production of more and more useless commodities, is responsible for this crisis. Solving the crisis means ending the system.

What Happened to the Global Justice Movement?

25 November 2007, by **Frances Curran**



She replied that she doesn't believe the anti-globalisation movement is finished but states that the moment

has passed, (Sunday Herald 22.09.07). So what has happened to the anti-globalisation movement, more

recently referred to as the global justice movement?

The policies of neo-liberalism which introduced unfettered market forces, privatisation of public services and an imposition of unfair trade using international institutions, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have provoked massive struggles of opposition and resistance. Neo-liberalism is not just an economic system; it affects every aspect of society - economic, political, social, cultural and ideological.

What the global justice movement has done is to recognise that the system is global and therefore the opposition has to be global, it has created an international consciousness amongst activists across the world and has tried to bring together those from very diverse campaigns through action. Millions have taken part in protests against the institutions of neo liberalism, mass protests and blockades of the WTO, the IMF, the World bank, the EU, the G8, the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) have United protestors under the slogan of Seattle, *The World is Not For Sale*.

International Solidarity

This active international solidarity has broken down barriers and has assisted in the creation of international networks, which puts Indian peasant communities resisting Coca Cola stealing their water supply in touch with students in Europe and the US who act in solidarity by campaigning for a boycott of Coca Cola on University Campuses, who in turn are linked with Columbian trade unionists fighting against Coca Colas attack on trade union organisation. It connects womens organisations fighting sex trafficking with Euro MPs drafting legislation on the issue. It was the initiator and co-ordinator of the biggest anti war demonstration the world has ever seen when on 15 February 2003, 12 million people simultaneously took part in protests against the invasion of Iraq.

Following the global capitalist circus around from continent to continent to

protest outside fortified doors raises the international profile of the movement and keeps the global solidarity banner flying but it has its limitations, not everyone can get on a plane to a G8 summit or a WTO meeting to protest and is it effective in resisting the policies of neo liberalism? Certainly global news pictures of the G8 leaders being forced into smaller and more isolated spots to hold talks because of the opposition to their policies is a success of the strength of the movement, but the talks still take place.

There was recognition amongst some sections of the movement that mobilisations of this sort although important are not enough. There is a need not just to develop action but to develop ideas, an alternative global model to that of neo liberalism. Under the slogan Another World is Possible, the first World Social Forum (WSF) took place in Porto Alegre in Brazil in 2001. It is no accident that the left of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) were in power in Porto Alegre and that the movement was offered facilities from the local council. Everyone and anyone fighting neo liberal globalisation was invited.

The enormous strength of the WSF is its openness and diversity, also the emphasis on democracy and creating an inclusive space. Drawing on past experiences there is a culture of suspicion against those who attempt to gain hegemony over the movement. From the outset political parties have not been allowed to be formal participants in the gatherings and structures of the WSF the reason being the fear of the domination of the space by those parties. However members of parties and leaders of parties have taken part and have spoken at events and rallies of the WSF, in particular Hugo Chavez the Venezuelan President. The emphasis has been and still is on networking . The WSF movement has travelled through various phases and is also on the move in terms of its political analysis and alternative programme. The political spectrum gathered under the WSF umbrella is broad to say the least, from the Christian organisations, through development NGOs and leadership bodies of international trade unions to socialists

and revolutionaries.

There are wide political differences within the International Council of the WSF which involves about 100 organisations. Views range from those who believe that you can negotiate fair trade and debt cancellation with the institutions of capitalism to those who present a critique of the entire capitalist system and who want to develop alternatives to capitalism.

Co-opting The Movement

We have had our own front row view of these tensions during the protests against the G8 summit at Gleneagles in 2005. The Make Poverty History demonstration saw 250,000 take part, and the follow up Live Aid concert announced by Bob Geldof were often portrayed in the press and by politicians as the acceptable face of the global justice movement. We saw the attempt by Blair and Brown to co-opt the movement, to bring it in to the negotiating table, to tame and paralyse it. In contrast the G8 Alternatives demonstration which grouped the more radical wing of the movement was initially banned. Bob Geldof declined the direct invitation to publicly support the G8 Alternatives demonstration on the opening day of the summit at Gleneagles. The G8 Alternatives Summit in Edinburgh had speaking on its platforms and at its workshops some of the leading figures of the ant globalisation movement but was very much ignored by the mainstream media.

