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People's Movement welcomes foreign workers

30 June 2009, by **Søren Søndergaard**



Ole Nors Nielsen and Søren Søndergaard (with megaphone) welcomed Polish workers with breakfast-bread and leaflets

Photo: <http://folkebevaegelsen.dk>

When the 8 am ferry arrived from Swinoujście, Poland, on June 3rd, more than 100 activists from a number of trade unions welcomed it with red flags, sandwiches and leaflets in Polish. [1]

There were two speeches by candidates of the People's Movement against the EU (Folkebevægelsen): Ole Nors Nielsen, a leader of the dockworkers' union; and MEP Søren Søndergaard, the lead candidate.

"I welcome the Polish and Eastern European workers to Denmark. The People's Movement against the EU support the workers' right to go to other countries in search of work.. But we can not accept that foreign workers are abused by social dumping and subjected to unacceptable and often fatal workplaces" said Søren Søndergaard in his speech.

"Unfortunately, the EU today allows the under-payment of foreign workers. It must be stopped. That's why the People's Movement therefore calls on the government and parliament to decide that foreign workers must work according to Danish standards. Work performed in Denmark, must be performed by existing Danish agreements." [2]

There should be equal work on equal terms: that is the clear message from Søren Søndergaard.

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Our place is at the side of the Iranian people!

27 June 2009, by **Fourth International**

With the announcement of the re-election of Ahmadinejad, the underground war between the various factions in power was transformed into open war. Four candidates had been authorized to participate. Four of the regime's dignitaries who share responsibility for the bloody balancesheet of the thirty years of the Islamic Republic. But the Supreme Leader [4] and the clan in power designated the winner well before the first round. In a context of strong tensions between factions, crisis and social instability, it was unthinkable that the Guide be repudiated by the people. In the same way, the immense economic and financial interests in the hands of Pasdaran and their desire to take control of important sectors of the economy, controlled by the clan of the former president of the Rafsandjani Republic, made it impossible for Ahmadinejad and his cronies to give up power and its privileges. In this fight to control oil revenue, the wealth of the country and power, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad carried out a true coup d'état intended to oust their rivals.

For democratic liberties and the

claims of working people

Faced with increasing economic difficulties, with unemployment, with which galloping inflation, corruption and nepotism became increasingly unbearable. The determination of the population throw off the suffocating weight of the mullahs' regime and put an end to the repression against the youth and women who are fighting for their rights, is more and more intertwined with the specific labour demands. The courageous mobilization of the Iranian people accentuates divisions within the regime and weakens it.

The regime responds to the legitimate aspirations of the population by bloody repression, massive arrests, prohibition of journalists and cutting phone networks and Internet. It is a true state of siege that the Islamic Republic is imposing. In Teheran, Bassidjis, the anti-riot troops, and the Pasdaran brigades took possession of the city in order to choke off the dispute. But to no avail. The rejection of the power is deep and the protest movement takes various forms. It is not repression which will extinguish the anger and the determination of the

Iranian people!

A new phase of in the struggle

A new phase of struggle is opening in Iran. It is to the women, to the workers and the youth - to all the demonstrators who defy the Islamic Republic while not hesitating to risk their lives - that all our support is given. Spontaneous strikes have erupted in several companies, in Teheran in particular and strike calls are multiplying. The decisive question of the general strike is put, not by Moussavi, who is trying to ride the wave of the dispute, but by the Iranian workers themselves. The arrival of the working class in this movement can give cohesion and the force necessary to overthrow the Islamic Republic and to establish a new democratic and social republic that stands against imperialist and Zionist attacks. The fight for true democratic rights, the right to strike, the right to hold free elections, to constitute free trade unions and political parties as well as the fight for social justice and the equality between women and men must be based on international solidarity. Their fight is ours!

On the way back in Croatia and Slovenia

27 June 2009, by **Lucien Perpette**

A demonstration was organized on April 29, 2009 in Ljubljana. Some 2,000 people marched through the streets of the centre of the city. Speakers denounced fascist violence, but also attacked the consequences of the irruption of the market economy

on the situation of the working class. In fact, many companies are closing and unemployment is increasing considerably in the country.

It was during this demonstration that part of the activists of the Slovenian

left decided to go to Croatia on Thursday April 30 to gather information about and support the movement of occupation of university faculties, and in particular the Zagreb faculty of philosophy.

Very warmly welcomed in Zagreb by those in charge of the faculty, two members of the Slovenian group, Rastko Mocnik and Primož Krasovec, had the opportunity to speak and to explain the disastrous consequences of the introduction of the market economy in Slovenia and in the former socialist countries.

In the evening, a plenary session was held in the academic room, where discussion took place not only around the principal demand of the students and professors of the faculty in favour of free tuition at all levels of teaching, but also around a certain number of demands concerning the whole of society, and particularly the situation of the working class in Croatia, which is also severely affected by the recession in the world economy. Among these demands, we should mention the abolition of the additional tax which has to be paid in order to have access to health care (which was previously entirely free), the

penalization of economic fraud (this demand is particularly aimed at the theft of formerly collective property), the establishment of a fund for the restitution of the goods which had been plundered, the reduction in VAT on food (which at the request of 1' European Union has been raised to 22 per cent)...

A striking fact was the intervention of the president of the principal Croatian trade-union confederation, Anna Knezevic, giving her support to the demands of the students and inviting them to take part in the May 1 demonstration the following day in Zagreb, which was enthusiastically received by the assembled students. A representative of the confederation of free trade unions of Slovenia, Goran Lukic, and a Slovenian student also intervened and distributed a leaflet of solidarity from the president of the Slovenian trade unions, Dusan Semolic.

Twenty-one university faculties were

occupied in Croatia and everything indicates that these actions have been greeted with sympathy by the population, because over and above the specific demands concerning education, it is all of the consequences of the irruption of neo-liberalism and the world economic crisis which are being called into question in the country.

The plenary assembly of April 30 was not only a manifestation of the strength of the movement and its relationship to the key questions of Croatian society, it was also an enormous working meeting during which the tasks of many commissions were defined (for example the one dealing with video) and where those responsible for carrying out the various tasks were designated. So self-management is once again being practised in the Croatian student movement.

Ljubljana, May 4, 2009

The crisis in Europe and the role of anti-capitalists

27 June 2009, by **François Sabado**

- Compared with the summit attained by the business cycle in 2006, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contracted in the last quarter of 2008 by 1.7 per cent in the United States and by 1.9% in the euro zone. According to the estimates of the United States Federal Reserve in 2009, US GDP will further contract by between 1.9 and 2.7 per cent, and in the euro zone it will fall even more sharply, by between 2.2 and 3.2 per cent. That gives us an idea of the extent to which the world capitalist crisis is seriously affecting the heart of the European Union. However, faced with the crisis, the reactions of governments are quite different between the United States and the

European Union: the implementation of the Obama plan would be equivalent to 5 per cent of US GDP in 2009, whereas there is no real anti-crisis plan on a European scale, the national plans are on a much smaller scale and, moreover, partially divergent. How do you explain this difference?

François Sabado: I believe that the first point to be underlined, at this moment when in various different scenarios for a way out of the crisis are being discussed, is that we are sinking deeper into this crisis. The figures which you have just mentioned indicate an economic crisis which is deepening both in the United States and in Europe, where it has its own singularity and characteristics, but I

think that we tend to over-estimate the effects of Obama's plans on the economic crisis in the United States. According to the winner of the Nobel Prize for economics, Paul Krugman, the Obama plan, which exceeds 5 per cent of GDP for 2009, will scarcely succeed in doing more than reducing by half the probable scale of the recession. It is thus necessary to situate this plan in relation to the depth of the crisis in the United States: it will contain it but not reverse the tendency.

The European stimulus programmes are at the very least, under-dimensioned: they amount to 1.3 per cent of GDP in Great Britain, 1 per cent in France, 0.8 per cent in Germany, 0.1 per cent in Italy. The

400 billion euros that supposedly exist for a European pseudo-plan gaily confound new investments, advances on projects already decided, and even some expenditure that is already part of the national budgets. When they speak about the new expenditure which would supposedly amount to 200 billion euros - 1.5 per cent of European GDP -, including 30 billion euros coming from community financing, the remaining 170 billion coming from national budgets, we can easily see the limits: the European stimulus programme is nothing more than a collection of disparate national plans that each state had already more or less decided, dressed up in a European garb. The crisis thus underlines an element, which is that economic policy in Europe has become, during the crisis, more national than it was before the crisis broke out. Besides, this is logical, because the instruments of intervention are primarily national.

The European singularity of the crisis lies in the fact that the nature of the European Union and its structures do nothing but aggravate it. The combined absence of economic integration and of democracy in the process of building Europe limits political initiative. The dogma of "free and unfettered competition" makes this situation even more worrying. The policies and structures implemented since end of the 1980s by the treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Lisbon have been submerged. The criteria of the Stability Pact have exploded. The budget deficits exceed the fateful 3 per cent. The national debt has taken off. The single European market is experiencing protectionist tensions. The plans to support national industry, such as the French "automobile" plan, take precedence over the coordination of an industrial policy. Areva signs agreements with the Russian nuclear agency and forsakes a European project with the other German nuclear group, Siemens. The euro is holding up... but monetary tensions are accumulating. The core of the financial system of the United Kingdom is affected. The Baltic States are in the red. Last December Germany itself had difficulty obtaining a loan from the banks. The need for capital is considerable. Greece, Ireland, the Ukraine and Spain risk

bankruptcy. Rescue plans are being prepared in case the crisis suddenly worsens. That is where the IMF, called to the rescue, has a role to play in this situation. In short the management of the crisis adds to the crisis because, unlike in the period of the establishment of nation-states in the 18th and 19th centuries, which resulted from the development of the capitalist market and from formidable democratic aspirations which were contained and even broken by the incipient bourgeoisie, the European Union was based neither on a European capitalism nor on a democratic momentum. There was no European capital as such. Capitalist globalisation intervened, amalgamating the principal European companies with international multinationals, often dominated by North American capital or capital from emergent countries. The ruling classes took hold of the single European market in order to conquer new market shares in the globalized world, rather than building an economically, socially, and politically integrated Europe.

- The different countries of the EU are not for the moment affected by the crisis in the same way and at the same rhythm: in Ireland and in the Spanish state bankruptcies doubled in 2008 compared to the previous year, whereas in the whole of the continent their average rate of increase was 11 per cent; in the United Kingdom, in Spain and in Ireland the level of household debt and the real estate crisis are comparable with those in the United States, which is not the case in France or Italy; the Hungarian and Latvian economies have for the moment only avoided bankruptcy thanks to the intervention of the IMF, and the governments in Riga and Budapest fell following mobilizations against the adjustment plans imposed by the IMF and the European Union... Do you think that these differences will accentuate or that in fact the worsening of the crisis will lead to an equalization of its effects on a continental level?

François Sabado: I think that the crisis will rather accentuate the differences.

We can see that the structure of the economy in Europe, at any rate now that there has been the enlargement of the EU, is heterogeneous and that what decides policy today is the defence of the interests of each ruling class, of the capitalist classes of each country d' Europe in the world market and the international division of labour. The German economy, for example, is trying to preserve its particular place, in the production of industrial equipment, by undergoing the contraction of world trade today and suffering from its stronger dependence on exports. But if the German economy holds up, it is obvious that that will give it a strong basis to start up again and to defend its particular place on the international level. On the other hand, countries like Austria - which is very exposed because of its investments and especially the loans granted to the countries of Central Europe -, or Spain, which is especially committed concerning the debt of the countries of Latin America, do not have the same interests because of their different positions on the world market. So the crisis will tend to give rise to divergent reactions and thus to worsen the particular characteristics of each state. Coordination is in fact the structural weakness of the European economy. The policies are national policies; faced with the crisis the interventions are national. There is no coordination on a European scale, whether it is in banking, industry or regarding social policies.

The existence of the common currency has, it would seem, initially protected the small economies with a very important banking sector which is seriously affected by the crisis - Belgium, Luxembourg or Ireland, for example - from monetary collapse as a result of a speculative attack, such as that which affected Iceland. That has led certain countries - Denmark, the Czech Republic and even Iceland - to want to join the "euro zone". At the same time the criteria of the Stability Pact - as you said - have exploded and in the majority of countries the budget deficits have already exceeded the fateful 3 per cent limit, or will exceed it in

2009. David Mc Williams, an Irish economist who was a leading executive of the Swiss bank UBS, even went so far as to write, in connection with the Irish economy: "Either we declare ourselves unable to pay our debts, or else we pull out of the euro. (...) And the same thing could happen to Spain, Italy or Greece" (Daily Telegraph, January 19, 2009). Is the euro zone in danger of breaking up under the blows of the crisis or, on the contrary, could the euro emerge reinforced as a reserve currency, through the creation of a kind of European Treasury Secretariat? In that case, what would be the price that the bourgeoisie would try to make the workers pay?

François Sabado: I do not believe that there is a risk of the break-up of the euro zone. The euro has, all the same, made it possible to hold up in the face of the crisis. The problem now, faced with this crisis, will be the questions of solvency or liquidity. From this point of view the international economic arsenal which is in the process of being set up following on the meeting of the G20, with in particular the role of the IMF as a central element, is aimed at saving countries which are in danger of collapsing. And doing so with a fairly clear calculation of a policy combined with re-launching inflation - they have to spend money - and of reduction of the share of wages, of social budgets, of public services and a worsening of working conditions. In short, the choice will be to maintain the euro, and I have difficulty seeing Greece, Italy or Spain leaving the euro zone, because that would add to the economic crisis an enormous social and political crisis in relation not only to European construction but even to the international place of these countries. But in order to defend the euro, which nevertheless makes possible a certain European cohesion, compared to both the dollar and the Chinese yuan, the cost will be terrible, involving a combination or a succession of policies of inflation and austerity in relation to wages, public services and social budgets.

- The massive rescue of the banks and the capacity of the capitalist

states to inject hundreds of billions of euros into them have, in the space of a few days, made the arguments served up over two decades about the impossibility for the state to deal with the "deficits" of public services lose all credibility. The interventionism of the state in favour of capital has appeared in broad daylight, and everyone can see it. Neoliberal ideology has thus lost much of its legitimacy and, for want of anything better, the ideologists are unearthing Keynesianism, presented by some people as a possible rebirth of the "Welfare State". Is such a turn envisageable?

François Sabado: Keynes is back in fashion, at least in speeches -as for actions and policies, that's a different matter. We are in a situation where we are between what has already happened and what is yet to come. What has already happened, in the sense that the neoliberal model is in open crisis. Today no government any longer identifies, from the ideological point of view, with neoliberalism. They all talk about combined solutions, about the reintroduction of policies of state intervention, accompanied by an injection of social policies... But what we do not yet have, perhaps because the crisis is still being underestimated, is an alternative model.

The European bourgeoisies are tending rather to turn their collars up, to wait until the crisis passes, to hold on to the main criteria of the economic policies that they have had until now, while waiting for the economy to start up again. But it is obvious that there is more state intervention in the economy - in the rescue of the banks, the policies of industrial and financial concentration and reorganization. This is a change compared to the ultra-liberal discourse about "less and less state" of Reagan and Thatcher.

It should not be forgotten that it was the state itself which privatised and deregulated. This was a new configuration of the capitalist, bourgeois state. We should not confuse speeches and reality: there has never been "less state", but there was less of the social policies of the state, less economic and financial

regulation, with the aim of re-formatting economic and social relations. The state never disappeared. Today it is there to save the system. In no case - this is a notable difference with the reconstruction of states after the Second World War - to rebuild a "social state". There is no re-launching of public services, no re-launching of social security, no re-launching of demand according to the traditional Keynesian criteria. That is why I think that the discussion on Keynesianism doesn't have much sense.

To appreciate the Keynesian character of a policy, if we take as a point of reference the economic policy of the United States in the second half of the 1930s, or that in Europe in the post-war period; we can see that the current measures fall far short of that. Another example - we have already spoken about it a lot - is that of the tax havens and the G20. We went from a black list to a grey list, made up of those who agreed to collaborate, but it there was no eradication of tax havens. However it is a quite a simple measure: it is enough to close all the banks that are domiciled in tax havens, and to do so with an authoritative administrative intervention on the part of states. Why did that not take place? Because the tax havens are integrated into the management of the financial circuits of the multinationals. We have recently seen denunciations of three big French groups - Michelin, Elf-Total and Adidas - which had a good part of their placements in these tax havens. So if you attack the tax havens, you attack a whole part of the policies of the multinationals which recycle their capital there, which have policies of looking for tax advantages through these offshore centres and which operate in this way. This is a concrete example of the interpenetration between industrial and financial capitalism. It is because there is such interpenetration that you cannot attack financial capitalism without attacking the hard core of the multinationals, the capitalist system, in other words the search for maximum profit. We can really see there the limits of all the proclaimed intentions or declarations about this or that turn in economic policy. There is a limit which is fixed by the type of

relations built up by capitalism over the course of the last thirty years.

Finally, although there were the theories of Keynes, we have to bear in mind that the choices of the economic policies of governments were never the result of ideological debates or theoretical constructions. It was power struggles which imposed political changes. And let us never forget that the real "Keynesian" re-launch took place, unfortunately, following on the terrible destruction of value that had taken place and the production of goods for the war, that it was a question of reconstruction, and what is more, of reconstruction on the basis of the arms industry.

