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Criminalisation of social movements and poverty: a feminist outlook

31 July 2009, by Tárzia Medeiros

A few years ago, sectors of the anticapitalist feminist movement joined in with this convergence, thereby contributing the transversal nature of feminist analysis in many debates and articles. The convergence of these forms of popular resistance has been fundamental to break through the blinders portraying “savage capitalism” as the only alternative. As

Claudio Katz says, “the workers, the exploited and the oppressed of the entire planet are the antagonists of 21st-Century imperialism”. However the repeated attempts to criminalise social movements and poverty via State apparatus (police, sectors of the judicial power, etc.) and the major communications media, as well as jailing and killing activists, place us up against several crossroads.

In a world where there is more and more exclusion and violence, where 70% of poor people are females, the role of women in anticapitalist movements and the repercussions of criminalisation on their lives warrant a brief reflection.

Women against privatisation and

destruction of natural resources

The macabre combination of production restructuring, suspension of rights, military intervention in countries of the periphery and takeover of natural resources, overseen by patriarchal capitalism has a harsh impact on women. This is why the struggle against “green deserts”, against agribusiness transnationals and against privatisation of water have a women’s face, as women are the people who also ensure food sovereignty through their subsistence activities; and it is women who walk for many kilometres in the heat of the Nordeste region’s semi-arid earth in search of the water their families will use.

The action by Via Campesina women in Brazil, who destroyed the Aracruz Celulosa substitution for eucalyptus, was a victorious example of women playing a leading role. The struggle for the preservation of forests and rivers resulted in the sentencing of the “women burners of coco and women living along riverbanks, whose sustainable way of life based on

fishing and extractive activities assures their survival and the survival of our Amazonia. In all the corners of “Our

America”, in Oaxaca or Ciudad Juárez, in Caracas neighbourhoods or Quito streets, women’s participation can be perceived, along with their determination not to submit to the imperialist neocolonisation of our continent, also speaking out against Latin-American pro-imperialist governments complicit with these aims.

The struggle for legalised abortion is the focus of criminalisation

Despite various initiatives by the Latin-American movement and some important victories – such as the decriminalisation of abortion in Mexico until the twelfth week of gestation – we are being subjected to a strong offensive by religious and conservative sectors who, putting into practice the “Campaigns for Life”, are implementing a strong lobby campaign to get laws criminalising abortion

tightened up further still. This is what happened in Nicaragua slightly more than one year ago when criminalisation of therapeutic abortion was

voted. Here in Brazil, women are harassed by the three State powers. President Lula continues to compromise with the Vatican, sending signals, including about the possibility of putting religious education on the school curriculum. At the end of 2008, Congress chairman MP Arlindo Chinaglia brought in the creation of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI, for the initials in Portuguese) of abortion,

with as a mandate no less than the institutionalisation of criminalisation of women who defend legalisation of abortion and those who are obliged to carry it out.

Moreover, we were recently surprised by an arbitrary action by the Judiciary of the State of Mato Grosso do Sul, in the town of Campo Grande, which cited more than ten thousand women for practising abortion, using as proof the medical records requisitioned in a clandestine clinic. Out of these women, some 1,200 are facing trial, reliving their personal dramas,

cruelly exposed. Thus, if we analyse the way capitalism commoditises and controls basic aspects of women's lives, using them as instruments and exploiting them on the basis of the foundations of patriarchy, then we can understand why the active part taken by women has become so noteworthy in anticapitalist movements. In consequence, it can be taken for granted that they are in the sights of criminalisation due to their participation in these movements.

Question & Answer on the Crisis

31 July 2009, by Campaign for Peace and Democracy

Our statement concluded: "We express our deep concern for their well-being in the face of brutal repression and our fervent wishes for the strengthening and deepening of the movement for justice and democracy in Iran." Since the elections, some on the left, and others as well, have questioned the legitimacy of and the need for solidarity with the anti-Ahmadinejad movement. The Campaign's position of solidarity with the Iranian protesters has not changed, but we think those questions need to be squarely addressed.

Below are the questions we take up. Questions three, four and five deal with the issue of electoral fraud; readers who are not interested in this rather technical discussion are invited to go on to question six. And we should say at the outset that our support for the protest movement is not determined by the technicalities of electoral manipulation, as important as they are. What is decisive is that huge masses of Iranians are convinced that the election was rigged and that they went into the streets, at great personal risk, to demand democracy and an end to theocratic repression.