Since the first WSF in 2004 there has been an annual WSF, the biggest of which were Mumbai (India) in 2004 (140,000) and Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 2005 (150,000). There have also been European Social Forums, Polycentric World Social Forums, emphasising the geographical spread of the movement, these took place in Bamako (Mali), Karachi (Pakistan) and Caracas (Venezuela), and Regional Social Forums in Asia.

The grass roots of the WSF are strengthening and renewing not just in organisational terms but also in political and programmatic developments and it is a very progressive and inclusive process. The latest WSF was held in Nairobi in

Kenya, the first one held in Africa. Although smaller than some of the others (40,000) it brought together grass roots organisations fighting the neo liberal agenda that had never before shared a space. Allowing experiences to be exchanged, solidarity links strengthened and ideas clarified.

The Charter of Principles of the WSF adopted at Sao Paulo in on 9 April 2001 states that it is, An open meeting place where groups and movements of civil society opposed to neo liberalism and a world dominated by capital or any form of imperialism, but engaged in building a society centred on the human person.....to debate ideas democratically, formulate proposals, share their experiences freely and network for effective action.

The movement is reclaiming the ground of international solidarity and an international consciousness which had been lost for a period. The Nairobi WSF in January of this year placed on the agenda, - social justice, international solidarity, gender equality, peace and defence of the environment. The big question facing the movement is how will these aims be achieved?

Despite the 12 million who took to the streets in a global movement to prevent war in Iraq, US and British Imperialism invaded. We did not stop the war. This has definitely had an effect on the consciousness and the retreat of the anti war movement. The analysis put forward by the anti war movement has been borne out, the Bush administration and US foreign policy is in a quagmire. The lasting legacy will be instability in Iraq which will destabilise other regimes in the Middle East. We could not prevent it from happening.

In our own direct experience we saw the biggest demonstration ever in Edinburgh, a quarter of a million people protesting at the policies of the G8 and demanding that action be taken on cancellation of debt, fair trade and aid to support the countries of the South. Despite Blair and Browns slick PR and sound bite promises nothing has happened to change the neo liberal policies of the G8, WTO, IMF or World Bank in Africa or

anywhere else. Numerous attempts have been made by varying governments to co-opt the movement into government and offer access to neo liberal institutions. In particular leaders of the big NGOs have been offered policy making roles. Attempts have been made to hi-jack the space created such as Brown attempting to speak at the Make Poverty History Demonstration. Politicians who are carrying out neo- liberal policies have gained access to platforms and have attempted to speak for the movement. Sponsorship for WSF events has been offered by the Ford Foundation amongst others.

Independence of the Movement

So far the movement has maintained its independence, the openness and emphasis on democracy as well as autonomous organisation at a grass roots level has been a factor in this. It has neither been co-opted nor institutionalised.

So what is it going to take both in terms of action and political programme to halt the neo liberal agenda and reverse the economic, social and ecological impact of these policies? More importantly what conclusions are being drawn by the millions of people worldwide, including the hundreds of thousands in Scotland who participated in action during the anti war and G8 protests demanding change, only to be failed by those in the seats of political power. What has happened to that consciousness?

There are voices within the movement who are pushing the debate further. Remy Herrera a leading public figure, academic and prominent campaigner for cancellation of third world debt in addressing The WSF in Mali said he came to defend two positions, the necessity of passing from consciousness to anti imperialist action and [to go] beyond the anti neo liberal critique to the more fundamental critique of capitalism.

There are many voices who are contributing to the global debate from this position, the very experience of the movement is posing new questions and developing a deeper anti capitalist consciousness. Socialists have much to

contribute to this debate and the process of understanding the nature of power in the capitalist society we live in, the power of ideas, the power of effective action and the power of organisation including political and trade union organisation.

As Naomi Klein said the movement is in no way finished, but it needs to negotiate the steps to go forward. There is a danger of fragmentation but there is the greater possibility of a strengthened and more united movement capable of co-ordinating effective action.