- In a recent interview (reprinted in International Viewpoint 411, April 2009), the American Marxist economist Robert Brenner insists on the fact that the policies aimed at absorbing the shock of the capitalist crisis which have been implemented since the Second World War, both the Keynesian policies of the 1950s, 60s and 70s and those based on indebtedness and financial speculation which followed, prevented the "purging by the crisis" of the surplus capacity of industrial production, thus preventing a new rise of the profitability of investments in manufacturing industry and pulling the rate of profit downwards. According to him, capitalist solutions - which means measures aimed at raising the rate of profit - to the present world crisis necessarily involve such a "purging" of surplus production capacities, in other words the liquidations on a very large scale of the least profitable industries, by mass unemployment and a significant fall in labour costs, therefore of direct and indirect wages. This would be very far from the "Welfare State" but to impose such a defeat on the working class, capital, in particular in Europe, would have to base itself on an authoritarian intervention by the state, as you in fact said. In your opinion are democratic conquests threatened?

François Sabado: First of all,

concerning the appreciation of Robert Brenner: there is a point that has to be underlined, which is that if we are talking about the surplus capacity of industrial production, where is it located? If we are talking about surplus production capacities in the imperialist centres, his thesis is well-founded, but there is an additional element to be taken into account, which is that there has been a political change of historical dimensions: the restoration of capitalism in Russia, in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and above all in China. If we base our judgement on the whole of the planet, if we take into account the so-called "emergent countries there" - in Latin America or India - with these new markets, these new territories open to capitalism, can we speak of surplus production capacity? . Moreover, this is one of the questions that is posed by China: won't the capitalist dynamics of this country be able, not to get world capitalism out of its crisis, but to contain it, to limit it. What is certain, what we have already seen, is that there is no decoupling. The crisis in the imperialist centres, given the dependence of the emergent countries on exports, has led to a fall in the rate of growth, including in China, but within certain limits, because China still has a relatively high growth rate and we can see the attempts that are being made to build a domestic market. Will that be sufficient to re-launch the economy or at least to contain the crisis?

But of course the current crisis is a massive destruction of value, we can see that in sectors like the car industry, as well as sectors that depend on it, the suppliers of industrial equipment, subcontracting, etc. We also see it in other sectors, like real estate, services... there is a massive destruction of this surplus capacity. It is taking place, with what it implies from the point of view of social attacks, because the question is: who pays for this crisis? There is unemployment; there are wage cuts, in particular, in a series of countries, in the public sector... In this situation the level of the crisis is such that the bourgeoisie is trying to contain it with a series of economic rescue measures - subsidies to the banks, measures concerning short-time working, etc. - but if the crisis deepens, and that is

one of the most probable assumptions, it can lead to much stronger attacks and that will be accompanied by authoritarian measures. Furthermore, we can see in a series of countries the rise of authoritarian, xenophobic, reactionary right-wing currents which are indeed in favour of using harsh methods. Such a policy of confrontation would inevitably be accompanied by authoritarian measures.

- The measures that capitalist institutions are taking are aimed at making the workers pay for the crisis. As you said, in a series of countries they are cutting wages, in particular in the public sector. In Ireland the government has decided to reduce by 7 per cent the wages of public sector workers, the Latvian government cut them by 15 per cent in January, in Hungary the adjustment plan envisages the suspension of the payment of the thirteenth month in the civil service... The current president of the European Central Bank, Jean-Claude Trichet, invited at the beginning of March European governments "to continue on the path of audacious budgets, in particular as regards wages in the public sector". Even though the Hungarian and Latvian governments fell faced with mobilizations against these attempts and in Ireland we saw a very strong mobilization - 120,000 demonstrators on February 21 - the measures that were decided on continue to be applied. How can the workers defend themselves against these attacks?

François Sabado: A series of the measures that have been taken constitute considerable attacks. Attacks on this level have not yet affected countries like France. The social and political situation in Europe is rather uneven.

If we take as a reference point the crisis of 1929, there is a relationship between the brutality of the crisis and the violence of the social confrontations of the time. We saw then confrontations between revolution and counter-revolution, between revolutionary movements

produced by the shock waves of the Russian revolution and counter-revolutionary movements related to the rise of Fascism and Nazism. The slow pace of deepening of the present crisis - unlike in 1929 there is no generalised collapse, the crisis is being contained with enormous social and economic costs - produces slower movements, both on the level of the attacks of capital and on the level of social resistance. Compared to the 1930s, where we had these abrupt turns and very sharp, very concentrated confrontations, today things are more "in slow motion", at less rapid rhythms. That produces a more contrasted situation. Already in certain sectors there may be fear, there may be anxiety, but we do not have situations of demoralization, of workers who are demoralized by defeats. In these first months of the economic crisis we have not had in any country a situation of working-class defeat; on the contrary we rather have social resistance, although with great unevenness. Firstly, in a series of country we are seeing social and political polarizations: on the one hand social resistance, people who engage in struggles, on the other hand there is a rise of reactionary, xenophobic and racist currents. In Britain with reactions in certain strikes around the theme of "British jobs for British workers", in Italy, with the very particular authoritarian government of Berlusconi, who was helped by the rise of the Northern League and of xenophobic nationalist currents... and we can have in certain countries a rise of fascist or para-fascist organizations. There is no mechanical relationship between economic crisis, class struggle and radicality, things are more complicated than that.

Now in a series of country there have been important strikes, days of action, there were the explosions of Greek youth at the end of 2008 and also big mobilizations - at the beginning of the year in Portugal and in Italy, with also the days of action in France, of which the last three were important... I think that the French situation remains rather exceptional, on the level of radicality, of social force, but it is part of an overall situation where workers have a capacity for resistance, linked to social systems which, even though they have been to a considerable

degree dismantled, remain a quite significant safety net, and there is a series of conquests of the workers' movement, institutional and organisational, which means that there are elements of resistance. The key question is how, around an emergency programme - centred on the defence of jobs, banning of lay-offs, wages, the defence of public services - to unite millions of workers, the unemployed and young people, in order to inflict sufficient retreats on the governments on these questions, in other words to impose a series of emergency measures. Whether that will be possible remains an open question, we will see in the coming months. In any case that is the first step: to unite around an emergency programme that is social, democratic and also ecological, because all these questions are bound together, faced with the crisis.

- How is social democracy reacting?

François Sabado: The crisis overdetermines all of European politics today. It will provoke changes and perhaps upheavals in the situation of the Left and the workers' movement. But the policy of social democracy remains in its social-liberal framework. The social democratic leaders, like the leaders of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), generally supported the rescue plans for the banks, while considering them insufficient and asking for guarantees from the banks. Generally, they use references to Keynesian policies, especially when they are in opposition, in order to incorporate them into neoliberal policies. But it even happens that people like Antony Giddens, the theorist of the "third way", beloved of Tony Blair, reject the theses of Keynes reject which, according to him, have become null and void with capitalist globalisation. In short, in order to manoeuvre and resist in the face of the crisis, the socialists can "give a left twist" to their positions. But their basic positions, synthesized in the Manifesto of the Party of European Socialists (PES), confirm their support for the type of European construction that has been deployed over the last couple of decades, in particular with the European treaties, especially the

latest one to date, the Treaty of Lisbon.

The socialist stimulus programmes, presented by the Dane Rasmussen, president of the PES, remain hazy. They can be summarized as follows: increase in investment, support for existing jobs, paying attention to the social costs of the crisis, solidarity with those who are in difficult situations, regulation of finance. But they remain within the framework of the results of the five European Councils of Heads of State which have met since the summer of 2008. They are characterized by a series of dead ends: on public services, the European minimum wage, the harmonization of social rights, measures to block plans for lay-offs. It should be said that the French Socialist Party, although this is not much publicised, only demands an increase in the minimum wage of 3 per cent, in other words a monthly increase of 30 euros net, whereas the workers of Guadeloupe and Martinique obtained an increase of 200 euros. So the French Socialists are a long way short of that. The European social democratic parties in fact differentiate themselves from the European plans by criticizing their insufficient scale and their projected rhythms but not their finalities or their objectives. In fact their reference point today is Obama's stimulus programme. Their policy is one of exerting pressure on European governments so that they support the proposals of the IMF. And the leaders of the ETUC joined the PES in their criticism of the European stimulus programmes: insufficient scale and not enough financing. However, stimulus programmes which do not reorganize banks into a unified public service under popular control, which do not propose to undo privatizations, which do not re-launch public services, which do not radically call into question the existing treaties, in short this whole policy, which accepts the present distribution of wealth, which accepts the present relationship between wages and profits, which does not call into question the structure of property, may temporarily improve the situation of this or that sector of the working class, but it will not settle either the crisis or its effects in the main European countries.

- How do you explain this alignment of social democracy, even when it is in opposition?

François Sabado: The absence of an alternative of the PES to the policies decided by the European governments, the European Commission, the European Union, is related to historical, structural, modifications of social democracy. Over the last two or three decades we have seen a very high level of integration of the leading layers of social democracy, of the social democratic apparatuses, on the trade-union as well as the political level, into the type of capitalism that has characterised Europe for thirty years. A very strong integration of the social democratic leaders at the highest echelons of the state into the political, financial and economic elites. With the passage from traditional social democracy to social-liberalism, these leaders are more sensitive to the policies and decisions of the ruling classes and the elites of these ruling classes than to the interests of the trade-union bureaucracy or even to those of the bureaucracies of the social systems, as they had been in the post-war period, up until the 1960s. This is a change of the centre of gravity of the social democratic apparatuses. Their proposals do not even amount to a radical Keynesianism, just a call for including small amounts of Keynesianism, ersatz Keynesianism, in liberal policies. This is related to the socio-economic dependence of their apparatuses, political as well as trade-union, on the type of capitalism that has modelled European societies over the course of recent decades.

That does not mean to say that the social democrats have become traditional bourgeois parties, although in certain countries the process has gone very far. The evolution of the communist parties into formations linked to the Second International, then into the Democratic Party in Italy, is related to this process. If there were substantial alliances between social democracy in crisis and parties of the centre, it is obvious that the process could be greatly reinforced. The crisis is revealing even more this structural change in social democracy. Whereas we might have thought that

towards liberalism it could have adopted a framework of traditional Keynesianism, it has been seen that the ruptures are limited and that its left turns were quite limited. Although modifications of the situation can still push this or that sector to have such and such a policy, because the political relationships with the history of social democracy, in France for example or in the countries of Northern Europe, which have a social democratic tradition, means that we are not dealing with traditional bourgeois parties.

- Do you think that the parties situated to the left of social democracy, for example those regrouped within the European Left Party, can appear as an alternative to social democracy?

In France, for example, both the Communist Party and the Left Party accuse social democracy of having a double discourse, on the one hand loudly denouncing Sarkozy and on the other accepting the framework of the Treaty of Lisbon. We can turn this criticism against these same Communist parties and various left parties, because on the one hand there are quite radical declarations, for example on wages or lay-offs in companies making a profit, because these are demands that they have taken up, but on the other hand they always keep their politics within the framework of political, electoral and institutional agreements with the social democratic parties. The key question for all the left reformist parties in Europe is that they have radical demands, but that their existence is subordinated to their place in democratic parliamentary or quasi-parliamentary institutions, and that is what determines all the rest. And to be in these institutions, to have elected representatives, they conclude agreements which imply disavowing or watering down their radical demands. So they keep their demands for electoral campaigns and when they get down to the serious business, governing at various levels, they take part in coalitions with the social democrats and they apply the policy of their allies. Their force of "transformation" is historically and politically limited by their electoral strategy, their strategy of alliances.

There can be some room for manoeuvre, as long as these parties do not have to take on governmental or quasi-governmental responsibilities, but that is quite rare, because even when they are not in the national government, they now nevertheless, with the way political institutions function in the principal countries of Europe, in particular on the level of regions and departments or the equivalent, have responsibilities for administering affairs with the social democratic parties.

- In April, meeting in Strasbourg the day before the demonstration against NATO, the European anti-capitalist left adopted a social and democratic emergency plan. What are the principal tactical and strategic differences between the European anti-capitalists and the European Left Party?

François Sabado: I believe that the first point to be taken into account is that something important happened at this meeting in Strasbourg, something which is the expression of a deeper process: the combination of the crisis, of social resistance and of the rightward evolution of the social democratic parties creates a space for all the forces of the radical left, in the broad sense. In this space there is a political struggle between the consistent anti-capitalists and forces which, as I said before, have a policy of combining on the one hand programmes which can appear as posing demands, and on the other their policy with respect to social democracy. The key question today in Europe is the attitude adopted in relation to the processes of social transformation, to the questions of government and power: do you situate yourself in the framework of alternating governments or of a political alternative? The European Left Party, essentially composed of the Communist parties, are on a logic of government and of seeking agreements with the social democrats to govern together. The anti-capitalists are on an independent position. That does not mean that they reject any governmental perspective, on the contrary, anti-capitalists want to change things, therefore they want their ideas to triumph, they want these ideas to come to power, but that

implies social, economic and constitutional transformations. That implies new workers' governments, based on new institutions precisely linked to social crises, to processes of self-organization, of exceptional mobilizations of the workers and the peoples of Europe. And not agreeing to govern within the framework of respecting capitalist and liberal policies. So this is a key question which separates for example the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and Die Linke, which are the two main organizations who represent different political lines in Europe. Die Linke is the product of two elements: the radicalisation in West Germany of sections of social democracy, of the trade union movement and of youth, and on the other hand the mutation of the former ruling party of East Germany into a left reformist formation. In East Germany in particular there is a very strong tradition of being the ruling party, which today leads Die Linke to govern Berlin, in particular, along with social democracy. This is a profile, an orientation, a fundamental strategic choice of a programmatic nature, which consists of limiting its policies to the horizon of a return to the Welfare State, of a return to certain equilibriums of what they call the "social market economy". We have another perspective, of rebuilding the workers' movement and of building the social movements with a perspective of a rupture with capitalism. Today that means understanding that what is at stake is to build something new in Europe. That implies very clear independence with respect to the old leaderships of the traditional Left which has been incorporated into the traditional game of institutional politics.

In Strasbourg what was important was that all the significant forces of the anti-capitalist left in Europe were present, with the exception of the

currents of the left opposition in Germany - there were the comrades of the isl and the RSB, two revolutionary organizations, but there was not the main part of the left currents in Die Linke and of the extra-parliamentary left. But all the others were there: the Portuguese Left Bloc, the Polish Party of Labour, Syriza and Entarsia from Greece, the British revolutionary left - the SWP and the SP, the Socialist Party of Sweden... and a whole series of other organizations. So we were able to advance towards an action programme, a social democratic and ecological emergency programme, and especially we were able to reaffirm an independent political perspective with respect to social democracy. There are forces within the European anti-capitalist left which are also in the European Left Party, because of their history, because of the history of the different countries, the level of the class struggle in these countries, and also because of political choices - which can be discussed and which are debatable - but overall, all the forces which were present in Strasbourg are on an orientation of rejection of any participation in governments with social-liberalism, with social democracy. It is very important that there is this type of regroupment in Europe. Now the question is how we continue on the level of action - in Strasbourg we took part in a common demonstration and we discussed joint initiatives; on the level of discussions, I think that the question of the crisis will be a key issue and it will be necessary to regularly check one another's points of view. In Strasbourg, for example, there were two important discussions: on international policies, in relation to NATO and to military questions and, especially, about the economic situation and how each organisation is developing an orientation in relation to this crisis. And then there is a very important thing, which is that there

are different experiences in different countries, and that has implications on how we formulate demands, on the political relations in each country, on the practical experiences of struggles, in short there was a discussion from which we all learned a lot. And an important element confirming that is that for the first time on this level, it seems to me, with the European elections we have quite a high level of cooperation between the organizations. For example the NPA, with Olivier Besancenot, will take initiatives along with the Left Bloc in Portugal, with the Anti-capitalist Left in Spain - which is standing in an election for the first time and was able to obtain more than 18,000 signatures to be able to do so, with the comrades of the Polish Party of Labour, with the Belgian comrades who are standing a list in French-speaking Belgium and also with the comrades of Socialistiska Partiet (Socialist Party) who also have a list in Sweden. And then there are a series other common initiatives where the NPA will be represented, in Britain, in Greece, in Switzerland, even beyond the elections. So there is a situation of strengthened co-operation between various organizations. We are not yet at the stage of building a European anti-capitalist party, far from it, the organizations each have their place, their history, their activity, but we are moving towards an anti-capitalist pole on a European scale, which has its particular profile, takes its own initiatives, has its own exchanges of views. And that is something new in the political situation in Europe today.

Paris, May 4, 2009

Interview conducted by Jan Malewski

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Arab Sexualities

18 June 2009, by **Peter Drucker**



Desiring Arabs

Desiring Arabs

by Joseph A. Massad

Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
444 pages, \$35 hardcover.

When international human rights or LGBT

(lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender) groups have issued alerts lately about persecution of Middle Eastern LGBT people (most often in Iran), some anti-imperialist gays have denounced the critics for contributing to the Republicans' (and some prominent Democrats') war drive. Others, closer to the politics of Against the Current, have insisted on the importance both of opposition to U.S. intervention and of solidarity with LGBTs.

The arguments have rarely shown much knowledge of the sexual cultures of the Arab world, however, or included much analysis of how imperialism and sexuality interact. Overcoming this lack of understanding is a crucial and urgent task.

The right's reliance on arguments about women's and sexual freedom makes it increasingly difficult to be an anti-imperialist or antiracist in the United States without integrating gender and sexual analysis. Similarly, international feminist and LGBT movements are hamstrung by their relative weakness in and ignorance of the Arab world. They badly need to take up the task of linking imperialism, gender and sexuality.