1. Was the June 12, 2009 election fair?

2. Isn't it true that the Guardian Council is indirectly elected by the Iranian people?

3. Was there fraud, and was it on a scale to alter the outcome?

4. Didn't a poll conducted by U.S.-based organizations conclude that Ahmadinejad won the election?

5. Didn't Ahmadinejad get lots of votes from conservative religious Iranians among the rural population and the urban poor? Might not these votes have been enough to overwhelm his opponents?

6. Hasn't the U.S. (and Israel) been interfering in Iran and promoting regime change, including by means of supporting all sorts of "pro-democracy" groups?

7. Has the Western media been biased against the Iranian government?

8. Is Mousavi a leftist? A neoliberal? What is the relation between Mousavi and the demonstrators in the streets?

9. Is Ahmadinejad good for world anti-imperialism?

10. Is Ahmadinejad more progressive

than his opponents in terms of social and economic policy? Is he a champion of the Iranian poor?

11. What do we want the U.S. government to do about the current situation in Iran?

12. What should we do about the current situation in Iran?

13. Is it right to advocate a different form of government in Iran?

1. Was the June 12, 2009 election fair?

Even if every vote was counted fairly, this was not a fair election. 475 people wished to run for president, but the un-elected Guardian Council, which vets all candidates for supposed conformity to Islamic principles, rejected all but 4.

Free elections also require free press, free expression, and freedom to organize, all of which have been severely curtailed."^[1]

2. You call the Guardian Council un-elected, but isn't it true that it is indirectly elected by the Iranian people?

Every eight years the Assembly of Experts is popularly elected. Candidates must be clerics and must be approved by the Guardian Council. The Assembly of Experts then chooses a supreme leader, who rules for life (though he can be removed by the Assembly of Experts for un-Islamic behavior). The supreme leader appoints the head of the judiciary. The supreme leader chooses half of the 12 members of the Guardian Council and the judiciary nominates the other six, to be ratified by the Parliament. The Guardian Council then vets all future candidates for president, parliament, and the Assembly of Experts.[2]

Thus, once this system was in place the possibilities of fundamentally changing it have been essentially nil. If 98 percent of the Iranian people decided tomorrow that they opposed an Islamic state, the rules would still enable the theocracy to continue in power forever — because the only people who could change things have themselves to be vetted by the theocratic rulers. Even amending the constitution requires the approval of the supreme leader.

Iran is not a dictatorship of the Saudi Arabian sort, where there are no elections and where people have zero input. But the basic prerequisite of a democratic system — that the people can change their government — is missing.

3. OK, but was there fraud? And was it on a scale to

alter the outcome?

There was certainly fraud: The Iranian government acknowledges that in 50 cities there were more votes cast than registered voters. (In Iran, voters can cast their ballots in districts other than those in which they reside, but "many districts where the excess votes were recorded are small, remote places rarely visited by business travelers or tourists." [3]) Moreover, the vote total also exceeded the number of registered voters in two provinces. [4] (Province-wide excess is more significant than city-wide, because people would be less likely to vote in another province than another city.) Perhaps the most damning indication of fraud was the fact that Mousavi's observers, as well as those of the other opposition candidates, were frequently not allowed to be present when ballots were counted and the ballot boxes sealed — a flagrant violation of Iranian law. [5] Moreover, supporters of opposition candidates had planned to independently monitor the results by text messaging local vote tallies to a central location, but the government suddenly shut down text messaging, making this impossible.

The question, though, is whether the extent of fraud was sufficient to change the results of the election. We can't be fully sure. But there is very powerful evidence that either no one emerged with a majority, which would have required a run-off election, or that Mousavi won outright.

According to an analysis by researchers at Chatham House, a British think tank, and the Institute of Iranian Studies at the University of St Andrews:

"In a third of all provinces, the official results would require that Ahmadinejad took not only all former conservative voters, and all former centrist voters, and all new voters, but also up to 44% of former Reformist voters, despite a decade of conflict between these two groups." [6]

Since Ahmadinejad's victory in 2005, when many reformists boycotted the elections and questions of fraud were raised, the hardliners lost their control

of local councils in 2007. So an Ahmadinejad sweep in 2009 — when reformist leaders, responding to a growing wave of discontent with the regime, were newly energized to challenge the President — is hard to credit.