A New Model

You may even get a big section of the grassroots organisations, many of them mass organisations, who make up the WSF agreeing with a critique of capitalism and supporting an alternative. The big problem for all of us is what does that alternative look like? Socialists have to find ways of bridging the gap between this consciousness and presenting a credible, global political and economic alternative. There is no model and we are still carrying on our backs, although less so, the totalitarian nature of Stalinism and the lack of democratic rights.

That's why the events in Latin America, Venezuela in particular, are important. In a concrete way the Bolivarian Revolution the policies of the Chavez government and the forms of organisation and participatory democracy at a grass roots level are redefining and contributing to the programme for Socialism in the 21st Century.

Hugo Chavez closed the Social Forum in Caracas in 2006 by stating, It is impossible, within the framework of the capitalist system to solve the grave problems of poverty of the majority of the world's population. We must transcend capitalism. But we cannot resort to state capitalism, which would be the same perversion of the Soviet Union. We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project and a path, but a new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything. That's the debate we must

promote around the world, and the WSF is a good place to do it.

During the last election campaign I was at a hustings hosted by Energy Watch Scotland, not surprisingly all of the questions were about energy. I was asked to exercise my imagination and assume that the SSP have been elected as a majority government (I've got a vivid imagination) what is the first thing I would do the next day when I got to Parliament? I replied, phone Hugo Chavez and ask him to fax through the documents relating to how to take into public ownership and run a state owned oil company, and invite the Minister responsible to come to Scotland to address the Scottish Parliament.

There is an article in this Frontline which goes into much more detail about the situation in Venezuela, I want to just briefly touch on the programmatic issues.

The international capitalist class has for two decades promoted the idea that there is no economic alternative to neo liberalism, only with free market access everywhere, privatization of public services and liberalisation of trade will we create economic growth.

The most recent economic report on the Venezuelan economy from the Centre for Economic and Policy Research released in July this year document that there has been a 76% growth in the economy since 2003, public spending has increased from 34-44%, and investment has grown.

Households living in poverty have dropped from 55% to 30.6% and those in extreme poverty from 25% to 9.1%.

How can this be possible when the Chavez government has done the exact opposite of what neo liberal economists recommend, such as strict currency controls, price controls, nationalisation of key parts of the economy, repeated increases in the minimum wage, policies which strengthen workers rights and trade union organization, increasing taxes on the wealthy and cracking down on corporate tax evasion? This disproves not in theory but in action the argument that national governments

can do little and are at the mercy of international neo liberal economic policy, it proves in practice that dissenting from the neo liberal agenda does not mean economic collapse, on the contrary if you seriously want to tackle poverty this is the type of programme you have to implement in government.

Interestingly the movement in Latin America is also trying to challenge the global dominant ideology of capitalism and to provide alternative organisations the existing global institutions of neo liberalism.

The proposal of a Debtors Fund bringing together governments of Latin America and the countries of the South to negotiate with the banks and governments of the North and to co-ordinate effective action around repayment and cancellation of foreign debt. Sure seems more effective that a Live Aid concert and Bob and Bono going for tea at Gleneagles.

There is a proposal to establish a trade agreement across the continent called ALBA (Alternativa Bolivariana para las Americas) as an alternative to the US Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. ALBA would be a different model of trade co-operation. It would push for solidarity with the economically weakest countries, setting up a fund to assist their development of infrastructure, prioritizing food sufficiency in every country and protecting internal production from the predatory role of multi nationals. The proposal to challenge the media monopoly of the neo liberal view of the world by setting up a TV station which would go global presenting information, debate, argument and concrete experience of Another World Being Possible. A socialist CNN!

Having this emerging alternative will enormously assist in bridging the consciousness gap between a critique of capitalism and a viable, credible socialist alternative. Of course the programme for socialism would be different in different national countries but the task of redefining it is given much assistance from the living experience of Latin America, including the movement for workers control of industry in Argentina which

I haven't touched on here.

An obvious point to make here is that the movement in Venezuela would not be able to advance any of these policies or more importantly implement them if they hadn't had popular social movements linked to political parties standing in elections, who then won a democratic mandate for political power. Networks are not enough. It also emphasizes the importance of the creation of anti capitalist parties like the SSP as part of this process. The lesson for us however is that political parties are not enough, there is enormous strength in being linked with networks and popular movements who still retain their democratic autonomy.