This task is not made any easier by the paucity of serious scholarship on sexualities in the Arab world. Lesbian/gay studies has focused mostly on modern Europe and North America. Fortunately more work has been done in recent years on dependent-world LGBTs. But Africa and the Middle East are the parts of the world where LGBT communities are least visible and LGBT movements most harshly repressed.

This helps explain why scholarship on Arab same-sex sexualities has been relatively thin on the ground. People outside the Arab world, who often don't know it well or even speak Arabic, have published most of what exists in English. While academics in North America and Europe have many times more resources, the knowledge and experience of researchers in and from the Arab world are indispensable.

Joseph Massad, an associate professor of modern Arab politics and intellectual history at Columbia University, has now walked out boldly into this minefield with his book *Desiring Arabs*. Massad is no stranger to controversy. His earlier work concentrated on Jordan and Palestine, not exactly fields where calm, collegial discussion is the rule in U.S. academe - least of all at Columbia, a hotbed of right-wing Zionist hate campaigns of which Massad has been a prime target. Naturally and rightly, the left and defenders of Palestinian rights have come to his defense.

Desiring Arabs has brought Massad a new crowd of detractors. His criticisms of North American and European efforts to identify, defend and free gay people in Arab countries(2) have been met with a wave of accusations. An online review of *Desiring Arabs* by a staff member of *The New Republic*, after describing police torture of a Palestinian gay man in graphic detail, charged Massad with an "insidious attempt to convince the world that men like [this one] are somehow figments of the Western world's imagination."(3)

Another review by Brian Whitaker, former Middle East editor of the *London Guardian*, accused Massad of reflecting "essentially the same ideas" as the Jordanian Islamic Action Front when it denounced women's rights as an "American and Zionist" attack on the nation's "identity and values."(4) These are excerpts from the relatively nuanced attacks; other diatribes on the net have been more scurrilous.

No Homophobe

Massad is clearly no homophobe and has no sympathy with torturers or fundamentalists. On the contrary, *Desiring Arabs* is an important resource for serious students of sexualities in the Arab world. It confirms that same-sex sexual desire and behavior were widespread in Arabic literature during the centuries when Arab civilization was at its height.

Above all, the book does a service to scholarship comparable to what Kate Millett did in *Sexual Politics* or Dennis Altman in *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation*: it analyses the sexual ideologies of a wide range of 19th- and 20th-century literary works, many of them inaccessible to non-Arabic speakers. In the process Massad shows respect for and familiarity with queer theory, the dominant current today in LGBT studies.

For all its merits, however, *Desiring Arabs* has major flaws. Like many queer theorists, Massad seems more interested in literature than in reality. He leaves crucial questions about Arabs' sexual behavior and identities not only unanswered - answers admittedly hard to come by in countries where mass surveys or in-depth interviews about sexuality are rarely feasible - but largely unaddressed.

While his criticisms of activists' and academics' Eurocentrism are often justified, he seems to suggest that the international lesbian/gay rights movement is largely to blame for the persecution of people engaged in same-sex sexualities in the Middle East today. Yet his own research shows that this persecution predated international LGBT activism by many decades.

Massad rightly rejects many lesbians and gays' essentialism ("we were born this way" and "we are everywhere"). However, he does not engage seriously enough with the more

substantial scholarly work that has been done on global same-sex sexualities. As a result, he doesn't recognize that LGBT studies have not always shared the essentialist impulses of many ordinary LGBT people. On the contrary, many theorists have emphasized that same-sex sexualities have been socially constructed in the course of history, and that these sexualities were and are extraordinarily diverse in different parts of the world.

Edward Said warned in his classic book *Orientalism* against notions that "there is such a thing as a real or true Orient (Islam, Arab or whatever)" or "that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically 'different' inhabitants." (5) Massad describes Said not only as "a mentor, a friend, and a colleague" but also as "a surrogate father" (xiii) and seems to heed Said's warning when he writes, "My point here is not to argue in favor of non-Western nativism and of some blissful existence prior to the epistemic, ethical, and political violence unleashed on the non-West." (42)

Nonetheless, his book tends to idealize the indigenous sexual culture of the Arab world. He repeatedly dismisses signs of lesbian or gay life in the Arab world as outside impositions, fabrications or shameful attempts by Arabs to mimic Europeans or Americans. He fails to come to terms with the reality that the Arab world too is increasingly part of a global capitalist order and that its contemporary sexualities are likely to be hybrid and diverse.

Beyond Gay and Straight

On one central issue Massad is right: his insistence that traditional Arab sexualities were not based on a "hetero-homo binary." (40) This will be a difficult point for many U.S. readers to grasp, given how deeply the division between "gay people" and "straight people" has shaped our common-sense understanding of sexuality. Most scholars agree, however, that this binary conception is a fairly recent development, and that there have been innumerable other

ways of conceiving sexuality.

Massad's reading of the Koran, later Islamic religious texts and medieval Arabic love poetry confirms what other historians have found: that Arabs in the first centuries of Islam simply did not classify human beings in this way. It is less clear how much continuity there is between this traditional Arab sexual culture and the sexual culture of the contemporary Arab world.

Despite Massad's skepticism, there are self-identified lesbians and gay men in the Arab world today. But distinctive lesbian/gay identities as they exist in North America and Europe do seem less visible in Arab countries than in most other regions. Many Arab men who have sex with other men do not identify at all as gay, transgender or even bisexual. Some of them fuck transgender or other males, concealing this sex from public knowledge; others simply have discrete sex with one another. (6)

As Massad points out, this means that the tactics that LGBT movements have used elsewhere cannot simply be imported unchanged into the Arab world. For example, in a culture where people can engage in same-sex sexual behavior without necessarily identifying as gay, it is doubtful what it means to call on them to "come out." People whose lives include both same-sex and different-sex relationships have to be free to decide when, where and how they speak up.

Massad has strong arguments for rejecting the insistence that desire is "embedded in the body [and] can only be freed in an individualist project of liberation through public confessionals" (365) - though even in the Arab world, transgender people and others do sometimes feel that their desire is embedded in their bodies.

The scholars in LGBT studies who laid the foundations for a social constructionist approach should be sensitive to the pitfalls of binary thinking. Yet as Massad shows, when it comes to the Arab world some of the most distinguished theorists can succumb to Eurocentrism. This Eurocentrism contradicts the main

thrust of the history of sexuality since the 1970s. Even worse, it ignores the key lesson of 20th-century liberation struggles: that each oppressed people needs to find its own way to free itself through understanding and transforming its own unique social formation.

Massad is better at showing how Arab sexual cultures do not work and cannot be freed, however, than in analyzing how they do work and can be freed. There is still an enormous amount of work to be done before this question can be answered. Nonetheless, Massad could have benefited a bit more from analyses by other scholars.

Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe's anthology *Islamic Homosexualities*, for example, contains more useful insights than Massad allows in his passing, cutting reference to it. (170-71) A reader who knew the book only from Massad's comments would never guess that Roscoe and Murray denounce Eurocentrism and the tendency to tell the "history of homosexuality as a progressive, even teleological, evolution from pre-modern repression, silence, and invisibility to modern visibility and sexual freedom." They even contrast the relative uniformity of modern "Western" homosexuality to the "variety, distribution, and longevity of same-sex patterns in Islamic societies." (7)

Massad barely discusses the social relations that made up classical Arab sexual culture. For example, his account of classical Arabic poetry makes clear, as others have, that boy love was an important theme for a major Abbasid poet like Abu Nuwas. But he casts little light on the dynamics of what Murray and Roscoe call "age-differentiated homosexuality," either in classical times or in the Arab world today.

He also devotes virtually no attention to another component of Arab sexual culture: transgender. Studies have shown transgender's importance as a form of same-sex sexual expression in many parts of the underdeveloped world, including Muslim countries like Pakistan and Indonesia. There is evidence from several continents that

working-class and poor people in particular are more likely than middle-class people to engage in transgender relationships as opposed to lesbian/gay relationships.(8)

Transgender people have shown an impressive capacity for radical organizing and action, to the point of virtually taking over the World Social Forum in Mumbai in 2004. Forms of transgender have been identified in at least some Arab countries, as among the hassas of Morocco and khanith of Oman.

Yet Massad passes over the subject in virtual silence. He denounces the International Lesbian and Gay Association for saying that transvestite dancers are popular in Egypt; he comments that this was "a nineteenth-century phenomenon" and complains that time "is never factored in when the topic is Arabs and Muslims." (167) But elsewhere he mentions the popularity of female impersonators as singers in Cairo in the 1920s and '30s, and of a female impersonator on Syrian TV as late as the 1980s. (364)

Massad's snipe is one example of how he tends to substitute discussions of ideology (Is time a factor in discussing Arabs?) for discussions of reality (Is transgender still a significant phenomenon in the Arab world?).

Empire and Culture

Imperialist domination of the Arab world is increasingly politicizing sexuality. Is Massad open to sexual politics within Arab countries, or only to a defense of Arab sexual culture against imperialism? Can Arab anti-imperialists opt for solidarity with women, transgender people and youth in their own region, with all this implies for transforming the existing sexual culture? The Islamist political movements that currently have hegemony over the oppositions to U.S.-backed regimes clearly prefer the defense of tradition - as they selectively define it. But the choice remains open.

There is neither a historical nor a

logical connection between anti-imperialism and cultural nativism. The British Empire was careful not to interfere with Islamic domination of civil society in countries it ruled like Egypt and Pakistan. By contrast, Muslim Turkey's fierce resistance to colonization after the First World War and Muslim Indonesia's struggle for independence after the Second World War involved far-reaching secularization. It is no accident that Turkey and Indonesia have stronger LGBT communities and movements today than almost any Arab country.(9)

Still today in the Arab world, repressive regimes linked to imperialism use sexual repression as a cover. Many of the Arab regimes whose repression of same-sex sexuality is most notorious, like the Saudi kingdom and Egypt, are among the closest U.S. allies in the region and among the Arab countries best integrated into the neoliberal world economic order. And U.S. right-wing lip service to lesbian/gay rights is worse than useless to LGBT Arab people.

The Shiite parties, militias and gangs that dominate Iraq today are guilty of vicious repression of people engaged in same-sex sexualities, which the U.S. occupiers have hardly lifted a finger to stop. In one incident in 2007, an Iraqi LGBT activist heard Americans talking in the next room while Iraqi police were torturing him.(10)

Massad consistently assumes that the presence of lesbian/gay identities in the Arab world is a result of European and North American cultural influence. His wide-ranging analysis of 19th- and 20th-century literature does show, as he says, that "cultural production as a whole has been marshaled, consciously and unconsciously, toward ... shaming non-Europe into assimilation." (416) But he hardly tries to make a case for cultural causes of gay identity as opposed to other factors; he only occasionally puts forward a class or economic analysis.(11)

In fact, the spread of lesbian/gay identities in the dependent world probably owes less to outside cultural influences than to social causes like

mass migration to cities, more waged labor by women, higher wages, commodification of everyday life, assumption of some traditional family functions by the state, and the spread of modern medicine with its penchant for classification.(12) The relative scarcity of lesbian/gay identities in Arab countries would then be due less to weaker European and North American influence (which seems doubtful) than to factors like the region's relatively low rate of female-paid employment.

Another factor is probably what Gilbert Achcar calls "the Arab despotic exception": the fact that the United States has continued to back dictatorships in the Middle East, due to its vital economic and geopolitical interests there, rather than risk the kind of transitions to nominal democracy that it has allowed in much of Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of Asia.(13) The result has been less freedom for political and social organizing, and specifically for LGBT organizing, in the Arab world.

Repression

Massad makes clear at many points in *Desiring Arabs* that he deplores the repression of same-sex sexuality by Arab governments. What has generated most of the controversy around the book is the chapter (by far the shortest one) where he blames this repression largely on the lesbian/gay groups, human rights organizations and "discourse" that he calls the "Gay International."(14)

Speaking of the crackdown on same-sex sexual activity in Egypt following the 2001 Queen Boat raid, for example, Massad says, "The Gay International and its activities are largely responsible for the intensity of this repressive campaign." (184)

"By inciting discourse about homosexuals where none existed before, the Gay International is in fact heterosexualizing a world that is being forced to be fixed by a Western binary," he says. (188) The "sexual rights agenda ... has led to much repression and oppression in the contemporary Arab world." (375) He even says that Islamic fundamentalism

has an "unwitting alliance" with the "crusading Gay International in identifying people who practice certain forms of sex." (265)

The irony of this line of argument is that Massad provides so much evidence that hostility to same-sex sexualities in the Arab world long predated the arrival of LGBT movements. He describes a host of modern Arab attempts to deny, downplay or condemn traditional Arab openness to same-sex sexual desire.

He notes that erotic poetry focusing on youths or men "disappeared completely as a poetic genre" around the late 19th century. (35) He devotes almost 20 pages to 20th-century Arab critics' denunciation of the poet Abu Nuwas' praise of youthful male beauty. (76-94)

He describes a paradigm shift in the work of Egyptian Nobel Prize-winning author Naguib Mahfouz, from the 1947 novel *Midaq Alley*, which portrays same-sex sexuality as commonplace but public awareness of it as shameful, to the 1957 novel *Sugar Street*, which portrays male same-sex desire as an "illness." (272-90) And he shows how Arab literature since the defeat in the 1967 war with Israel has been pervaded by images of humiliating, emasculating penetration of Arab men.

Taken as a whole, this suggests a drastic, century-long transformation of Arab sexual culture, in large measure completed before the modern lesbian/gay movement was born with the 1969 Stonewall rebellion. European influence undoubtedly played some role in this transformation, as shown by colonial laws against "sodomy" still on the books in many former European colonies. Doubtless other factors, neglected by Massad, played a role as well, as in the case of modernizing, nationalist and Stalinist regimes elsewhere in the dependent world. (15) But protests by international LGBT and human rights groups have undoubtedly been more a reaction than a contributing factor.

The power of these organizations is derisible compared to that of the former colonial empires, the U.S.

military, major multinationals or the international financial institutions. Imperialist governments have shown virtually no interest in supporting them with more than an occasional press release. Arab governments may vilify these organizations in their propaganda, but Massad provides little evidence that they have had any significant effect on law or policy, even negatively.

Furthermore, while international LGBT organizations are largely European-led and often Eurocentrist in their thinking, they are far from having a unified agenda for the Arab world, as the 2001 Egyptian Queen Boat raid showed.

For example, Act Up Paris responded to the raid with a protest at the Egyptian embassy, whose slogans included a demand to "free our lovers." This slogan would hardly have been welcomed by the Egyptian defendants, who were not defending themselves as open gay men, let alone as men with European lovers.

If this were typical of the European movement, Massad's charges would be vindicated. But in fact, at the next Euromediterranean Summer University on Homosexualities, an annual LGBT gathering in Marseille, a lone representative of Act Up Paris faced a barrage of criticism from virtually every other participant in the discussion for his group's insensitivity and counterproductive tactics.

Massad's argument becomes even less plausible when he asserts that the Egyptian police "do not seek to, and cannot if they were so inclined, arrest men practicing same-sex contact but rather are pursuing those among them who identify as 'gay.'" (183) This is the opposite of the truth: the police rarely know whether the people they harass, arrest or torture identify as gay. There is hardly a law or policy on earth that uses this as a criterion for police repression.

The sequence of cause and effect is the reverse, as historians have shown: the common experience of repression can contribute to the development of transgender, gay and lesbian identities. In any case, the dominant sexual ideology that Arab states have

developed over the past century has increasingly led to repressive practices against same-sex sexual behavior, and did so before lesbian or gay identities had begun to emerge. Clearly the identities are not the cause of the repression.

Love and Solidarity

In at least a few Arab countries, some people engaging in same-sex sexuality have begun responding to repression by assuming LGBT identities and even organizing LGBT groups. The Lebanese group Helem is one example. Interestingly, it suspended its LGBT advocacy in 2006 to turn its headquarters over to relief efforts for victims of the Israeli invasion, working with a range of other Lebanese organizations. (16)

Among Palestinians in the West Bank and pre-1967 Israel, the LGBTQ [the Q here stands for "Questioning" - ed.] group Al-Qaws has been working since 2001 "not simply to mimic an existing model of queer identity/community, but to provide a social space for LGBTQ Palestinians to independently engage in a dialogue about our own visions and ideals for a community." (17)

As Arabs engaged in same-sex sexualities begin adopting LGBT identities, they may form more lasting relationships and speak more of their love for one another. This would cast doubt on Massad's assertion that in the Arab world the goal of sexual desire is "consummation and not romantic love." (363) (18)

Contrary to conservative ideologies now gaining ground, sexuality does not require any justification in romantic love or in stable partnerships sanctified by marriage. Pleasure is its own sufficient justification. But neither should same-sex desire necessarily be limited to episodic gratification "on the side." Love too has its rights.

No one can know for sure if, when, how or in what forms Arab LGBT communities and movements will develop. (19) In particular, no one knows for sure what proportion of Arabs who have sex with people of the

same sex identity as lesbian, gay, transgender or bisexual. But this is no argument against solidarity with them. Nor is it an argument for privileging those who have LGBT identities, as international movements tend to do - or those who have no such identities, as Massad does.

In the age of neoliberal globalization, power relations between colonizers - witting or unwitting - and colonized cut across LGBT movements, anti-imperialist movements and for that matter the Marxist left. The fact remains that all the victims of oppression today badly need allies in the imperialist countries, who have access to far greater resources.

Cultural sensitivity and respect for self-determination are essential. But neither should stand in the way of solidarity with the victims of repression by regimes whose vicious sexual puritanism often goes hand in hand with their subservience to an imperial agenda.

Notes

1. Older readers may remember Midge Decter's notorious article "The Boys on the Beach," *Commentary* vol. 70 no. 3 (Sept. 1980).