Ahmadinejad allegedly won in areas where other candidates had strong ties and support, including their home provinces. Some have suggested that this was a result of people not wanting to "waste" their votes on candidates unlikely to win. [7] But in Iran, elections are in two stages: if no candidate gets a majority in round one, then there is a run-off. So there was no reason for anyone to refrain from voting for her preferred candidate in the first round.

4. Didn't a poll conducted by U.S.-based organizations conclude that Ahmadinejad won the election?

The poll, conducted by Terror Free Tomorrow and the New America Foundation, found that Ahmadinejad was favored over Mousavi by two to one. But the poll was conducted between May 11 and May 20, 2009, before the official beginning of the three-week election campaign, and before the (first-ever) televised presidential debates. These debates were a turning point: millions of Iranians saw displayed the deep divisions in the leadership of the Islamic Republic. They sensed that there was now an opportunity for real change.

More importantly, however, Ahmadinejad received the support of only a third of the poll respondents, with almost half either refusing to answer or saying they hadn't yet made up their minds:

"At the stage of the campaign for President when our poll was taken, 34 percent of Iranians surveyed said they

will vote for incumbent President Ahmadinejad. Mr. Ahmadinejad's closest rival, Mir Hussein Moussavi, was the choice of 14 percent, with 27 percent stating that they still do not know who they will vote for. President Ahmadinejad's other rivals, Mehdi Karroubi and Mohsen Rezai, were the choice of 2 percent and 1 percent, respectively.

"A close examination of our survey results reveals that the race may actually be closer than a first look at the numbers would indicate. More than 60 percent of those who state they don't know who they will vote for in the Presidential elections reflect individuals who favor political reform and change in the current system." [8]

When a government acts in secret, conducts an election lacking in transparency, and bars and restricts foreign journalists and the free flow of information, it makes sense not to accept its claims.

5. But didn't Ahmadinejad get lots of votes from conservative religious Iranians among the rural population and the urban poor? Might not these votes have been enough to overwhelm his opponents?

Ahmadinejad's support from ultraconservative voters was certainly not insignificant. In addition, his social welfare programs, funded from oil revenues, have undoubtedly induced many among the poor to give him their allegiance (see below). And then there are the members of the security apparatus — the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij, the pro-government religious paramilitary force — who,

together with their families, number in the millions. But there is no evidence that these were enough to give him the huge majorities he claims. As for peasants and villagers, only 35 percent of Iranian voters live in rural areas. And in any event, there is good reason to believe that rural voters are not strongly pro-Ahmadinejad. [9] As Chatham House noted, "In 2005, as in 2001 and 1997, conservative candidates, and Ahmadinejad in particular, were markedly unpopular in rural areas. That the countryside always votes conservative is a myth. The claim that this year Ahmadinejad swept the board in more rural provinces flies in the face of these trends." [10]

6. Hasn't the U.S. (and Israel) been interfering in Iran and promoting regime change, including by means of supporting all sorts of "pro-democracy" groups?

In the 1950s and 60s, rightwingers charged that the U.S. civil rights movement was actually controlled by the Soviet Union, through the U.S. Communist Party. Of course Communists were involved in the civil rights movement and no doubt Moscow approved. But that's a far cry from indicating that the Soviet Union was a decisive force in the civil rights movement, let alone that it controlled the movement.

There is no doubt that U.S. agents, as well as those of other countries, are hard at work in Iran, as elsewhere. It is well known that Washington has meddled in the politics of Venezuela and Bolivia, as well as Georgia, Ukraine and Lebanon, to take only the most recent examples. Congress has

even set up a special fund for "democracy promotion" in Iran. But foreign meddling does not prove foreign control. And foreign meddling does not automatically discredit mass movements or their goals; it depends on who is calling the shots. In any event, there is no evidence that the CIA or any other arm of U.S. intelligence — or Mossad — had anything to do with initiating or leading the protests in Iran. And it is absurd to see a parallel between the rightwing elements in Venezuela and Bolivia — who are not fighting for greater popular control over their governments — and the millions of protesters who have demanded democracy in Iran.

In 1953 U.S. and British intelligence engineered a coup to oust the democratically-elected Mossadeq government in Iran. But that coup involved bribing street gangs and a treasonous military. There was nothing like the mass upsurge that we've recently seen in Iran, and there has been not a scrap of credible evidence that the millions of people in the streets these past few weeks were brought out by CIA money.