The WSF and the global justice movement are helping create an international consciousness, links are strengthening between diverse and dispirit campaigns and organisations, and there is a space to exchange ideas and to find solutions to the unanswered question of how to organise effective action on a global scale to stop privatisation and multinational domination of the world's resources and protect our environment.

The decision has been taken not to hold a World Social Forum in 2008. Instead it will be replaced by two global days of action around 26-27 January 2008, with a plan to hold the 8th WSF in 2009; the location is still to be agreed.

In Scotland we have never really managed to establish a national Social Forum type umbrella. There was the possibility to develop something concrete from the G8 Alternatives initiative, but for reasons which I have written about previously in this magazine it didn't prove possible.

As socialists we should consider how we can link up with other groups in Scotland to prepare for the global days of action next January. The thousands of young people who took part in the Make Poverty History demonstration and those who took their protest to Gleneagles haven't gone away and I am sure many of them are still committed to the idea that Another World is Possible.

Global Economic Turbulence - Blip or Crisis?

23 November 2007, by **Danilo Connadi**



Northern Rock bank - technically bankrupt

Some people have up to now put the blame on the psychic weakness and the mentality of investors who are in the grip of panic and are incapable of understanding the marginal nature of the crisis. Today, whereas the crisis is by no means solved, there is even a certain competition to demonstrate that "the worst is behind us". Not claiming to be a specialist in finance and markets, I would like to limit myself here to drawing attention to some elements which shed light on the nature of this crisis, which emerged in August 2007. To put it another way, is the crisis the result of the "lies" of the financial world, which has taken the risk of implicating the real economy, or is just the opposite? Is the capitalist system as a whole solid and exterior to what has just happened?

It would be enough to list the establishments which have been implicated in the crisis to realize immediately that the story of the wheat and the chaff is just a fable. We can find in particular Deutsche Bank, Morgan Stanley, Merrill Lynch, Union des Banques Suisses, JP Morgan, BNP Paribas, Unicredit, Crédit Suisse, Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, Countrywide, Landesbank Sachsen, Bayerische Landesbank, in other words both top-ranking investment funds and watchdogs of management. [1]

This list gets longer every day, because obviously both companies and banks are trying as far as possible to hide their direct involvement in the risky loan market and their indirect involvement through the acquisition of

bonds which themselves serve as guarantee for these loans. We will undoubtedly know more between the end of September and the beginning of October when the principal investment banks publish their quarterly statements. To those which I have just enumerated it is obviously necessary to add the 87 small and medium-sized American financial enterprises which have already filed for bankruptcy.

The list of these big investment and pension funds, banks, the property investors and insurance companies really does not lead us to think of an "anomaly" but much more of a wide-ranging crisis concerning the heart of Western finance, primarily American and German. In the space of fourteen days these companies needed some \$324 billion of short- or medium- term credit, obtained from the central banks, in particular from the European Central Bank (ECB). And we saw real rescue operations on companies, such as Countrywide, the principal supplier of credit in the United States, which controls 61 000 establishments.

And if we still had some doubts about the dimensions of the problem, it would be enough for us to remember the amount of these US credits: \$6 500 billion. An amount which exceeds, and by quite a lot, that of the Treasury bills issued by the state (\$4 300 billion) and also the amount of the bonds of private companies which come to only \$5 300 billion.

"Subprime" credits

High-risk loans are relatively recent "financial products". Their rise started in 1996 and they subsequently experienced a rapid boom, so that

their total amount came to exceed \$1000 billion. They are loans granted by the banks and financial institutions to debtors who are "at risk", i.e. who do not have property to guarantee the loan and who have irregular incomes that come from precarious or intermittent work. The rise in the prices of real estate, which has been spectacular and uninterrupted for the 15 last years (between 10 and 20 per cent per annum between 2001 and 2006) thus served as a "solid" guarantee helped by the supply of "easy money" thanks to the very low lending rates of the central banks.

The risks and the profits were founded on these co-ordinates. We were witnessing a cycle that was apparently without end, where rising prices of real estate fed financial investments and facilitated new credits which in their turn made possible new construction and a further increase in real estate prices. Banks and financiers who had plenty of capital issued loans and bonds which were supposed to guarantee in due course profits for those who acquired them. These bonds multiplied and, taking advantage of the excellent evaluation of their reliability, were massively acquired by investment funds, pension funds, the insurance companies and other banks and companies. With the new liquidities, even riskier credits were issued, while competition became increasingly fierce.