2. The chapter of *Desiring Arabs* that sets out Massad's criticisms of international LGBT groups is based on his article "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World," *Public Culture* vol. 14 no. 2 (Spring 2002).

3. James Kirchick, "Queer Theory: The Columbia Professor Who Also Doesn't Think Gay People Exist in the Middle East," *The New Republic* online (www.tnr.com), Oct. 15, 2007.

4. Brian Whitaker, "Distorting Desire," *Gay City News*, Sept. 13, 2007.

5. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, 322.

6. According to Iwan van Grinsven, *Limits to Desire: Obstacles to Gay Male Identity and Subculture Formation in Cairo, Egypt*, Nijmegen: n.p. 1997, 37, some Egyptian men speak of 'face-to-face' sex, meaning that anal intercourse is avoided so as to evade issues of masculine/feminine or active/passive roles.

7. Will Roscoe and Stephen O. Murray, "Introduction," in Murray and Roscoe, *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History and Literature*, New York: New York University Press, 1997, 4-6. Roscoe also gives an interesting account of the sexual culture of pre-Islamic Arabia, and of the emergence of the sexual culture of classic Arab civilization from the interaction between this pre-Islamic culture and sexual cultures of the Persian, Byzantine and Western Roman empires that the Arabs conquered: Roscoe, "Precursors of Islamic Male Homosexualities," in *Islamic Homosexualities*, 55-86. Given the influence of pre-rabbinical Judaism on Islam, the sexual culture of pre-Islamic Arabia might be illuminated by a comparison with the sexual culture of the ancient Hebrews: see Daniel Boyarin, "Are There Any Jews in 'The History of Sexuality'?" *Journal for the History of Sexuality* vol. 5 no. 3 (1995), 333-55.

8. I summarize the evidence in my "Introduction: Remapping Sexualities," in Peter Drucker (ed.), *Different Rainbows*, London: GMP, 2000, 24-25.

9. See my "Introduction" to *Different Rainbows*, 29.

10. Doug Ireland, "Iraqi Gay Activist Arrested, Tortured," *Gay City News*, May 3, 2007.

11. In an otherwise vigorous defense of *Desiring Arabs*, Yoshie Furuhashi has commented that Massad has "relatively little to say about the role [of] the emergence and development of the capitalist mode of production, with its tendency to proletarianize,

urbanize, atomize, and commodify people, in the emergence and development of [a] discourse of sexuality under capitalist modernity." (<http://montages.blogspot.com/2007/10/desiring-arabs.html>)

12. I make this argument at length in the "Introduction" to *Different Rainbows*, 14-25.

13. Gilbert Achcar, "The Arab Despotism Exception," in *Eastern Cauldron: Islam, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq in a Marxist Mirror*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004, 69-74.

14. On its face, the term "Gay International" suggests an analogy with the Communist International. It seems like a curious choice of epithet for someone like Massad, who seems in some sense to identify with the left.

15. See my "Introduction" to *Different Rainbows*, 31-32, 34.

16. www.helem.net; "Lebanese gay group helping refugee relief," *Pink News*, September 1, 2006.

17. Haneen Maikey, "Rainbow over Palestine," guardian.co.uk, March 10, 2008.

18. Massad's assertion may not do justice even to the classical Arab conception of sexual desire. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, 27, notes for example, "In Islamic Sufi literature homosexual eroticism was a major metaphorical expression of the spiritual relationship between God and man."

19. In my conclusion, "Reinventing Liberation," to *Different Rainbows*, 217-20, I suggest that LGBT movements in the dependent world are likely to often be alliances of a range of groups with distinctive sexualities and identities.
back to text

ATC 137, November-December 2008

Peter Gowan - an appreciation

17 June 2009, by **Phil Hearse**

But he was far from a detached academic; he was an utterly partisan, determined and vitriolic critic of American imperialism. For him, the central obstacle to world progress and social justice were what he called the "Dollar-Wall St regime". After 9/11 Peter was in demand around the world to explain why the US had gone to war and what the 'axis of evil' and 'war on terror' were all about. He claimed American imperialism had made a 'Faustian bid' for world dominance, and that military violence was central to that bid. He was also convinced that it could not succeed; that ultimately world domination was impossible by a single imperialist power and that the United States was 'triumphing towards disaster'.

Peter Gowan joined the International Marxist Group (IMG) in 1968 and more or less immediately came into its central leadership. In 1969-70 he was central to the organisation's youth work, particularly its intervention into the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation. He worked closely with established IMG leaders like Pat Jordan and Ernest Tate; but also with two new recruits, Tariq Ali and John Weal, in the 'united front' far left newspaper *The Black Dwarf*, a journal particularly well adapted for the student and cultural revolution of the time. Peter was involved in the split in the paper's editorial board, which saw the likes of Adrian Mitchell, Anthony Barnett and Fred Halliday assume control of the paper while the IMG-led majority produced in 1970 *The Red Mole*.

The first issue came out in the middle of the June 1970 wave of student sit-ins against the universities' practice of keeping secret files on students and their deepening links with private business (1). IMG students were central to this protest in a number of universities including Warwick and York.

At the start of the new decade however the IMG was struggling to establish its identity and role as the anti-Vietnam war movement and student upsurge were giving way to an increasingly working class, union-centred, rebellion. A small organisation, with a weak leadership and few working class roots met its destiny in the form of a faction organised by John Ross in Oxford, which quickly pushed aside the old leadership. At first Peter, like Tariq Ali, was convinced by Ross's blend of 'turning to the working class' and programmatic, propagandistic ultimatism, but by 1973 had broken with the Ross leadership to link up again with Pat Jordan, at first on the (self-evident) basis that the urgent need of working class struggle was to fight to kick out the Tories and not 'centralise the struggle against the state'. Peter said that discussions with Pierre Rousset, a leader of the French Ligue Communiste, had been decisive in his reassessment of Ross's passive propagandism.

Peter Gowan led more or less the same minority throughout the 1970s, as the IMG interpreted democratic rights in revolutionary organisations as meaning that having half a dozens internal factions was a virtue, rather than - if persisted in over a long period - a massively demoralising and destabilising factor.

By the early 1980s Peter was leading a faction that urged entry into the Labour Party, but was also moving towards an academic career and deepening his interest in Eastern Europe. Around this time, at the 1982 conference, he refused to be on the national leadership again, and effectively drifted out of the organisation. This was also the period when Tariq Ali also left the IMG.

In this period the IMG was trying to put into a practice a hare-brained tactic devised by the American SWP,

the so-called 'turn to industry' - sending young ex-students into anything that smacked of manual industry. Sections of the Ross leadership moved sharply to break up the organisation's growing base in white collar unions, and send white collar fraction leaderships to meet its conception of the 'proletariat' (often in un-unionised sweatshops) (2).

Backing this tactic was part of an attempted rapprochement by sections of the Fourth International leadership with the Jack Barnes-led leadership of the US SWP, who had built their own tendency in Britain. When Ernest Mandel appeared in front of the IMG central committee to explain he was supporting the 'turn to industry' because of his 'sincere convictions', Peter shocked him by denouncing 'this anti-Trotskyist turn'.

Peter also rejected the increasingly improbable notion that there was something 'anti-imperialist' in the leadership of the Iranian regime, insisting that a central part of the upsurge that threw out the Shah had been an urban-based reactionary mass movement, with nothing progressive about it ("as if we haven't seen reactionary mass movements challenge states before").

Being centrally involved in permanent factional mayhem and an organisation clearly going crazy was too much for Peter, just as much as for Tariq Ali.

Outside an organised far left group Peter's energies found three inter-related focuses. He had been a central the IMG's East European commission, that had worked with other sections of the FI to make links with, and give material aid to, Marxist and other radical dissidents in the eastern bloc. From the late 1970s Peter assembled a talented team around the journal *Labour Focus* on Eastern Europe, designed to build broader support in the left and labour movements for

anti-Stalinist activism and organisation in the Stalinist states. The magazine lifted the curtain on the then largely unknown developments in the eastern bloc and provided a platform for the emerging dissident movements. While other talented Marxists like Patrick Camiller, Sheila Malone, Andy Kilmister, Günther Minnerup and Gus Fagan worked on the magazine, it was around Peter Gowan's substantial interventions that the magazine developed its ideological position and analysis.

Second, Peter became a lecturer in European Studies at North London Polytechnic, later part of London Metropolitan University. This gave him the stimulus and motivation to develop an analysis of the European Union in the 1980s, and its relationship with the United States and an increasingly crisis-racked eastern bloc. Peter saw the EU as an undemocratic bosses' club, which took decision in the Council of Ministers and was deliberately designed to be outside democratic control of the European workers - a perspective now widespread in the European Left.

Third, Peter became a member of the New Left Review editorial board, working alongside other ex-IMG members like Robin Blackburn, Tariq Ali and (until the early 1990s) Quentin Hoare and Branka Magas. It was his repeated interventions in the NLR that made him well known world-wide amongst the radical intelligentsia and the Left. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the eastern bloc, and with the first Gulf War in 1991 his international focus rebalanced, giving more emphasis to explaining and charting American imperialism. He engaged in a deep study of the roots of US expansionism and was greatly influenced by the work of one of the

foremost 'revisionist' US historians, Gabriel Kolko - whose main theorisation of the rise of US imperialism is set out in his *Main Currents of American History*.

Peter used Labour Focus to write a major piece opposing the US-led assault on Serbia, the so-called 'Kosovo war', in 1999. He campaigned with crusading zeal against the 'humanitarian interventionism' espoused by many liberals and former leftists - and used as a cover by many for supporting the second Iraq war.

Peter's theory of the 'Dollar-Wall St regime' eventually led to the publication by Verso of 'Global Gamble - America's Faustian Bid for World Leadership' (1999). After 9/11 he was in his element, one week in Brazil, the next in the US, then in China. He waged his own intellectual jihad against the 'war on terror' and American imperial power. He was in his element again at the 2004 European Social Forum in London where, together with Perry Anderson, he clinically dissected and denounced US imperial power to an audience of hundreds of young people from across the continent.

There will doubtless be many memoirs of Peter from different perspectives. From the viewpoint of people he knew him from the early IMG years, it was perhaps a pity that the descent of that organisation into craziness prevented him from being a more long-term leader of a revolutionary organisation. In a bigger organisation with a broader political culture he could have been a long-term member of a broad leadership team. But that would have meant him living in another country, at another time, with another culture altogether.

But Peter did maintain links with the organised far left, particularly the International Socialist Group (later Socialist Resistance) and the Fourth International more generally. He strongly influenced the ISG's international politics; and he frequently spoke at meetings organised by FI supporters and their allies in the radical left.

As it was he became one of the most important Marxist intellectuals writing in the English language. His writing was invariably original, always sparkling with ideas and insights - as was his speaking. Peter was utterly charismatic and had an ability to inspire people and excite them with his creative Marxism. He oozed personal charm, a quality not over-abundant in the British far left. He was completely intransigent ideologically, and was unphased about telling anyone, no matter how rarified the company, that he was a Marxist and a Trotskyist.

Peter Gowan inspired hundreds of people in many countries with the ideas of Marxism, applied to the central questions of our time. It is awful that such a brilliant man has died in his early 60s.

Notes

1) Recounted in the Penguin book of the time, Edward Thompson's *Warwick University Limited*.

2) A tactic which reached its nadir in the 'Cowley Moles' saga, when MI5 and the British Leyland management caught the organisation sending more than a dozen young people into the Cowley (Oxford) car factory.

Phil Hearse 15/06/09

First published at Marxsite

No future without a political solution

9 June 2009, by **Danielle Sabai**

Under the pretext of a "war on terror" the army has without respite bombed the area of a few square kilometres in which the Tigers have sought refuge, together with some tens of thousands of hungry and terrorised civilians. Although the government is preventing non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from bringing aid to the civilians trapped in the combat zone and has also excluded journalists, testimonies agree in denouncing a war which pays little attention to international conventions. The army has from the beginning of the operation bombed hospitals, schools and even its own self-proclaimed safety zone. The number of deaths has been more than 6,500 since the beginning of the year and there are at least 15,000 wounded [5]. Figures which will unhappily increase since the Rajapaksa government rejects any ceasefire which would allow the organisation of aid to civilians trapped in the combat zone and the tens of thousands of refugees dispatched to camps by the authorities. The refugees are forbidden to move and no contact with the exterior is authorised.

Numerous accounts from civilians escaping from the zone of confrontation give the impression that the Tamil Tigers has for their part prevented civilians from fleeing the combat zones, to use them as human shields and put pressure on the government to obtain a ceasefire.

The origins of the conflict

Sri Lanka offers a striking example of the political, economic and religious problems left by colonisation [6]. An examination of the colonial history of Sri Lanka throws light on the current civil war in its ethnic dimension but also in terms of its economic and social roots.

Before the arrival of the first colonists, the island was divided into three distinct kingdoms, a Tamil one in the north and two Sinhalese kingdoms in the south. The Sinhalese, Buddhist by religion, formed and still form the biggest community on the island. At the last census of population in 1981,

they represented around 75% of the total population. The Sri Lankan Tamils (18%), who originate from the island are mostly Hindu but around 7% are Sunni Muslims and 3% are Christian. To this Tamil community originally from the island the British added more than a million Tamils, called plantation Tamils, who came from Tamil Nadu (India) to work in the plantations in the centre of the island.

Whereas the Tamil and Sinhalese communities had their own histories, cultures, languages, religions, one of the main political measures taken by the British colonists was to regroup in the same administrative structure kingdoms which until then had developed separately. The conflicts created between the different religions, the Buddhist religion in particular, and the Western culture and the Christian religions imposed by the successive colonial powers have contributed to the creation of the political problems which still face Sri Lanka today.

From the beginning of the 16th century, under the Portuguese, Dutch and then British, the Christian religions - Catholic then Protestant - were introduced. The practitioners benefited from privileged relations with the colonial regime. Although not representing more than 10% of the population during the British reign and in the first years of independence, Christians made up a significant part of the elite and the rich of the country.

Meanwhile, the practice of the Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim religions was restricted and indeed penalised. During British colonisation, under the pressure of Protestant missionaries, the traditional links between the Buddhist religion and the Sinhalese state of the kingdom of Kandy were broken. In reaction, with the aim of protecting and supporting Buddhist values but also the traditional Sinhalese cultures, Buddhist activists carried out regular agitation against the colonial power. Without going back to the previous situation, the latter found it more practical to grant the Buddhist religion advantages, if not a special position.

After independence, the demands did not weaken. The Sinhalese nationalists

considered that the Sinhalese population had suffered during colonisation to the benefit of the Christian minority and the Tamils favoured by the British. It is true that after independence, the inequalities between the Tamil community from the north of the island and the Sinhalese community in terms of education, income and jobs were significant. The educational system was more developed in the northern region where the Tamils were in the majority. Their percentage in the universities and the higher professions was much superior to their proportion in society. For example in 1970, 49% of medical students, 48% of engineering students and 40% of science students were Tamil. As "compensation" Sinhalese nationalists demanded a dominant position in post-colonial society.

The parliamentary arithmetic would give them this possibility of dominating the country's political bodies.

From the first year of independence, the Senanayake government deprived 1 million plantation Tamils of their voting rights and sent them back to India so as to empty a reservoir of votes for the workers' parties [7]. The conflict got bitterer with the election of Solomon Bandaranāike in 1956 and the arrival in power of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The latter imposed Sinhalese as the sole official language. During the 1970s two new Constitutions would allow the consolidation of power in the hands of the Sinhalese élite.

Rather than putting in place measures of positive discrimination with a view to re-establishing a greater equality between communities, the government imposed discriminatory measures towards minorities. For example in the area of education, the solution adopted by the government in the 1970s was to impose norms of access to the university which were damaging to the Tamil community [8].

Economic development in the island has also been marked by its colonial heritage. During independence on February 4, 1948, Ceylon (the official name of the island until 1972) had a rather prosperous economy compared

to most of its neighbours. It rested essentially on a system of big plantations in sectors oriented towards export but strongly dependent on market fluctuations. These plantations were in their majority possessed by Sinhalese proprietors. The island was deprived of industry (outside of the processing of tea, rubber and coconuts for export) and depended on imports, notably of rice, for its food. The country's infrastructures were well developed and the indicators of human development (death rates, infant mortality, life expectancy, rate of adult literacy) were clearly higher than those of other Asian countries. That made Ceylon a rather promising country in terms of economic development. The Sinhalese elites who would lead the first government of independence in 1948 saw no reason to overthrow this economic structure inherited from the colonial era.

The question of economic development and increased growth took a new dimension in the 1960s. The fall in profitability of the plantations combined with the problem of food self sufficiency led the state to agree priority to the redistribution to the peasants of the unexploited lands that it possessed. This policy of redistribution, begun in the 1930s and pursued after independence, sought to ensure the food security of Sri Lanka. It was reflected by smaller plots to the point that only subsistence agriculture was possible. It did however allow rice imports to be ended and made Sri Lanka independent of imports for its food supply.

Significant structural changes in the plantation system were attempted, in particular during the periods 1956-64 and 1970-77. Meanwhile, the development of industry was encouraged from the 1960s onwards. However, the continual sudden political and economic changes did not favour economic growth.

From independence, the system of social protection had been strongly developed. The increase in the number of young people due to a high birth rate between the 1940s and 1970s was accompanied by an extension of social measures, in particular free

education including at university level. In a stagnant economy, the effects of these social policies were unhappily not those expected. The rate of unemployment increased to reach nearly 20% by the late 1990s.