On the contrary, for years now leading Iranian human rights activists, feminists, trade unionists — people like Shirin Ebadi and Akbar Ganji — have taken the position that Iranian dissidents should not accept U.S. financial support. [11] They have a consistent record of opposing U.S. bullying, sanctions and threats of war, [12] and they know that any hint of links to Washington would be the kiss of death in Iran.

Recently, Iranian state television has broadcast footage of alleged rioters stating "We were under the influence of Voice of America Persia and the BBC" and some detainees — politicians, journalists, and others — are said to have confessed to all sorts of Western plots. [13] Surely, though, no one should take such claims, elicited under torture or duress, seriously. [14]

7. Has the Western

media been biased against the Iranian government?

Mainstream Western media have clearly been more interested in pointing out electoral fraud and repression in Iran than in states that are closely allied with Washington. But this doesn't mean that there has been no fraud or repression in Iran.

For example, a video of the killing of Neda Agha Soltan spread widely on the internet and the media was quick to turn her death into a icon of the brutality of the Iranian government. We never saw a similar response to the many victims of government atrocities in Haiti or Egypt or Colombia. Nevertheless, the claim by some Iranian officials that she was killed by the CIA or by other demonstrators just to make the regime look bad[15] is totally lacking in credibility.

Western media have always selectively publicized and often exaggerated the crimes of official enemies. But we shouldn't conclude from this that crimes have not been committed. And in the case of Iran, there is no good evidence so far that Western news reports on the government's electoral fraud and violent repression of dissent have been fundamentally inaccurate.

8. Is Mousavi a leftist? A neoliberal? What is the relation between Mousavi and the demonstrators in the streets?

Mousavi's politics and economic program are not very clear. He is in many ways a pillar of the Establishment — approved as a candidate by the Guardian Council and a former prime minister who

served under Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1980s. He had a reputation for being one of the leaders more sympathetic to welfare state programs. Under his prime ministership many such programs were enacted, but also leftists were brutally repressed. With Washington's assistance: using U.S. intelligence information, the Iranian government rounded up members of the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party and conducted mass executions, virtually eliminating the Tudeh in Iran and killing many other leftists as well.[16] It has been argued that the repression was carried out by the ministry of intelligence and the judiciary, and that these institutions were not in fact under his control even though he was prime minister. Whether or not this is the case, at a minimum Mousavi neither resigned nor publicly protested the violent repression that took place when he was prime minister, and thus he cannot be absolved of responsibility.

More recently, he has been an ally of the powerful billionaire cleric and former president Hashemi Rafsanjani, who is close to major private business interests. Mousavi supports turning over many of the publicly-owned sectors of the Iranian economy to private hands, but so does Ahmadinejad, who boasts that he has privatized more public assets than his predecessors,[17] and in fact privatization has been going on for several years and is mandated by recently passed legislation.[18] In his campaign for the presidency, Mousavi called for loosening some of the Islamic Republic's restrictions on personal liberties, especially as concern women's rights. But Mousavi came to embody the aspirations of millions of Iranians for more than this — for an end to the terrorism of the Basijis and the Revolutionary Guards and for an even broader democratization of the Islamic Republic. Undoubtedly, some of them hoped — as do we — that the protests would be a first step towards dismantling the fundamentally anti-democratic system of clerical rule itself.

During the weeks that followed the election, demonstrators protested voting fraud, but also called increasingly for equality and freedom

— "down with dictatorship!" The marches may have been started mainly by students and liberal-minded middle class people, but they were quickly joined by growing numbers of workers, elderly people and women in conservative chadors.

It seems that Mousavi's electoral organization did not anticipate the massive outpouring of protest after the election and was unable (and perhaps unwilling, given Mousavi's Establishment ties) to provide any organization or real leadership. The ferocious violence of the security forces has left the protesters, and the general public in Iran, stunned and understandably intimidated. However, their outrage is deep, and it will not go away. Protest may soon return to the streets and rooftops. And many are looking for other forms of protest. Mousavi, Khatami and Rafsanjani have not made their peace with Ahmadinejad, and the split in Iran's clerical establishment deepens.