Demand and prices increased so much that between 1995 and 2004 investments in new construction industries increased by 80 per cent in the United States and by between 20 and 40 per cent in Europe, except for Germany which was experiencing a period of spectacular growth. At the same time the property loans granted

to households increased annually by 3.3 per cent in Germany, 11 per cent in the United States and up to 19.2 per cent in Italy, producing a real boom in the relationship between debt and disposable household income, which went from 31.1 per cent to 52.2 per cent in Italy, from 64.7 per cent to 75.3 per cent in France, from 99.7 per cent to 109.9 per cent in Germany, from 106.6 per cent to 155.5 per cent in England, which thus attained a ratio similar to that of the United States.

In 2006 in the United States, nearly 70 per cent of the population own their own houses, but two thirds them - that is to say, around 50 million Americans - are behind in repaying their loans. Just in the course of the last six years, the total amount of financing of new houses went from \$5 100 billion to approximately \$10 000 billion. These figures give an almost everyone takes part, directly or indirectly, in the banquet of the housing market, based on growing household debt.

And if at a certain moment the increase in prices were to stop, what would happen of all the calculations of risks and expected profits? Pretty well what has just happened. All it needed was a slight increase in the percentage of failure to pay by debtors with "subprime" loans, a fall in demand and consequently a deceleration of the increase in prices, to make the foundations of the great castle of the housing market tremble. A deceleration which started in 2007 and was recorded by the US indicators during July, which noted that the increase in the price of real estate was slowing, that the construction of new residences was reduced by 6.1 per cent and that the number of new building permits had fallen by 2.1 per cent. Figures confirmed it again on August 28: the price of residences showed an exceptional fall of 3.2 per cent on annual average annual, with high points reaching double figures in some large cities.

Many European analysts, especially those working for banks and property companies, sought to calm things down by underlining the diversity of the European market. We can understand them. But we have seen that the differences are not so enormous that it is not possible to

imagine a structural crisis of the United States market which does not implicate the European market. The data that we have do not authorize excessive "optimism". In Italy for example, there is no lack of evidence of a deceleration of the rise in prices (+ 1.6 per cent in Milan in the first half of the year), and especially, the lengthening of the time necessary to sell or find a new tenant (indicators which record the fall in demand before that of prices). During the first half of 2007, in fact, in Italy the time necessary for the sale of a house was 37.2 per cent longer than in 2003. And it was necessary to await 53.1 per cent longer to conclude a rental agreement [2]. Standard & Poors mention that the index of non-repayment of credits at risk increased by 5 points during the second quarter of 2007 in England, and it envisages a further increase over the next six months. More than 10 % of customers are more than 90 days behind with their payments.



Bull market stumbles

The selling price of houses cannot increase ad infinitum. When the level of repayment of loans - whose duration is constantly increasing - comes to eat up 60-70 per cent of the monthly wages of the household, it becomes difficult to go any further and to increase demand. All the more so as average wages are stagnating, job insecurity is increasing increases and that the most recent "subprime" loans have been based on low repayments during the first two years which then sharply increase. That is what explains the increase in payment defaults and the tendency for prices to fall.

Obviously the crisis is extending to all the companies which have invested in bonds based on "subprime" loans, because the promised profits are suddenly proving to be precarious. It is the risk of an insolvency-bankruptcy-insolvency spiral which obliged the central banks to inject billions in short and medium term loans to avoid the bankruptcy of companies short of liquidities. At the same time the Federal Reserve (Fed)

reduced the lending rate by half a point, while the ECB has frozen the announcement of an increase in order to make new loans possible. Will that be enough? Will the banks and financial institutions manage to solve the crisis by taking advantage of the time that this imposing injection of "liquidities" gives them?

The crisis overcome?