Young graduates were particularly affected. When education was the sole means of social mobility for young people from the lower social layers and in particular the peasantry, young graduates were excluded from work on a massive scale. Sri Lankan youth who benefited from the educational policies were in their majority Sinhalese who believed that they had been marginalised during the colonial period. They entered directly into competition with educated Tamil youth in their search for rare jobs and opportunities. In this economic context it was impossible to satisfy this constantly growing social demand. That led to the emergence of a revolutionary movement of Sinhalese youth in the south, with xenophobic tendencies, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and to the radicalisation of Tamil youth penalised in their access to university. The Sri Lankan government responded with fierce repression.

The emergence of a separatist movement

In the thirty years following independence [9], the government pursued a policy seeking to secure its domination. Ethnic minorities were marginalised politically, economically and culturally. A policy of ethnic colonisation, mainly in the east of the island with a large Tamil Muslim community, was followed with a view to overthrowing the traditional equilibria between the different communities.

By peaceful means and through parliamentary votes the Tamils would demand first equal rights inside a united state and would then launch a campaign for a federal solution.

The response was a strengthening of the central state, military repression and the organisation of pogroms

against the Tamil community orchestrated by groups of Sinhalese extremists supported by the government. This situation, coupled with the absence of economic perspectives, led a section of the Tamil youth to build militant groups whose modes of action broke clearly with decades of fruitless negotiations. Armed groups like the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the Eelam Revolutionary Organization (EROS) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were founded during the 1970s. The EPRLF, EROS and PLOTE were organisations of Marxist inspiration. However the LTTE has never really claimed any Communist affiliation. The objectives it set out have always been the struggle for the independence of Tamil Eelam and the recognition of a separate Tamil state. Their goal is the completion of their national liberation struggle. According to LTTE head Velupillai Prabhakaran, the objective is to establish "a society that is economically self-sufficient and self-reliant. I also want a democratic system in which the people have the right to rule themselves. And there should be economic equality among the working people." [10].

Beyond ideological references these groups were characterised by a tactic of guerrilla warfare with regard to the government. As the LTTE themselves write "the Tamil National Army also known as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were formed after the failure of many years of peaceful demonstration by Tamil leaders in order to win their freedom from the successive Sinhala majority governments, which showed no concern for the Tamil grievances. Under the leadership of Mr. Velupillai Pirabakaran, the LTTE was founded on May 5, 1976 to achieve what had become unachievable by peaceful methods in over 28 years [11].

The militarisation of the conflict was accompanied by a radicalisation of political positions. The absence of will on the part of the government to construct a multi-ethnic society respecting the rights of its minorities led to the demand for a separate Tamil

Eelam (land of the Tamils) among the educated Tamil youths of the Jaffna region.

These groups did not enjoy any great support until the massacre of July 1983. In response to an ambush by the LTTE against the army in which 13 soldiers were killed, the government organised a veritable pogrom against the Tamil community in Colombo. In some ten days, several thousand Tamils were killed, houses burnt, lands confiscated. Violence against the Tamil community took on a previously unequalled dimension. That led to a wave of immigration to the north of the country and abroad and the mass adhesion of Tamil youth to the different militant groups formed in the 1970s [12]. Nearly 100,000 Tamils would emigrate, then constituting the most ardent defenders of Tamil separatism.

The LTTE, rather war than negotiation

During the 1980s, the Indian government organised mediation between the armed groups (which it had trained and seemingly armed) and the government of Sri Lanka. The different Tamil groups would end by agreeing on the following principles: recognition of the Tamil people as a separate nation with the right to self-determination, a guarantee of the territorial integrity of an independent Tamil territory, safeguarding of the basic rights of Tamils outside of their independent territory. In May 1987, the government and the Tamil parties reached agreement on a series of proposals according a special status to the provinces with a Tamil majority in the North and East. The fusion of the provinces of the North and East remained temporary and was conditioned on the ratification by referendum of the agreement in the Eastern province. The LTTE opposed the referendum and disarmament and broke unity. Hostilities recommenced.

Meanwhile throughout the decade the Tigers organised the assassination of the main leaders of the other armed organisations. Numerous moderate

Tamil activists were also killed. At the end of the decade, most of the "competitor" organisations had disappeared or had been absorbed by the LTTE, the militants had fled, been killed or resigned. That allowed the LTTE to claim to be "the sole organisation representative of the Tamil people".

In the 1990s, the LTTE increasingly had recourse to suicide attacks. Nearly 200 attacks were directed against civilians and political personalities including the assassination of two heads of state (the president of Sri Lanka, Premadasa in 1993 and former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991). The LTTE did not limit their attacks to personalities: airports, religious temples, offices were also targeted. The Tigers "refined" their modes of attack: they innovated by using the first "human bombs" and in particular women in suicide attacks. From 1989, the LTTE launched their national "heroes" day on November 27, in commemoration of the first suicide attack, which they marked as "the day the first LTTE fighter gave his life for the freedom of the Tamil Eelam nation." [13].

In the name of their struggle for a Tamil Eelam, the LTTE massively used violence against all the communities living in the region that it considered theirs. They did not hesitate to organise massacres of Sinhalese civilians with the goal of provoking in return state violence against the Tamils so as to mobilise people around their ranks.

Violence was also directed against Tamils. The latter do not constitute a united community and had historically divergent interests. The plantation Tamils, who live in the centre and south, have until now never supported the separatist movement supported by the Tamils of Jaffna. In the East, the Tamil speaking Muslims formed a significant community. In the 1980s, they had founded their own political party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMS). The LTTE were hostile to this party which challenged their claim to represent "all" the Tamil community of the North and East. Between 1984 and 1990, the Muslim population which lived in the north controlled by

the LTTE were victims of much violence [14]. The situation reached its paroxysm with the ethnic cleaning organised by the Tigers in October 1990. 75,000 Muslims were expelled from the peninsula of Jaffna, with 48 hours to leave. Most of those expelled continue today to live in emergency camps in the district of Puttalam (in the west of the island) [15].

Starting from 1995, after a new round of aborted negotiations, the government opted for a military solution. A more conventional war was waged. The Tigers, financed by the diaspora, were equipped with modern means of communication, a flotilla of rapid vessels, private aircraft equipped with bombs. Families are supposed to supply at least one child to the "liberation army", while the LTTE does not hesitate to recruit child soldiers. Several years of war allowed neither the army nor the LTTE to mark a decisive victory.

Under pressure, the LTTE and government accepted a new cease fire in February 2002 and the opening of negotiations starting from September. For the first time in their history the LTTE agreed to explore a political solution of the federal type inside a united Sri Lankan state. However, in 2003, the Tigers again quit the negotiations table in disagreement with the government on the provisional administrative structure for the development of the North East. During the presidential campaign of 2005 which followed, they would force the Tamil community to boycott provoking the election of the current president Mahinda Rajapaksa.

This warlike logic has led to numerous losses both in terms of lives and at the economic level. But above all it has left little place to political solutions, war became the brutal expression of Tamil and Sinhalese nationalisms.

The study of events reveals the lack of will the LTTE had to negotiate a real peace agreement. The Tigers have never authorised independent political activities inside the Tamil community under their control. A mass movement in favour of peace was an obstacle to their hegemony and was never tolerated. Their political survival rested on the perpetuation of the war,

only the perspective of a separate Tamil state was envisaged. Periods of ceasefire and negotiations were used for tactical ends, allowing them to rearm in view of new hostilities.

A government in the service of Sinhalese extremists

This policy has finally driven the LTTE into the wall and with them the Tamil community and Sri Lankan society as a whole.

The new president was supported by the Sinhalese extremists. The government's rhetoric left no doubt about their influence in the president's entourage. Thus the army commander Sarath Fonseka says "I strongly believe that this country belongs to the Sinhalese; but there're minority communities and we treat them like our people....They can live in this country with us, but they must not try to, under the pretext of being a minority, demand undue things." Defence minister Gotabaya Rajapaksa, brother of the president, has said that "In any democratic country the majority should rule the country. This country will be ruled by the Sinhalese community which is the majority representing 74% of the population." [16].

After the split by Karuna, the commander of LTTE forces in the East of the island and his surrender, the extremists pushed the government

towards a military solution. In 2006, although claiming to want a political agreement, the government set about dismantling the consensus established in the 1980s and asked the supreme court to annul the fusion between the Northern and Eastern provinces. Meanwhile, it began a "war on terror" seeking to put an end to the LTTE. The army bombarded intensely in the Muttur region in the east of the island and organised massive displacements of the Tamil population that it forced into camps. Then houses in the Sampoor zone, culturally Tamil, were destroyed so as to make room for the construction by the Indians of a thermal power station [17].

Since the resumption of hostilities, the Sri Lankan army has committed innumerable war crimes against the Tamil civilians, bombarding indiscriminately schools, mosques, temples, hospitals in which the civilians sought refuge.

This "war on terror" has also served as a pretext for the government to attack democratic liberties throughout the country. The government has been guilty of numerous extra-judicial killings, disappearances, arbitrary detentions, launching death squads against Sinhalese who had denouncing the government's policies. The media have been taken as a target, with journalists harassed, threatened and assassinated, newspaper offices burned and bombarded [18]. Sri Lanka shows once more that attacks against minorities end with the restriction of liberties for all.

The military defeat

will not bring lasting peace

The very probable military crushing of the last Tigers in the strip of 10 km² where they have fallen back will not resolve a political conflict which is more than 60 years old. No lasting peace will be possible without the recognition of the right to self-determination of the Tamil people. Without prejudging the result of a self-determination vote on the question of independence, autonomy should in any event be granted to regions with a non-Sinhalese majority, the sole guarantee of peace and democracy in a multiracial and multi-cultural state. Equality between citizens, whatever their origin, should be guaranteed.

Immediately, we should support all initiatives seeking to impose on the government a ceasefire which would help stop the massacres of civilians and the massive destruction. At the same time, the LTTE should agree to let civilians who wish to do so leave the combat zone. The Tamils trapped in the combat zone like those in the government detention camps need food, health care and medicine.

The UN and the whole of the international community, in particular the EU, should clearly make known to the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE that they will be held responsible for the crimes against humanity that they are committing against the civilian population.

Written May 17th, before final victory was declared by the government forces.

Neoliberalism flanked by the populist right

9 June 2009, by François Sabado

Other main tendencies emerge, initially a rise of the right across Europe.

The right won in the big countries where it governs, in Germany, France,

Italy, Belgium, Holland, Poland, Austria, and Hungary. In Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia, and Cyprus, the parties of the right also came first.

This right wing surge is accompanied in a series of countries by the rise of populist right and far right forces, in particular in Holland, where the far right Islamophobic and anti-European party of the deputy Geert Wilders

obtained 16.4% of the vote and 4 MEPs. In Austria, Finland and Hungary, the forces of the far right which have been involved in anti-immigrant campaigns also gained support. In the United Kingdom, the British National Party obtained 2 MEPs, with 6.7% of the vote. Greece also saw a breakthrough for the far right, with 7.2% for the LAOS organization.

Social democracy fell back, in particular in the countries where it governs: in Britain, Spain and Portugal. It experienced a veritable rout in Germany where it scored only 21%, one of the weakest electoral scores for the Social Democratic Party, not to mention the collapse of the Socialist Party in France. It only gained votes in Greece, Sweden, Denmark, Slovakia and Malta.

In a series of countries the crisis of the large traditional apparatuses of the right and social democratic left has created broad space for a series of forces going from the Greens to the radical left, passing through a whole series of left reformist forces.

The Greens, with nearly 60 elected MEPs, emerge strengthened from these elections. One of the most significant breakthroughs being that of the alliance led by Cohn-Bendt in France.

The Danish organization "Folkebevægelsen mod EU" (People's Movement against the EU), by centring its campaign against the European Union, indeed against Europe, had an MEP re-elected, Søren Søndergaard, also a member

of the Red-Green Alliance and the Fourth International.

Parties like Die Linke in Germany, the SP in the Netherlands or the Front de Gauche in France maintained or increased their electoral positions without making new breakthroughs.

The Party of Communist Refoundation in Italy won 3.23% and will not have any representatives in the European Parliament.

In Britain the results of the radical left were disappointing, with the NO2EU list scoring 1%, as did the SLP of Arthur Scargill.

Syriza in Greece won 4.7% of the votes and one MEP, and thus did not achieve its goal of electing 3 MEPs.

The NPA in France consolidated its electorate. It progressed compared to the results of the LCR-LO lists in the last European elections of 2004 (+2.3%) without gaining any MEPs.

For a number of organizations of the anti-capitalist left, this was their electoral baptism of fire: the Polish Party of Labour, Izquierda Anticapitalista in the Spanish State, Workers' initiative in Sweden, the LCR-PSL in Belgium, the Scottish Socialist Party, Antarsya (??????), the anti-capitalist coalition in Greece, campaigned well but their results did not exceed 1%.

On the anti-capitalist left, we should highlight the result of the SP in Ireland which elected one MEP, following the No campaign against the Lisbon treaty, and especially the

excellent results of the Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal which made a real breakthrough, in fact the only breakthrough of the radical or anti-capitalist left, with 10.73% of the votes and 3 MEPs.

It is always difficult to draw global lessons on relations of social and political forces from a poll marked by abstention by almost 60% of voters. Nevertheless, the first socio-economic effects of the crisis - redundancies, explosion of unemployment, lower purchasing power - did not produce movements of electoral radicalisation, on the left or in an anti-capitalist sense. The breakthrough for Bloco de Esquerda constitutes an exception.

There is a paradox which sees the right-wing neoliberal political formations that have instigated anti-social attacks flanked by the populist or far right emerging strengthened from the European poll. We might have thought that the crisis would favour anti-capitalist ideas. The situation is more complicated. Social resistance, which has not led yet to overall struggles of employees and youth, does not mechanically produce an anti-capitalist alternative. Social democracy is mired in crisis, freeing up new spaces, but the development of the anti-capitalist left remains unequal. The beginnings for a series of organizations are promising. It is now necessary to pursue a politics which stimulates social mobilizations against the economic and ecological crisis and the accumulation of forces to make anti-capitalist solutions increasingly credible and this in complete independence from the old leaderships of the traditional left.

Letters to a Tamil Sama Samajist

8 June 2009, by **Vickramabahu Karunarathne**

Ironically comrade Anna then living in India under cover, reprimanded me for not being sensitive to the Tamil youth. I accept that my language could be different and if I were to write this

article today I would formulate many things differently. But the discussion on method of terror and greater Indian republic is important, in particular as the UNP also abandoning

Tamil autonomy. In addition India has become a part of Global capital creating a massive anti Yankee movement in India.

1. Answering questions from Jaffna

Dear Comrade,

I was preparing a theoretical document on our position concerning the National Question when I came across the questions raised by some of the Jaffna comrades; I think it is urgently necessary to deal with these, at least briefly.

Most certainly we do not call Keppetipola or Puran Appu, or to be very clear Pandara Vanniyam or Sankili, terrorists. Why? Is it because they fought against oppression and subjugation? No, on the contrary we do not call them terrorists because they simply were not terrorists. However we call Sardiel, the 19th century Kandyan highway man a terrorist, in spite of the fact that he, in his own way, fought against colonial and feudal oppression. Why? Because, he was really a terrorist

Marxists always identify people and phenomena by their correct name. That in fact is our duty. We are seeking to educate the working masses by correctly categorizing all symptoms and expressions that arise in politics. We shall not deviate from this duty, come what may.

Who is a terrorist, then? Terrorist is a person whose only or primary form of political action is organized isolated terrorism. Terror is a method in politics. It is utilized by both the oppressor and the oppressed. Neither of them will be a terrorist merely by utilizing terrorism. However even a liberation fighter becomes a terrorist if his primary means in politics is terrorism.

We do not abhor or reject terrorism in any absolute sense. Nor we make any moral judgment on the use of terror, certainly not. All revolutionaries resort to terrorism one time or other, as the need arises. However the difference between a revolutionary, or even a rebel, and a terrorist is that while the former bases himself on the struggle of the masses, the latter confines himself to actions of terror and to the

substitution of such organized attacks for the struggle of the masses. Even within a general strike, and a Hartal, of course there could be points of terror. One can think of a group of workers unleashing merciless terror on a fascist gang in the course of retaliation. Still, that will be only marginal or a secondary course of action in relation to the general strike and mass rebellion.

Calling a liberation fighter a terrorist, in itself is not an abuse or a condemnation. Just because the oppressor uses a word, it does not become an abuse or a derogatory word. If it is so, we should not call anybody a Marxist or a revolutionary because JR and others have always used these terms to condemn others.

In fact he has called Tamil Youth, Marxists and revolutionaries too. Of course he is wrong there in every sense of the word, particularly in using the term Marxists. We do not use those latter terms to identify the militant youth not because he has used these on them, no, of course not. We do not use these on them simply because these are wrong terms to be used on them. These petty bourgeoisie fighters are neither Marxists nor revolutionaries.

One thing should be very clear. That is, we should get rid of this middle class embarrassment of not being able to call a terrorist, a terrorist, when he is a liberation fighter. This kind of shyness arises when one is not sure of one's role in the liberation struggle. If you are not in the fore-front of the liberation struggle using revolutionary methodology, i.e. mass actions, then of course you will have an enormous guilt in calling a young liberation fighter, who at least using terror tactic is in the struggle, a terrorist and an inadequate fighter.

In Jaffna it is our duty to come forward fearlessly criticizing terrorism of young liberation fighters, as a harmful method of struggle. Even Uma maheswaran has been pushed to the position of rejecting Piribhaharan's mad terror tactics. As far as I can see Uma is not advocating terrorism, at least not now. He is advocating rural guerillaism. That again is limited compared to a Hartal centered around

a general strike. Still he cannot be called a terrorist in the strict sense.