The millions who have gone into the streets have already shown themselves capable of acting independently of Mousavi, and, as has often been the case in democratic struggles historically around the world, there is good reason to believe that the masses of protesters who have entered into the fight for limited demands can transcend the political, social and economic program of the movement's initial leaders. In Iran, this is especially the case if trade unions are able to use the opening created by today's challenges to Ahmadinejad to assert the interests of the poor and lend their organized strength to the movement.

9. Is Ahmadinejad good for world anti-imperialism?

There is a foolish argument in some sectors of the left that holds that any state that is opposed by the U.S. government is therefore automatically playing a progressive, anti-imperialist role and should be supported. On these grounds, many such "leftists" have acted as apologists for murderous dictators like Milosevic

and Saddam Hussein. The Campaign for Peace and Democracy has always argued that we can oppose U.S. imperial policy without thereby having necessarily to back the states against which it is directed.

Ironically, despite their current rhetoric, some U.S. neoconservatives favored an Ahmadinejad victory.[19] They knew that on the main issues dividing the U.S. and Iran — Tehran's pursuit of nuclear energy, its support for Hamas and Hezbollah, and its insistence on forcing Israel to withdraw completely from the Occupied Territories — Ahmadinejad's position was no different from that of Mousavi or that of Iranian public opinion.[20] But Ahmadinejad, with his confrontational style and his outrageous "questioning" of the Holocaust, is a much easier leader to hate and fear; his continuing grip on power therefore serves the goals of neoconservative hawks and Israeli hardliners.[21] And they know that Iranian public opinion solidly supports the cause of Palestinian rights; and that Ahmadinejad's anti-Jewish rhetoric has harmed, not helped, the Palestinians.

Some of these "leftists" say that whatever Ahmadinejad's faults, the mass upsurge in Iran plays into the hands of U.S. imperialism. On the contrary, a people's pro-democracy movement is the worst fear of the many authoritarian regimes on which Washington relies to maintain its hegemony; such as the rulers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Pakistan and elsewhere. And not just among U.S. clients. It is significant that news of the demonstrations was heavily censored in China and Myanmar, and that the Russian government was one of the first to congratulate Ahmadinejad on his "victory."

Hugo Chavez too congratulated Ahmadinejad. As Reese Erlich, author of *The Iran Agenda* who frequently appears on *Democracy Now!*, has commented,

"On a diplomatic level, Venezuela and Iran share some things in common. Both are under attack from the U.S., including past efforts at 'regime change.' Venezuela and other governments around the world will

have to deal with Ahmadinejad as the de facto president, so questioning the election could cause diplomatic problems.

"But that's no excuse." [22]

10. Is Ahmadinejad more progressive than his opponents in terms of social and economic policy? Is he a champion of the Iranian poor?

As leftists we are very familiar with rightwing politicians disingenuously claiming to care about the poor and the working class. The Islamic Republic has long included a social welfare component to help it maintain support. Ahmadinejad has undertaken some populist programs, utilizing some of the revenues generated by the sharply higher price of oil. But, even ignoring the fact that basic democratic rights and women's rights are hardly the exclusive concern of the well-to-do, the Islamic Republic, and especially Ahmadinejad's presidency, have not been good for the workers and the poor of Iran.

Anyone purporting to support the working class has to back independent unions so that workers can defend their own interests both in the work place and in the society at large. However, Iran has still not ratified international labor conventions guaranteeing freedom of association and collective bargaining and abolishing child labor,[23] and unions in Iran have been subjected to horrendous repression. As the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran has reported[24]:

"Iranian workers are still unable to form independent trade unions, a right denied both within Iran's labor code and de facto repressed by the government in action. The government

routinely arrests and prosecutes workers demanding their most basic rights, such as demands for wages unpaid, sometimes for periods as long as 36 months. Security forces often attack peaceful gatherings by workers, harass their families, and even kill them, as happened during a gathering by copper miners in Shahr Babak, near the city of Kerman, in 2004."

Under Ahmadinejad's presidency, the situation has been especially grim:

"Two leading trade unionists, Mansour Osanloo and Mahmoud Salehi, are currently in prison. Another one, Majid Hamidi, recently the target of an assassination attempt, is hospitalized. In addition to being imprisoned and fined, eleven other workers were flogged in February 2008 for the crime of participating in a peaceful gathering to commemorate International Labor Day, May 1st.