So the crisis of the housing market now seems to be certain. During preceding decelerations of real estate prices in the United States - at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s - prices stagnated, but they never actually fell, especially because of the high rate of inflation. The current fall could be much more sudden, just as the rise was more rapid and longer, thereby contributing to reignite the panic effect in sales of property and accelerating the fall in prices. If that happened, bankruptcies could prove to be more numerous than in 1987, and especially they could reach some giants of the financial world. The crisis would be propagated not only via the bonds issued on the basis of credits, as described previously, but also by its effects on the fundamental elements of the US economy. We have already seen 20 000 lay-offs in the financial sector (6 550 at American Home Mortgage, 2 000 at Countrywide, 1 900 at Capital One...) during the first twenty days, a figure destined to grow and to which must be added the foreseeable reduction of the number of jobs in the building industry. To that must also be added the future reductions of stock exchange profits and of those derived from investment and pension funds of pensions and the effects of these reductions. As if that were not enough, in the course of the last six months the United States recorded an increase of 30 per cent of unpaid overdrafts originating from the use of credit cards. [3]. All these elements then act to reduce the indicators of consumer confidence and the propensity of US households to consume.

They also immediately set the alarm bells ringing in the sectors producing the durable consumer goods, in the first place the automobile sector. General Motors and Ford have already

implemented the first reductions in production, envisaging a drop in sales of 10 per cent and estimating the increase in stock at 116 days of autonomy. The same economists who had been accused of having been too late in warning of the risks of investments related to "subprime" loans, today confirm the danger: the probability of an economic recession increased in August, going from 15 per cent to 35 per cent, whereas the forecasts for growth were reduced by a point for the North American economy and by several decimals for Europe. So if the spiral effect of is not foreseeable today, it is no longer completely excluded, especially if the crisis of loans at risk ("subprime", which represents 10 per cent of the credit market) were to extend to "normal" credits (90 per cent of the market). If the chain of the bankruptcies reached the giants of the financial sector, the forecasts concerning growth could prove to be still too optimistic.

Property speculation and overproduction

Just as Joseph Halevi wrote [4], the crisis of the United States housing market is a crisis which was largely announced in advance. Two years ago economists were divided between those who announced a controlled landing from the period of growth and those who put forward the hypothesis of a crash... Today the second hypothesis seems to have gained in probability, even if nobody can sell certainties on how it will finish. The question that is essential today is why were there no interventions earlier, although everyone recognized that the

growth of the housing market was an anomaly? The answer it is that it was not possible.

"The reality" - Halevi has written- "is that since 1970 during each decade the cumulative growth of the world economy (...) has been weaker than it was it during the previous decade, and that is still valid for 2000-2005. (...) Today, for capital, the best fruit of the present period is the compression of wages and of the pensions" One can only approve. We are still in the long wave of stagnation, caused by the crisis of 1973-1974 and the fall I the rate of profit, that is to say by the fall in the percentage of capital gained compared to that invested. The history of the following thirty years is the history of a capitalism which has been trying to increase its profits by a short-term strategy: reduction of wages to increase surplus value, reduction of the costs of raw materials in order to reduce the capital invested, increase in financial activities in search of easy money. The financial storms in South-East Asia at the end of the 1990s, the Argentinian crash of 2001 and the crisis of the so-called "new economy" are separate phenomena, but they are of the same nature as the crisis of the housing market. There is a latent crisis of the system, intrinsically related to the laws of capitalist accumulation.

Since the crisis of 1973-1974 the capitalist economy has been marked by a strong tendency to overproduction, in other words by productive forces that are in excess compared to the market available. When you tend to produce too much, the rate of profit in relation to the

capital invested decreases and thus productive investments are discouraged. If for example the existing factories of FIAT are able to produce more cars than they manage to sell on the market, then why should FIAT invest in creating new factories? We are certainly seeing the appearance of new products and of expanding economies, where it is possible to invest capital and hope for a profit, but that is not enough to guarantee a worldwide relaunch of capitalist accumulation comparable to that of the thirty years which followed the Second World War.

It is in the course of this long wave of thirty years of limited expansion and of weak increases in productivity that capital has implemented short-term strategies to obtain high profits:

1. By directly acting on direct and indirect wages and by operating the greatest reduction of wealth redistribution to the advantage of capital in the entire history of capitalism [5];
2. By trying to reduce the cost of energy and raw materials in order to lower the cost of investments;
3. By increasing through financial, technological, political and military means unequal exchange, to the advantage of the economies having a strong organic composition of capital;
4. By reinforcing fusions, concentration of capital and monopolies, including by the use of legal instruments, such as copyright;
5. By multiplying short-term speculative activities. [