There is no question that Piribhaharan is a terrorist. He may be a devoted national liberation fighter. But his method is terrorism and ideology is petty bourgeoisie nationalism. Let me put it clearly that this madman has done untold damage to the liberation struggle by his insane terror. There may be a threat to my life when I say this in public. But that is nothing new. In South we are constantly under the threat of fascist-racist gangs. In 1971 I described JVPers as Narodniks with a trace of Sinhala racialism and I was threatened with violence for such criticism. If we abandon the truth in fear of threats we might as well fold up the revolutionary party. So, we have to say Piribhaharan's method is terrorism. Not only has he used isolated individual terror against the oppressor but also used it indiscriminately against all others fighting the common enemy. He has not hesitated to use it against us too. We did not retaliate not because we are incapable of terror. No one should be encouraged to entertain such an idea. We have not retaliated through terror because it is incorrect to use terror against another group of freedom fighters to settle a dispute. This is insane terror; notwithstanding that of their own methodology. We correctly took the question to the masses and created a mass opinion against them. We shall continue to do so.

Of course we do not join bourgeoisie propaganda and condemn terrorism of freedom fighters; because, their terrorism is only an expression of hatred against the oppression. One can think of a striker who may shoot the supervisor because he is angry with the employer and his henchmen. We do not publicly condemn him. On the contrary we will explain how the cruel employer has pushed the worker into such desperation. In the meantime it is our duty to convince the worker about the futility of his terror tactic and move him towards the proper form of struggle. The parallel should be clear to you.

As I mentioned above, around 1971 I wrote a series of articles comparing the JVP with Russian Narodism with

a trace of fascism. I referred to them as rebels and that 71 was a petty bourgeoisie youth rebellion. Many so-called left intellectuals pounced on us and condemned 'Vama Sama Samajaya' for the reference. Their criticism emanated from several reasons. Firstly, they, as were not doing anything for the social revolution, wanted to identify with the youth who were 'doing something'. It is a case of glamour without sacrifice! Secondly, for their middle class sense of value, rebellion was bad where as revolution sounded respectable. Thirdly, the most important of all, according to them JVP was fighting only against police brutality and there was no preplanned insurrection aimed at capturing power. Hence, according to their morals, it was a good thing. We did not give in to this nonsense, and we did not lose in the end.

I think you are facing the parallel of that in Jaffna. These people who criticize us first of all do not do anything for the liberation of the Tamil nation. So they are guilty or afraid to criticize these 'heroic' youth who are in the 'game'. Secondly, 'Terror', somehow, is bad where as 'revolutionary war' is good. Apparently there is something inherently bad about terror, which does not exist in military violence! Thirdly, this again is most important, these youth are fighting only brutal oppression and not fighting to gain control of Tamil land. At least that is not the immediate purpose. So a boy who play hide and seek with the police is a good fighter while a worker proposing mass defence actions and through these moving towards a massive hartal to overthrow the system is a bad one!

It may sound funny that the government seems to prefer Piribhaharan's terrorism to any trend towards general unrest and Hartal. On 9 September 1983, Daily News reported: "The leaflet (of Piribhaharan) advised all Tamils in the North not to defy any government directions. All students, teachers, and employees both in the mercantile and public sector should follow government's order it said".

Then on 18 September 1983, Sunday Observer said:

"These gangs (i.e. Hartal callers) are nothing but a handful of school drop-outs who called for Hartals and boycotts. The main intention of these riff raffs is to disturb the education of school children and create tension in the entire Northern Province" he added, "these riff raff gangs have no connection with the Tiger movement or any other terrorist movement and investigations have established this fact."

Obviously the government and pro government elements have seen clearly what is more dangerous to them; Terror or Hartal. Also, here it is interesting to remember what Mr. Leembruggen, the President of the Chamber of commerce of Sri Lanka said very recently. Daily News of 29 October 1983 reported. "Happily" Mr. Leembruggen said, 'a guerilla with a gun in his hand, is not as frightening to the foreign investor as the prospect of a politician with Karl Marx on his mind'. Is not it very clear in whose interest it is to romanticize terrorism? Piribhaharan's type of terrorism is only an extreme kind of Safety Valve and an indirect pressure force for the establishment. LTTE may not accept it. But that is the sad truth.

I think you should stand up and fight back. You must say that those who reject mass struggle and resort exclusively to conspiratorial terror actions, are terrorists in spite of being freedom fighters. No one who is not interested in building a mass movement under the hegemony of the proletariat is going to solve the national question in Sri Lanka or in the Indian Subcontinent. That is quite apart from not establishing a socialist regime. Of course we have no moral objection to the use of terror. In fact if fascist goons attack us, we shall retaliate with severest means possible. Also if such naked terrorism can bring socialism we will be the first to use it. Unfortunately apart from what Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky have taught us, the entire experience of liberation struggles and social revolutions shows that it is not the case. As an instrument of struggle it has only a secondary place. Any Tamil liberation fighter who gives the prime of the place to terrorism will never achieve anything except vicious kind of

sectarian reaction that will put what happened in Pakistan to shades.

Only we are capable of avoiding a great disaster in this part of the world and move towards the proper unification of the Indian sub-continent. For us Sama Samajists, both identities: Tamils and Sinhalese are very limited and can play only a very limited role even in the immediate sense. Hence, in the immediate sense too, only identity we could promote is the Indian identity. Unless the liberation struggle is taken to the broad mass movement in this form, here as well as in India, there going to be a long period of human misery. Terrorism of Tamil liberation fighters only aggravates the issue and creates massive obstacles in the path of taking the liberation issue to the non-Tamil Indian masses, even other than Sinhalese. We will not do any good by placating terrorists and yielding to the crocodile tears of petty bourgeoisie intellectuals.

We are the only national party which clearly intervened in the Tamil liberation issue. There is no question about. Therefore we have right to tell the Tamil youth, where they are going wrong and drag them towards sanity and the real struggle for power. We cannot fail in this duty and I am sure we shall not

P.S. About the Elam slogan later

VBK

5 December, 1983.

2. A detailed account of our position

Dear Comrade,

Hope you went through the document on terrorism which I sent to you last week. There I mentioned that I was preparing our position on the concrete slogan of Ham. In this letter I will give you a detailed account of our position. First of all let us make ourselves clear on the principles involved.

1. Right of self determination: The absolute principle in here is that Sama

Samajists of an oppressor nation should advocate and fight for freedom to secede for the oppressed nation. In the present context of super imperialism we have to go farther. It is not sufficient to fight for freedom to secede. It is necessary to fight to allow smaller nations to join with a nation other than one's own. For example the freedom of Sri Lankan Tamils to join India or coalesce with Tamil Nadu after breaking from Sri Lanka, as a right, should be defended. Today we see very often apparent sovereignty of small nations who in reality cannot move out of the domain of influence of big nations. So, though there is no actual subjugation, there is indirect threat of intervention if the small nation decides to do something against the wishes of a big neighbor.

On the other hand it is absolutely necessary that Sama Samajists of the small nation or the oppressed nation advocates and fight for integration, of course voluntary integration. That is with power over one's destiny in one's hand, deciding to integrate in the best possible way with the neighboring states. In other words always he must fight against small nation narrow mindedness, seclusion and isolation. (Vide page 347, VI Lenin's "Collected Works Vol: 22")

2. Autonomy: Absolute principle in here is the management of one's everyday life by oneself. Here the most important aspect is the looking after normal social peace and security i.e. police functions. Every distinct set of people should be allowed to elect their own representatives without alien people interfering in their affairs. Best form of autonomy would be small assemblies for all villages, towns, work places with powers over all internal and regional matters and the freedom to coalesce to form bigger units. Autonomy is a must in a democracy even when there are no minorities with national consciousness. In other words autonomy is not an alternative to the right of secession. It is a separate principle to be upheld even if self determination is not an issue. If there is no autonomy there cannot be democracy in a racially and culturally heterogeneous society.

3. Equality of citizens: Absolute

principle in here is that all citizens should be equal before the state and should be able to deal with the state as equals. Access to basic ingredients of social living: language, jobs, land, and education (etc) should be equal to all communities. Obviously there cannot be separate registers, different birth certificates, and a community claiming to be the Boomi Puthras. Here again, this principle is independent of the first two. That is, even if the first two principles are not relevant it is imperative that this third principle is respected.

Of course you will see that in a society where the first principle is respected it is very unlikely that the other two are not respected, though the converse is not true. Still there could be cases where the right of secession is granted to one community while other two principles are violated in respect of others.

Also we should understand that we are discussing the principles involved in solving a bourgeoisie democratic task. Hence the principles are absolute within that context. Naturally for a society which grows over to socialism these principles will eventually become meaningless.

Having got all these clear in our minds, we must come to grapple the concrete question of Lankan Tamils. First problem we encounter is to decide the nature of oppression and the oppressor. Is the Sinhala nation imperialist and Tamils a subject race? Here again Lenin was very clear. World has moved to the stage of imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism. Hence our estimate and classification of oppression should be related to the reality of imperialism. An analysis of racial or ethnic violence, unless we relate to the present day working of imperialism, becomes meaningless. Further more it can lead us to a useless moralistic discussion on violence or at worse to an academic debate on historical rights of various racial and communal groups.

Marx at his time did not support Czech and South Slavian national movements against German and Austrian oppressors as they were instruments of reactionary tsarist of

Russia. Russian reaction was the greatest oppressor at that time of bourgeoisie democratic revolution of Europe. Hence the struggle against that bulwark of reaction was the real democratic struggle and the genuine fight against oppression. Therefore Czech and South Slavian national liberation movements which were outpost of Russian reaction were opposed. (Vide page 340's VI Lenin Collected Works "Vol: 22") Lenin in his time while advocating Russian and German Social Democrats (Sama Samajists) to demand unconditional freedom for Poland to secede, advised Polish Sama Samajists to work for the unity of the proletarian struggle without putting forward the slogan of Polish independence. This was when Poland was quite developed and very much nationalistic. His argument was that raising such a slogan means helping either imperialism against the other, when both were interested in Poland (i.e. Russian and Germans). (Vide page 351's "Vol 22." VI Lenin).

I am not drawing any parallels here: Only trying to elucidate the necessity of an overall view. Those examples and lot more, make it clear that while the Sinhala Sama Samajists should unconditionally fight for freedom of secession for Tamils (including their rights to join Tamil Nadu), the Tamil Sama Samajists should decide to lead the struggle for separation only after careful analysis of the entire struggle against the international finance capital in the Indian sub-continent. Tamil Sama Samajists cannot stand for isolation and seclusion. To do that will be to succumb to worse kind of petty bourgeoisie nationalism. Because Elam as it is posed today is not even a bourgeoisie concept. It is utterly petty bourgeoisie. Obviously Tamil Sama Samajists should fight against this trend and stand for integration.

What integration? This is the real question. Tamil Sama Samajists do not stand for secession for the mere sake of separation. Even when he stands for the political independence of Tamils, he should uncompromisingly fight for the unification of the entire Tamil nation within a greater Indian republic. He should stand for the integration of the sub-continent and in

particular stand for the unification of Lanka with India. To the Elamist we must pose this question; why this separate entity apart and distinct from Tamil Nadu? Forging of a Tamil Region as a democratic task could only mean the unification of Tamils of Southern India (Lankan and Indian), and nothing else. Such unification within the context of a united greater India will be a progressive step. In fact that is the only realistic way the task of a Tamil nation could be posed. On the other hand to propose an isolation of two million people in an arid piece of land is madness.

We have always maintained that the Tamil National Question can be solved only in the context of the Indian sub-continent; solutions that were proposed so far within a Sri Lankan state are transitional and incomplete. When we said this five years ago people laughed at us saying that we were idealists. However today, it is clear that anybody who thinks of solving the national question without taking into account the Indian sub-continent situation is a fantasy maker. Thus we must boldly and singularly stand for the unification of the Indian sub-continent based on the principles mentioned above. We cannot afford to deviate an inch from this.

So the concrete question of secession of Lankan Tamils is really the question of breaking away from the present state and linking up with the Indian republic. In other words the Tamil Sama Samajist fights either to remain within Lanka based on above mentioned principles with the intention of dragging the entire island into the Indian republic in the coming period or if and when that position is rejected, to break away from Sri Lanka and join India as a part and parcel of Tamil Nadu. There is no other concrete democratic reality and Tamil Sama Samajist, least of all, should not stand for anything else. Hence the question to be answered by us is whether we are today dismissing Sinhala nation as a reactionary outpost and raising the slogan of Lankan Tamils separately and independently joining the Indian republic breaking the Sri Lankan state. This is the only concrete formulation of the question before us. In general standing for unification

with India is a basic revolutionary democratic position. That is Sinhalese; Tamils; Bengalis; Sindhis etc joining the greater Indian republic is a necessary general slogan irrespective of the concrete situation. (Of course we know that we can achieve such a republic only under the hegemony of the proletariat). But to support today, the secession of Sri Lankan Tamils and to propose them to join the present Indian republic, certain preconditions should be satisfied.

Such a proposal means a conflict between the Indian state and the Sri Lankan state. If we are proposing that as the liberation task to the Tamils in Sri Lanka then we cannot hesitate but co-operate with Indian forces on a tactical plane to achieve such. In any case there is no other way secession of Sri Lankan Tamils could be achieved whatever the utopian radical youth might think. Then the question is, can we say, that the Indian republic stands for democracy against Sinhala state, a bulwark of imperialist reaction? To answer in the affirmative it is not necessary for the Indian republic to be a socialist paradise or Tamil Nadu to be an epitome of democracy. Anyone demanding such as a precondition is an opportunist of the worst kind. On the other hand for a Tamil Sama Samajist to take that position it should be clear to him beyond doubt that the Sinhala nation has totally succumbed to imperialist reaction, thus making the separation with the view to join India, the immediate democratic task. Can we say this today? Can we say "Indian democracy, help us to smash Sinhala fascist state"? Can we write off Sinhala nation as such?

Some ultra-leftists have come to that conclusion. For them left movement has lost its forces and completely decimated. In addition Sinhala racialism is part and parcel of pro-imperialist state, backed by CIA and the Pentagon. Democracy is finished for the coming period. Hence there is nothing much to expect within the Sinhala nation in this period. All attempts should be directed to wipe out this out-post of reaction. They of course give unconditional support for all Tamil national movements. Terrorism is elevated to a form of mass struggle, a revolutionary war, and venerated.

Clearly, even on the basis of the conclusion that the Sinhala state of JR is an out-post of imperialist reaction and the Sinhala nation has no progressive content in the present moment, their positions are wrong. On one hand they do not see the importance of the Indian republic. With such a position first thing should have been to decide tactically on the side of Indian nationalism. They have not done that. Obviously they do not see that only meaningful separatist movement is that, which is inspired by Indian industrial capitalism. Forward strides taken by Indian industries with even limited democracy and unification, has attracted the attention of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. Strong nationalist sentiments of the educated Tamil youth are partly fired by the changes they see in the Tamil Nadu. Ultra-leftists are oblivious to these facts. On the other hand, at no point one should give unconditional support to National movements, completely handing over the liberation to 'national democracy' or even 'revolutionary democracy'. One should never dip one's separate red flag even if one joins unconditionally to strike a blow at the reaction. This is what Lenin has taught us. (Vide Lenin's "Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions" 1920)

However these are minor matters when compared to the gross mistake of writing off Sinhala nation at this moment. It is true that both the JVP and our party are banned. But is this act, a frightened mad blow of an unstable regime or a definite fascist take over? Are all progressive forces in Sinhala areas dissipated? I think it will be an incredible folly for us to answer in the affirmative and to conclude that the centre for proletarian work in Sri Lanka has moved entirely and completely into the Tamil nationality and émigré groups. Of course if we were to select between Indira and JR naturally we will be with Indira who still represents the national industrial bourgeoisie in the sub-continent whereas JR is simply a comprador Don Juan (Not the lecher, the prince.) He does not represent the Sinhala nationalists though the right wing chauvinist elements are with his adjutant Cyril Mathew. Sinhala nationalism is not with imperialism nor is it an imperialist force on its own

strength. Sinhala merchant and commercial capital, on the contrary, is a minor bourgeoisie element which is in sharp conflict with imperialism. When India declared war against Pakistan over the issue of Bangladesh we came on the side of India heavily. There was no question then about the nature of the war. Pakistan was a (and still is though there is a significant progressive mass movement) reactionary theocratic state run by imperialist puppets. India was and still is a secular democratic state (within limits) which is in conflict with imperialism. Sama Samajists of the East Pakistan (if such were present) should have participated on the Indian side but not on the slogan of Bangladesh. On the contrary we must fight for the unification of the Bangala nation within an Indian integration. Even though relatively speaking Bangladesh is a big country it is wrong for anyone, not to advocate and fight for integration, above all the unification of Bengalis and thus not to educate Bangala workers in the spirit of internationalism.