"In January 2006, security forces arrested nearly a thousand members of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, attacked some of their homes, beat their families, and even detained the wives and children of the leading members, to prevent a planned strike. Since then, most members of the Syndicate's central council have been targets of prosecution and imprisonment. The Syndicate's leader, Mansour Osanloo, is currently serving a five- year sentence, while he suffers from eye injuries due to earlier beatings, and is in danger of going blind. Fifty-four members of the Syndicate have been fired from their jobs and are prosecuted in courts for their peaceful activities."

Teachers' attempts to organize and collectively bargain have also met violent repression.

Just this past May Day, the government beat participants in a peaceful labor event and arrested the leaders.[25] And in June, a committee of the International Labour Organization cited Iran for the "grave situation relating to freedom of association in the country.[26]

What makes the need for unions in Iran so important is that large

numbers of workers are forced to work under temporary contracts that permit even more exploitation of labor than usual. One common practice is for workers to be fired and then rehired every three months as a way to deny them pensions and other benefits.

11. What do we want the U.S. government to do about the current situation in Iran?

There is a great deal that the Administration can do. Obama should promise that the U.S. will never launch a military attack on Iran or support an Israeli attack. He should commit the United States not to support terrorism or sabotage operations in Iran, and immediately order the cessation of any such activities that may still be occurring. He should lift sanctions against Iran — certainly not as a reward to Ahmadinejad for stealing the election, but because the sanctions have a negative impact on the Iranian people and provide one of the main justifications for Ahmadinejad's iron rule. He should take major initiatives toward disarmament of U.S. nuclear and conventional weapons, and he should withdraw all U.S. troops from Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Pakistan. And he should work to promote a nuclear-free Middle East, which includes Israel. By reducing these threats, Obama would thereby be removing one of the main rationalizations for Iranian repression (as well as for its nuclear program).

12. What should we do about the current situation in Iran?

We need to make it clear to the Iranian people that there is "another America," one that is independent of the government and opposed to its oppressive and anti-democratic

foreign policy. Our support comes with no strings attached and no hidden agenda. Iranians should be made aware that it is American progressives — not the U.S. government or the hypocrites of the right — who offer genuine solidarity.

13. Is it right to advocate a different form of government in Iran?

As leftists, the Campaign for Peace and Democracy supports radical change everywhere that people do not have full control over their political and economic lives. We advocate such change in the United States, in France, in Russia, in China. And we support it in Iran too. But we do not support the United States government — or Britain or Israel or any other country — imposing "regime change" outside its borders by force. What was wrong with Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003 was not that the regime of Saddam Hussein was overthrown — his was a hideous regime and anyone concerned with human decency wanted it ended — but that Bush asserted that the United States had the right to invade. Political change imposed by a foreign army, or brought about by the covert operations of foreign intelligence agencies, is unacceptable, and it is especially unacceptable when the foreign power concerned has a long history of interventions for its own sordid motives: to impose its domination, to control oil resources, to establish military bases.

But do we support the Iranian people if they act to end autocratic rule in Iran? Of course! This is a government that, in addition to its just-completed election fraud and vicious attacks on its own citizens, imprisons, tortures, publicly flogs and hangs political opponents, labor activists, gays, and "apostates," and still prescribes execution by stoning as the penalty for adultery. The Head of the Judiciary declared a moratorium on executions by stoning in 2002, but at least five

people are known to have been stoned to death since then, two of them on December 26, 2008.[27] Workers have no right to strike. A woman's testimony is worth half that of a man's and women have limited rights to divorce and child custody. The regime imposes gender apartheid, segregating women in many public places. Veiling is compulsory and enforced by threats, fines and imprisonment. We should support Iranians' efforts to end these barbaric practices.

Notes

1. See, for example, Amnesty International, "Iran: Worsening repression of dissent as election approaches," 1 February 2009, MDE 13/012/2009; Amnesty International, "Iran's presidential election amid unrest and ongoing human rights violations," 5 June 2009; Amnesty International, "Iran: Election amid repression of dissent and unrest," 9 June 2009, MDE 13/053/2009.
2. See BBC, "Iran: Who Holds the Power".
3. Michael Slackman, "Amid Crackdown, Iran Admits Voting Errors," New York Times, June 23, 2009.
4. Ali Ansari, ed., Preliminary Analysis of the Voting Figures in Iran's 2009 Presidential Election, Chatham House and the Institute of Iranian Studies, University of St Andrews, 21 June 2009.
5. Kaveh Ehsani, Arang Keshavarzian and Norma Claire Moruzzi, "Tehran, June 2009," Middle East Report Online, June 28, 2009.
6. Ansari, op. cit.
7. George Friedman, "The Iranian Election and the Revolution Test," Stratfor, June 22, 2009; Esam Al-Amin, "A Hard Look at the Numbers: What Actually Happened in the Iranian Presidential Election?" CounterPunch, June 22, 2009.
8. Terror-Free Tomorrow & New America Foundation, "Ahmadinejad Front Runner in Upcoming