Though it is not a fascist state, it is true Sri Lanka to-day is a Sinhala Buddhist state led by comprador classes, with a Bonapartist constitution with serious curtailments on democracy. Where as secular Indian Republic is led by a significant national industrial bourgeoisie. Hence it is attractive to the Tamil workers and peasants and also to the advanced Sinhala workers. Also, Sinhala national movement is not represented by JR and his clique. As I said above Cyril Mathew represents the extreme, fanatical element of the Sinhala Bourgeoisie. Sinhala national capitalist class is really a very minor capitalist class consisting of commercial and state bureaucratic classes with a minor manufacturing component. These people were the leaders of the populist movement represented by the SLFP. Today the most radical expression of them is the TB-Vijaya faction, earlier led by Hector. There is a progressive aspect to this movement and in the immediate sense it is in conflict with imperialism. They have common interest with Indian manufacturing classes. In-fact Tamil petty bourgeoisie stood close to them during the Presidential election, compelled by

common economic Interest. Also it is amply clear that Indian national bourgeois opinion depends very much on the plight of this force. If this force is also crushed under foot by the reaction, that will be a great impetus for Indira to intervene directly in here. Present 'good office' role is with the approval of Mrs. B; that we cannot forget. As long as these forces are intact, unless indications are given by them, Indira will hesitate to intervene in spite of all the wailing and whimpering of Tamil Nationalists.

Apart from this radical Sinhala national democratic forces there is the left movement with the JVP bringing in, the radicalized Sinhala petty bourgeoisie. It is true that there is a ban and these forces are in a certain degree of confusion after the defeats in July 1980 strike and in 1982 Presidential elections. But it is complete nonsense to think that left and democratic forces, i.e. proletarian and radical petty bourgeoisie forces, are all wiped out or neutralized. It is madder to think that July violence is a conscious attack by JR and his adjutants, backed by imperialism, to wipe out both Tamil nationalism and left politics in Sri Lanka. Of course JR's Machiavellian maneuvers opened the way. But several frustrations and dissatisfactions gushed into this blind alley shocking JR out of balance.

So it is completely wrong to conclude that Sinhala pro gressive forces are no more and fascist are in full control.

Any strategy based on that kind of thinking will be completely irresponsible. If Tamil Sama Samajists today take up secession and pro Indian Republican slogan dismissing Sinhala nation it will bring total confusion into the Sinhala progressive movement severely impeding real revolutionary prospects. Still, in the Indian sub continent one of the most promising backgrounds is provided by the radicalized Sinhala workers and peasants. However tragic it may be, momentary and temporary confusions and the rise of dark forces should not close our eyes to the fact that all important left parties and workers organizations, at least nominally, stand for the right of self determination and they have not said the last word yet. If we do that not

only will we be dismissing Sinhala left and democratic organizations but also spitting on the face of the Sinhala workers and peasants such as Eheliyagoda voters; who voted for VN disregarding the vicious communal campaign of JR that made them fully aware that the NSSP stands for the liberation of Tamils, the repeal of anti-terrorist act and the release of Tamil political prisoners. We cannot hand over on a plate a nation which is not yet a reactionary out post, to western imperialism. Nor we could abandon all the grounds we have won among Sinhala masses and let Sinhala nation the stepping stone for the intervention of western imperialism. You cannot fail to realize that convincing the majority community to accept the right of secession is not the same as proposing immediate division of the country with possible foreign assistance. Latter proposal will give advantage to the dark forces within the majority nation. Obviously if the dark forces are already in full control then it is our duty to eliminate them even using division of the country as a means. But in the present situation Tamil Sama Samajists should intervene and direct the Tamil liberation struggle, so as to ignite the revolutionary forces among the Sinhalese and hence in entire Sri Lanka. He should always remember that a proletarian victory in Sri Lanka will act as the beacon of the Indian revolution.

How powerful are the dark forces today? Are we fighting a black dictatorship (racist, fascist) backed by imperialism which has drained in blood all progressive forces? We must not paint the devil blacker than it really is. What we have got is an unstable constitutional Bonapartism resting on several forces pulling in different directions. Thonda & Deva are still powerful forces. Thonda's attitude and his popularity still, show that there is no significant tendency for Kandyan Tamil workers to abandon Kandyan areas and move to the North. In fact Thonda has regained respect within his community. Also most of the Colombo Tamils have re-established themselves in their old places. These two groups alone constitute 30% and 8% of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Armed forces and the police though predominantly Sinhala, do not

constitute a politicalized racist attack force. It still acts as state machinery within a bourgeoisie democracy. Hence it will be incorrect for us to classify every police officer or even every soldier as a fascist thug or a racist brute and to develop our strategies on such false assumption. Our strategy should be disruption and dismantling of the state by propaganda, agitation and mass actions and not military attacks aimed at wiping out soldiers and policemen. It is stupid and disastrous to use methods of struggle that are used against fascist or imperialist dictatorship, against a parliamentary democracy though with a strong Bonapartist tendency.

So you see, moving from the general position of right of secessions and other principles, to a position of separation and division is not as simple as some comrades think. It is certainly not enough to say that 'Tamils have already decided'. Of course, Tamils have decided and the progressive elements among them is looking at India or a collaboration with workers state while the right wing is hopeful of ASEAN and thinks of installing a Singapore type state with American support. We must realize that while the revolutionary proletarian movement is represented by us and the tendencies close to us, the revolutionary democratic movement among the Tamils is the tendency that looks towards India with the hope of unification of all Tamils within a greater republic.

So the national unification task today is to take the idea of integration of the Indian sub continent to both the Sinhala and the Tamil masses and to other peoples in the sub continent. Already advanced workers among Sinhalese were able to break conclusively from chauvinism and approve of Indira shaking JR by the collar. Some go to the extent of thinking that it is a good thing of the Indian Army comes and "knock the fool off". Such feelings have tremendous positive aspect. But this will not grow in the right direction if we pose the intervention of the Indian Army where the outcome is a mere dissection of the country leaving Sinhalese in the hands of a worse chauvinist far to the right of JR. For

those Sinhala workers, who vaguely wish that racist semi fascist forces be eliminated by the Indian republican forces, one cannot offer the prospects of a worse form of a fascist state.

What will be the role of Indian bourgeoisie including that of Tamil Nadu? Let us understand very clearly, even under a worst condition that is, even after take over by bloody racists backed by American imperialism, it is very unlikely that Indian bourgeoisie will fully back a popular war against the dictatorship. Obviously, on the other hand, Jang Sang elements may support the regime. Only reluctantly Indira may help a liberation war. She knows very well such a war releases revolutionary forces which will threaten her own artificial unitary regime. In fact JR, after returning from India said what she really worried about is the harassment of Tamils in Sinhala areas and not the fate of the liberation struggle in the North. Ten years of liberation struggle did not disturb her. Not only Indira even Amir is frightened of the Marxist tendencies within Tamil liberation. He was reported to have said: "If there is a settlement that we can recommend to the people we can carry them (i.e. the militants) except for a few groups which were Marxist orientated." (Vide, Island "23 November 1983, page 1). It is not entirely clear how he is going to deal with these Marxists including of course Tamil Sama Samajists. Perhaps JR Indira-Amir 'thrimurthi' will look after them!

This discussion leads us to the slogans raised during the independence struggle of Sri Lanka and India in 1930s and '40s. Sri Lanka bourgeoisie at first did not ask for complete independence and it came to them as an after thought. When Sama Samajists launched the "free Lanka" slogan they (i.e. LSSP) were identifying themselves with the Indian national movement. In fact at early stages even Nehru was introduced here as an Indian Sama Samajists by the paper "Sama Samaja". That was of course going bit too far. But the fact remains that it was considered to be a single liberation struggle. However later Phillip succumbed to Sinhala chauvinism and separated the Sri Lankan independence from the Indian independence movement where as

BLPI continued the idea of Indian unification as a part and parcel of the independence struggle. It was the only correct way to pose the question of independence from British imperialism. Proletariat poses liberation issue not as a process of disintegration and amputation but as a means of healthy integration.

We cannot put all teachings of Marx and Lenin over the board just because feelings ran high after July holocaust. The very people who tore their hair apart shouting "nothing but separation" are now thinking of the best possible way to satisfy JR. Before long we may have to fight alone to show that the agreed settlement is a sellout. I am sure that real interest of, the Tamil workers and peasants will be thrown overboard for some concessions to the Tamil upper and middle classes. In particular the interest of Kandyan Tamils will be swept under the carpet; land allocations in the North and the East included.

Our duty is to stand by our socialist internationalist duty and to take the best form of slogans to emancipate the masses. If we do not emancipate and educate them on the national question we cannot ever take them along the road to socialism. Now that even Indian intervention is a possibility if a serious breakdown occurs again, Tamil Sama Samajists have a greater responsibility fighting against Tamil narrow nationalism of isolation. You must pose the question realistically and make the best layers aware of their responsibility. We must show that we are fighting for liberation with the intention of integration with other Indian nations including Sinhalese on the basis of genuine equality.

You should propose:

1. Right of secession be included in the constitution, a referendum be held among the Tamil masses to decide their destiny under the supervision of an international commission acceptable to the Tamil leaders (if a referendum is held obviously you will campaign for a democratic unity in Sri Lanka with the Indian unification as the perspective.)
2. Autonomy of Tamil speaking areas

with powers over regional security or police functions. Home guards or defence militias for minorities in other areas.

3. Equality, and end of discrimination in citizenship, jobs, education, land allocation, and particularly, in the national armed forces. Granting of citizenship to all Kandyan Tamils .

4. Right to use Tamil in dealing with the central government.

5. Fair share of the national income to develop the Tamil areas.

On the basis of this programme you should mobilize Tamil people and bring them to participate in the common struggle to throw out this government. In the course of such a struggle they will be able to take power in their own areas. Once they are in power Tamils could decide for the best possible integration. To talk of separation before taking power is to put cart before the horse. Separation or integration entirely depends on what changes take place within the Sinhala nation. Putting the slogan of separation now, means not to expect a common struggle with Sinhala workers and peasants and evolve a strategy for power by passing, or more correctly against, the entire Sinhala

nation. Such a strategy for power presumes that the liberation struggle is against a reactionary Sinhala state backed by imperialism, and the struggle is with the help of all progressive forces in the subcontinent and in particular the Indian national democratic forces. As I said before that is not the way things stand today. Class forces are more powerful than that within Sri Lanka and also within India. Sri Lankan state is still a weak constitutional Bonapartism. Indian national bourgeoisie is not interested in toppling JR and would be happy if he stabilizes himself and put all militants, both Sinhala and Tamil, on the run. American imperialism has more important problems near at home than getting involved with Sinhala racialists.

Such is the actual situation. There can be no doubt our programme aimed at mobilizing both Tamil and Sinhala forces against the decadent regime of JR is the only correct strategy. Tamil Samajists should boldly tell the Tamil masses that while trying to mobilize support for their cause in India and elsewhere they should remember that their greatest support is close at home: Among the Sinhala workers and peasants. Hence it is their responsibility to use slogans and tactics which are more effective in

mobilizing these Sinhala forces too. Idea should be to overthrow the present oppressive regime and establish a revolutionary power based on workers, peasants and soldiers councils. Naturally in such a takeover, the control of Tamil areas will be in the hand of the Tamil masses. They will be then free to decide on what their destiny ought to be.

Singing Elam slogan in London and Madras and playing hide and seek with armed forces is no alternative to that.

3. Reading material

1. The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self Determination: Thesis (page 143, Vol.22 Collected Works of VI Lenin.

2. The Discussion on Self Determination summed up (page 320, Vol.22 Collected Works of VI Lenin)

3 Preliminary Draft Thesis on the National and the Colonial Questions (VI Lenin, June 5 1920)

4. The Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions (VI Lenin, July 26 1920)

The agony and the ecstasy

8 June 2009, by **Vickramabahu Karunarathne**

The question that was in the latter's mind was whether the enthusiastic crowd will resort to any violence, but nothing of import happened. It appears that the government is now under the belief that the Tamil national problem is over and normalcy is established in the country. Ceremonies and the festive mood take one back to the early chapters of the Mahavamsa with King Dutugemunu replaced by Maha Rajinda, great king Mahinda [1]. But in reality the national problem is a specific problem in bourgeois society.

We explained in this column that as Tamil freedom is in the hearts and minds of the Tamil people, unless there is a solution, based on the right of self-determination, there will be no normalcy in the country.

Of course Tamils may not resort to an armed insurrection but the agitation will continue, both locally and internationally. In fact the war has made it an international problem, something akin to the Palestinian issue.

Armed insurrection detached from the people or negating people's participation could be counterproductive, we explained over and over again. It is true that there was mass participation towards the end in the form of Pongu Tamil mass actions, but it was not broadbased so as to attract all trends within Tamil society. On the other hand, there was a continued belief that global capitalist liberals will intervene to resolve this problem in favour of Tamil nationalism. In fact there was reluctance to take this issue to the

local and international working class or to Left liberation organisations, as it could offend international capitalist leaders. In the end, all global leaders followed the Indian bourgeoisie to support the suppression of the Tigers.

Again it was proved that the oppressor could be ten times more ruthless than the oppressed and in this case the oppressor's terror surpassed anything of the kind witnessed so far. It was quite evident what was happening, but there was no liberal bourgeois global force to intervene to save the Tamils from defeat and a bloodbath.

Languishing in tears

It is a terrible defeat and is a human disaster with 350,000 people miserably displaced. On the other hand, there are thousands of families of Sinhala soldiers killed or wounded, languishing in tears. No amount of compensation could erase their grief. There are thousands of young wives of Sinhala soldiers killed in combat, who

will lose their income if they get married again, and there is no way out for them. All this could have been avoided and the Tamil national problem solved conclusively, if the peace talks were continued and autonomy was granted to the Tamil homeland while the Tamil armed forces were integrated with the Sinhala forces to create a true national army.

Now while the Sinhalese are jubilant, the Tamils are suffering in humiliation and surrender. There is a terrible gulf in between and all attempts for talks will be influenced by the Tamil diaspora and Tamil Nadu activists. Above everything they will go at the new Indian government. It was India that orchestrated the war in Lanka. Indian intelligence agents and military experts were working closely with the Lankan forces in the war zone. They simply hid the truth.

Foreign journalists and aid workers were barred from the war zone and IDP camps. Those who tried to enter and report about the war were kicked out of the country.

Now India may change the tune and call for devolution to the Tamil homeland. It may also demand changes in the armed forces to include a Tamil speaking regiment.

That will be a challenge to the government. At the same time the masses will demand more relief, workers will demand higher salaries and the removal of anti worker regulations.

Maha Rajinda may have to change his friends.

Notes

[1] Mahavamsa is a Sinhala chronicle written by monks since 5th century AD. It relates early history taken from other old documents unknown today. Dutu Gemunu is 3rd century BC Sinhala Buddhist king fought against Elara, a Hindu conqueror from south Indian Pandyan kingdom. Maha Rajinda means mega Regina.

* Column published May 24 in *lakkbimanews*.

"We met in very difficult circumstances"

8 June 2009

This meeting was called after the press conference to pass a resolution to condemn blood shed and demand for immediate cease fire. But we met in very different and difficult circumstances

Alliance started as a support group for our election effort. In that we obtained 4000 less 3 votes in Colombo district. All consider that as a victory in the circumstances. Left Front is thankful to all those who helped; and attempt were made to extend the alliance to include other left groups including the United Socialist Party and the New Democratic Party. USP participated in the meeting but was not prepared to be in the committee. It will participate in activities depending on their

estimation. NDP did not come. All others agreed to appoint a committee to coordinate future activities.

The meeting was chaired by Patric, Chamil and Stalin. All group leaders were allowed to express their views and then the open discussion took place. After a very inspiring discussion it was decided immediately look into continued repression, disappearances, refugees and political prisoners; also the proper resettlement and release of land taken under high security.

General opinion was that the question of devolution and autonomy for Tamil homeland may not come up as an issue for another 3 or 4 months because of general suffering. So, first problem for the government will be

about human rights and welfare of the people who suffered under the war. It includes welfare of the Sinhala families of soldiers wounded or dead and Muslims displaced by the LTTE. We should intervene in all these issues.

It was decided to

1. write to the Inspector General of Police to look into the problem of harassment of Tamils, Muslims and oppositional elements by the victory demonstrators; in particular on the day of celebration 22 Friday when over 100 thousand are expected to demonstrate in Colombo.
2. Prepare a perspective document.

The campaign against the closure of Ford in Bordeaux

8 June 2009, by **Philippe Rouffigne**

The Ford factory at Blanquefort (near Bordeaux, France), which employs 3,500 workers, has been threatened with closure since 2000. It manufactures automatic gear boxes for the U.S. market and manual gearboxes for the European market. It is the part of the plant manufacturing automatic gear boxes and employing 2500 workers that has been under threat.

The automatic gear boxes are an ageing product nearing the end of their life, and production has been declining until today. The speeches from the company directors about the future of the plant were sometimes contradictory reassuring, and at other times threatening.

The first struggle was conducted on the works committee (Comité d'Entreprise) to sound the alarm to the workforce. The management was formally requested to provide more information on the future of the plant. This proved to be of little value. In 2005, the company announce a programme for the reduction of posts (Plan de Suppression d'Emplois). Five Hundred employees take-up offers of early retirement and voluntary redundancy.

The official reason given for these job losses was to ensure the survival of the plant. The CGT was the only union that attempted to organise opposition to this round of job losses, but mobilisation and industrial action was weak. We were in a factory which had not seen any action during the previous 20 years, and the idea that these job losses were unavoidable was widespread. The offer of early retirement and voluntary redundancy was made to buy peace and avoid conflict, and management announce that the future of the plant is safe until 2014. But in November of that same

year, there is another offer of 165 early retirements. The CGT tried to fight to improve the offer, but the mobilisation of the workforce was still too weak.

From then on, the CGT steps up its campaign against the job losses by warning that management was gradually going to empty the plant of workers until it closed it down completely. In February 2007, we organised a demonstration in defence of jobs in the town of Blanquefort. No other union joined the demonstration, but it was a success because 250 employees from the plant were on it. This was the beginning of our campaign.

From then on, other unions join in the campaign, creating a joint union committee that lasts 12 months. We then have two years of actions and mobilisations which were eventually successful.

In 2007, there are several demonstrations: 500 in March in Bordeaux, then 1000 in the same month. We organise a conference on jobs in April with local councillors and state organisations. The aim was to warn the local community and to put pressure on the state organisations so that they intervene. It took a very long time, but eventually they do respond.

The first outcome of the demonstrations was the creation of a working party convened by the Prefecture, and including Ford management and local elected officials. Ford had announced earlier that year that it would withdraw from the plant in 2011, and this working party was trying to develop a plan by 2007 for the future of the plant. Each time the working party met, we organised strikes and demonstrations.

Ford gave virtually no information and

continuously tried to stop mobilisations. It denounced "agitators", but was nevertheless wrong-footed because it had never had to deal with such a campaign. The management argued that it was trying to find solutions, but never mentions closure. Gradually, the feeling develops amongst the workforce that there is a grave threat.

Furthermore, the working party offers no perspectives as it claims that despite trying it had no solution for the plant. We step up the pressure, and in October 2007, we organise a strike that is supported by 800 workers. For the first time ever, the union for technical and supervisory staff supports the action. In November, a one-day strike closes the factory and 1400 demonstrate in Blanquefort.

Reports in the local media are widespread, the local population is informed and pressure is growing on local elected officials. From the beginning, we argue for the defence of all the jobs inside Ford, but also of all those indirectly employed which is about 10,000 in the whole region.

The working party meets for the last time in December, and we organise a demonstration in Bordeaux. The mood is angry as the working party has nothing to report and inside the plant the atmosphere is tense. The next two days, there is a spontaneous strike just before the Christmas break. Management seem unable to control the situation.

The return to work in January 2008 is difficult. Management try to take the initiative by announcing the closure of the site for April 2010. The atmosphere becomes again fatalistic, but we try to relaunch the mobilisation with pickets at the end of January. We are relatively few, but the media is

there and management realises that there is still a determined group of union activists.

There is a discussion that starts amongst the activists about whether the fight is for jobs or for generous terms for early retirement and voluntary redundancy. This is a debate that continues to the end. Management attempt to get us to abandon the fight for jobs, while the other unions have an ambiguous position as they say that it is utopian to try to save jobs.

The determination of the CGT allows the struggle to be re-launched with a new strike organised by the joint-union committee. Because some unions are hesitant, preparations are clandestine. We start a strike on Saturday 16 February with 30 pickets at 5am. This is the beginning of a 10-day strike during which we block all gates, and organise food, patrols and braziers (it was very cold). During 10 days, the workers are mobilised, although some don't go on strike. The strike is picked up by a national and regional media, with mobile studios outside the gates. This gets the local population informed who come to support us and start to establish support/solidarity committees that are key to building a bridge between the workforce and local people.

During the strike, the reports in the media increase as Olivier Besancenot (LCR) and Segolene Royal (PS) turn up to show their support.

This strike had one important effect: to force the management of Ford Europe to get involved who up till now had kept clear. Twice they come to Bordeaux to get us to stop the action and to calm us by making a ridiculous financial offer. The strike is ended following legal proceedings that threaten us with heavy fines. But in any case we would have been unable to keep the action going for much longer. Management go again on the offensive as they saw the strike as an insult to them.

During the strike, there were two demands: save all jobs and also generous financial offers (although at the CGT we were not in favour of the latter). Management will use the

demand for a financial offer to break up the joint-union committee, and to sow confusion and demobilise amongst the workforce. They are partly successful as the joint-union committee breaks up.

Management proposes an agreement for financial compensation in case of redundancies in the next three years. We continue fighting against this attempt to make job cuts. Four unions sign up to this deal, but the CGT and the CFTC refuse. As these two unions represent the majority of the workforce, we are in a position to get this agreement cancelled. Management attack the CGT and tries to bribe the workforce by making an offer of a minimum of 50,000 Euros in case of redundancy. We faced hostility from some workers and a declaration of war from the unions that had signed up to the deal.

We go through a difficult period as management with the unions that had signed-up organise a referendum to isolate the unions that were fighting. We called for a boycott, which may have been a mistake, but as more than a third did not vote, the small majority for the deal was meaningless.

From July 2008, we plan with the local support committees for a demonstration in Paris at the Car Show. We finance the transport with bingos, meals, and a concert organised by the Council of Blanquefort. We eventually organise 600 people to go up by train to invade the Car Show, resulting in a big splash in the media and the exasperation of the management with this campaign that never ends.

In the summer of 2008, the possibility of the plant being taken over becomes a serious option as pressure is beginning to pay-off. We have no faith in the statements from management, but those of the government and local public bodies indicate the possibility of a take-over with at least 500 jobs safe.

At the end of October, management announces the closure of the site for ten weeks. This is a shock to the workers and we demand full-pay as compensation during the close-down period. On the eve of the closure there

is a meeting of the works council were management refuse to improve compensation. We invade the meeting and block management in the car park. There is a physical confrontation and the atmosphere is very tense. It was only the CGT there with 200-300 militants. Management is shaken but denounce political manipulation by the extremists and refuses to make any improvements. The CGT is now alone as the CFTC break-off, repeating the criticism of management against this demonstration.

During the closure of the last two months of 2008, the CGT organises weekly union meetings, and two demonstrations in Bordeaux. We keep up the pressure and a presence in the media, with the objective of saving all jobs.

Finally, there is an official announcement on the 2 February 2009 that the plant will be taken over by HZ, a German holding company, in co-operation the German industrial group Hay. It is a strange return to work, which gives the impression that Ford is trying to stop the mobilisation, to make itself forgotten and to sub-contract out the closure. Nevertheless the promise is that all jobs will be safe. The local public bodies and elected officials declare that they have worked hard over the last two years but forget to mention the campaign by the workers that forced them to find a solution.

From the 1st May, the plant has officially be bought up by another company, but Ford is still has a presence on the board. Ford finances everything until 2011, and we carry on with the same production while we wait for new products to be brought in over the next three years. We have little confidence in management, and most workers don't believe them, but the campaign has stopped.

It is both a victory and a trick by management. The CGT is alone in continuing to keep up the pressure, and argues that to really defend jobs we need to be vigilant and continue the struggle as soon as there are new attacks.

Philippe Rouffigne

A tug-of-war over the media

8 June 2009, by **Peter Drucker**

Left-wing Canadian-Chinese professor Yuezhi Zhao has written several books about the media in the age of neoliberal globalization. Her works are devoted to showing how the apparently diverse global media is in fact kept in line by capital with the help of all sorts of subtle mechanisms. She had little need of her ability to peer beneath the surface in order to expose media dictatorship in her native country, however; there's not much subtlety about the way the Chinese state controls its media.

While competition and debate do exist in the Chinese media today, there's no such thing as independent media. Newspapers, magazines and broadcasting are virtually the only remaining sector in which private property in the means of production are not permitted in China. According to the official rules, every publication must be the organ of a Communist Party committee.

This does not amount to an effective barrier to multinational or domestic capital. There are Chinese editions today of fashion magazines like *Elle* and sports magazines like *Golf*. In 2003 top CP leaders attended a lecture at their party school by no less a media magnate than Rupert Murdoch. And by now the Chinese media is almost totally dependent for its revenues on advertising, mostly by the private sector. Formally, however, a party committee is always in charge of every media outlet - which means that providing a CP front for private investors is an easy way for local party organizations to fill their treasuries.

Yet formal party ownership of the media is not considered a sufficient guarantee of its political submissiveness. All media firms also fall under the strict central supervision of the CP propaganda

department. Every day, before an editor puts together a paper or news broadcast, a stack of directives has to be read. No coverage today of yesterday's protests in x province, the editor is instructed. Use only the central press bureau's copy for your coverage of the prime minister's visit to country y. You may publish an interview with this expert about that development, but don't give your own in-depth analysis - or the other way around. And the editor had better pay close attention, because Beijing reserves the right to sack any editor whenever it chooses.

Dissent

Within such an apparently airtight system, one might imagine that there is no space at all for dissident opinions or debate. But space for dissent does exist. In fact the system even allows for storms of protest that shake the structures of authority every couple of years, and even shake loose concessions. China is simply too big a country to make it feasible to stifle every dissident opinion before publication - as the regime fully understands. Its goal is no longer to censure every article, but rather to channel debates in a way that marginalizes the most dangerous currents of opinion.

The internet in particular has become the privileged terrain of dissidents, despite the state's internationally notorious system of firewalls and filters. Zhao explains that net users are not a good cross-sample of the Chinese population, since only the most prosperous two or three hundred million of the 1.3 billion Chinese have internet access. But these millions of net users include students and even workers who can and do pass on their

semi-licit reading to millions of others.

Zhao recounts at length the story of three recent protests that spread across the whole country: the protest against the murder of former student Sun Zhigang in 2003 in a detention centre in Guangzhou; the 'Lang Xianping storm' of protest in 2004 against the plundering of state property by managers; and the protest against the death sentence imposed in 2005 on worker Wang Binyu after he had stabbed four people to death in a rage after he had failed to get his back wages paid. Each of these waves of protest was begun by a courageous blogger or journalist, allowed temporarily and partially by a shocked government to be picked up by the broader media, and eventually suppressed, though sometimes after concessions.

Concessions are sometimes useful in helping President Hu Jintao with his effort to craft a more social image than his predecessors Jiang Zemin and Deng Xiaoping. But no dissent is allowed to put capitalism itself in question, or even criticize the system of apartheid that keeps the great majority of the rural population prisoner in their villages or only allows them to live as second-class citizens in the cities.

To the extent that foreign sources covers repression of the Chinese media, they give a distorted picture of who the victims usually are. Western publications sometimes complain that liberal democratic intellectuals, like the signers of last year's Charter 08, suffer from the regime's attacks. And in fact China's rulers do sometimes decide that they need to draw the line when intellectuals call for a multiparty system or the privatization of everything that is still in state hands. Zhao shows, however, that this kind of

liberal is generally treated with kid gloves compared with the treatment meted out to workers who protest against factory closings, farmers who protest against confiscation of their land, or the small left-wing circles that charge that there is no longer anything communist about the CP.

It is unfortunate that a book this valuable is written so inaccessibly. That it repeatedly cites people like Raymond Williams and Jürgen Habermas is fair enough. But there was no need to write the whole volume in 'critical communications' jargon, or make virtually every sentence in these hundreds of pages

stretch for two or three lines of print or more. However, this reader in any event found it well worth the effort of plowing through to the end.

Yuezhi Zhao, Communication in China: Political Economy, Power and Conflict. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008. 373 pp.

Epidemiology, economy and racism

4 June 2009, by **Thadeus Pato**

Epidemics and pandemics of influenza since ever take place periodically. The influenza is a viral disease, which has got a high transmissibility and therefore tends to epidemic and pandemic occurrence. Generally it leaves a more or less potent immunity. But the flu-viruses have got the inconvenient talent to be able to mutate very easily, means, they can change their genetic material in a way, that for instance a immunity against the flu-virus of last year doesn't work against the virus of this year and therefore as well the vaccination does not work, because the vaccines regularly can only be produced on the base of the existing virus-types. Especially the influenza type A (there are the types A, B and C) has got this high potential for mutation. Even when there has taken place a considerable mutation of the virus, there can happen a pandemic, a worldwide outbreak of the disease. Worldwide outbreaks took place in 1889, in 1918 (so-called Spanish flu), in 1957 (so-called Asiatic flu), in 1968 (so-called Hong Kong-flu) and in 1977 (so-called Russian flu). However the influenza isn't a especially aggressive disease.

People with an undamaged immune system generally recover without bigger problems. Even the biggest

known pandemic in 1918/19 left on the one hand 50 million dead, an incredible number, but on the other hand the mortality of the infected was just 0,2 %. Additionally one has to consider, that this pandemic at the end of First World War hit populations, whose immune systems were severely weakened by the consequences of the war.

If we look to the presently fuelled hysteria, we have to ask the question, why there is such a hype about just another variation of the flu-virus (type A), called misleadingly "swine-flu".

Where does the "swine-flu" come from?

The new type of virus consists of parts of genomes from four different origins. This type of combination until today was not known. The single parts come from a North-American swine-flu virus, from a virus of a North-American bird-flu, a human influenza-virus and a swine-flu virus of an Eurasian type of pigs - the latter until today was not found in the USA. In contrary to the misleading label "swine-flu" the genome of the new virus comes from variants in the first place between humans common and was transmitted until now only from humans to humans, but in the meantime there is one reported case from Canada of transmission from a man to a pig. The epidemiologists are

alarmed, because the variant, which causes the bird-flu, is the most aggressive one known so far, with mortality above 50% among humans. But until today there was no transmission of bird-flu between humans. This is apparently different with the new virus.

As far as we know, symptoms and mortality of the new variant are not much different from the yearly waves of "common" influenza.

As usual in these cases, in the last weeks appeared a couple of more or less absurd conspiracy theories respecting the origin of the virus, for example the targeted breeding in a laboratory etc. But all of them have got no plausibility.

One of the more serious assumptions, which the Mexican PRT was pointing to in its statement respecting the origin of the new virus-type concerns the mass-keeping and breeding of pigs in Mexico. Pigs are generally a reservoir for all the forms of viruses, which attributed to the new type, so it is clearly possible, that the genetic exchange could have taken place in the respiratory tract of pigs. This assumption is backed by the fact, that in the area of the first occurrence in Mexico one of the biggest pig-breeding factories of the world is located, run by a US-multinational. In the same region there are located, what is less known, big bird farms as well. Before the outbreak of the flu there have been rumours about cases of bird-flu, which have been kept

secret.

It is undeniable, that the mass-keeping of animals poses a general problem respecting the spread of this kind of germs. It means that the mass keeping most probably plays a role in the origin, but surely in the spread of respective new kinds of pathogenic agents.

However, a fact is, that in the respective region (the Mexican state of Vera Cruz) end of 2008 according to the dates of the health authorities 60% of the population were affected by an atypic infection of the upper respiratory tract.

Alarm - why?

If one looks to the present figures of flu-cases and especially the number of the died people, one has to state, that the hysteria until now is not justified from the point of view of public health. In the USA every year 36 000 people die by "usual" influenza. Fewer people until now died by "swine-flu". [19] Why the alert of the WHO?

For the present influenza-hype there is not only one reason, but a couple of them. The most important:

- In the "worst case" the new virus could combine the high contagiousity of the "usual" influenza with the aggressivity of the bird-flu and therefore have a much higher mortality than the former types.

- For the vaccine-industry, which cooperates in such cases directly with the public health-authorities, a pandemic is a giant opportunity - the threat alone is enough to boost the sell of vaccines (which are developed just now in high speed) incredibly. The industry has got any interest to feed the hysteria. This was a success already in former times: 1976 there occurred a local outbreak of a new variant of flu-virus in US-soldiers at Fort Dixon, New Jersey. The health

authorities of USA started a vaccine-production program and a public campaign, until mid of December 1976 40 millions of US-citizens had been vaccinated - at this time the biggest vaccination campaign of history. Afterwards it came up, that some of the vaccinated had developed a so-called Guillain-Barré syndrome. For the origin of this - until today not completely understood - disease, which is an autoimmune-phenomenon characterised by the development of antibodies against the own nerve-cells of the patient and leads to severe damage, beside other reasons vaccines possibly are responsible. In the fifties for this reason a vaccine already was removed from the market.

- For the producers of antiviral drugs like Oseltamivir a pandemic, if it occurs or not, also is a giant chance. Actually these drugs should be applicated quite cautious: On the one hand the danger of development of resistance is very high. Scientists in the USA concluded out of the data of the flu-season 2008/2009, that about 98% of the virus-samples isolated by them had been resistant against Oseltamivir ("Tamiflu"). Data of the WHO from March 2009 too confirmed in 1291 from 1362 samples taken the high resistance against flu-drugs in the season 2008/2009. On the other hand these so-called virustatika are not at all harmless drugs. Oseltamivir for example possibly causes impaired consciousness and paranoid symptoms in children. After the check of more than 100 cases with abnormal behaviour, among them three with letal outcome, health experts in USA recommended to incorporate an information to the respective drug, to supervise permanently patients taking Tamiflu.

- For the international phalanx of the meat-producing industry a pandemic would be a direct threat to their business. Mass-slaughtering like some years ago in Hong Kong because of the bird-flu would be a economic

disaster for them. And there would take place another public debate about mass-keeping of animals as a such - this they like to block at all costs.

- A flu-pandemia is an event, which touches the countries of the North as well directly and which has not only consequences to health, but also to economy because of the massive temporary drop out of workforce. This is a disease, which is not limiting itself to the countries of the South.....

- Besides that in the present political and economic situation for the political class a subject is very convenient, in which they can present themselves as able to act and which leads away from the desperate situation respecting the crisis. And the respective professionals in the scientific field are thankful as well for the suddenly gushing money.

But we have to remind, that every year millions of people die unnecessarily: not only from hunger, but from simple, easily treatable diseases - but usually not in the imperialist metropolises, but in the periphery. It may be plausible from an epidemiological point of view, that there are spent because of the threat of a flu-pandemic already after a handful of cases millions of Euro and that there are started worldwide programs, but it shows at the same time the racism of this kind of health-policy.

For the 1,6 -3 millions of people dying every year from tuberculosis, the 1,5-2,7 millions dying from malaria, means, from diseases, which are very good treatable and curable, (not to talk about the 8,8 millions dying from hunger) there are no giant emergency programs, there is no international media hype, no prophylactic stock of medicine, no free vaccination, no money for research to a comparable extent.

But out of these people you cannot make any money.....