Presidential Elections; Iranians Continue to Back Compromise and Better Relations with US and West; Results of a New Nationwide Public Opinion Survey of Iran before the June 12, 2009 Presidential Elections," June 2009.

9. Eric Hoogland, "Iran's Rural Vote and Election Fraud," June 17, 2009, Agence Global.

10. Ansari, op. cit.

11. Karl Vick and David Finkel, "U.S. Push for Democracy Could Backfire Inside Iran," Washington Post, March 14, 2006; Akbar Ganji, "Why Iran's Democrats Shun Aid," Washington Post, Oct. 26, 2007; Patrick Disney, "Iranian Civil Society Urges US to End 'Democracy Fund,' Ease Sanctions," 16 July 2008.

12. See, for example, "Iran's Civil Society Movement Sets Up 'National Peace Council'," CASMII Press Release, 10 July 2008.

13. AFP, "Iran shows footage of 'rioters influenced by Western media'," 23 June 2009; Michael Slackman, "Top Reformers Admitted Plot, Iran Declares," New York Times, July 4, 2009; CNN, "Newsweek reporter in Iran reportedly

'confesses'," July 1, 2009.

14. Of course, when similar torture was carried out by the U.S. government, U.S. media only referred to "harsh interrogation techniques." See Glenn Greenwald, "The NYT calls Iranian interrogation tactics 'torture'," Salon, July 4, 2009.

15. Thomas Erdbrink and William Branigin, "Iranian cleric says protesters wage war against God," Boston Globe, June 27, 2009.

16. The Tower Commission Report, President's Special Review Board, New York: Bantam Books/Times Books, 1987, pp. 103-04.

17. Ehsani, et al., op. cit.

18. Billy Wharton, "Selling Iran: Ahmadinejad, Privatization and a Bus Driver Who Said No," Dissident Voice, June 28th, 2009.

19. Stephen Zunes, "Why U.S. Neocons Want Ahmadinejad to Win," AlterNet, June 17, 2009.

20. See Obama's assessment of the lack of difference between Mousavi and Ahmadinejad; on public opinion, see Terror Free Tomorrow poll cited above.

21. Joshua Mitnick, "Why Iran's Ahmadinejad is preferred in Israel; The incumbent president will be easier to isolate than reformist leader Mr. Mousavi, say some leading Israeli policymakers," Christian Science Monitor, June 21, 2009.

22. Reese Erlich, "Iran and Leftist Confusion," ZNet, June 29, 2009.

23. See ILO, "Ratifications of the Fundamental human rights Conventions by country" (7/1/09).

24. International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, "Workers' Rights."

25. Amnesty International, "Iran: Prisoners of conscience / fear of torture or ill-treatment," 10 June 2009, MDE 13/054/2009.

26. International Labour Organization, "ILO Governing Body elects new Chairperson — Committee on Freedom of Association cites Myanmar, Cambodia and Islamic Republic of Iran," Press release, 19 June 2009, ILO/09/41.

27. Amnesty International, "Iran: New executions demonstrate need for unequivocal legal ban of stoning," 15 January 2009, MDE 13/004/2009.

How should the left relate to Obama?

31 July 2009, by **Charlie Post**

The election of an African-American to the highest elected office in a republic founded on white supremacy was, in itself, an important symbolic blow against white supremacy. Even more importantly, Obama's victory was a political and ideological defeat of the right. The 2008 election has raised popular expectations of the possibility of gains for working and oppressed people—national health insurance, the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), a renegotiation of NAFTA, the expansion of civil rights for queers, women and people of color, and an end to the imperial adventures in Iraq

and Afghanistan.

Linda Burnham, the long-time African-American socialist and feminist, has made an important contribution to the analysis of the Obama victory and the strategic challenges it presents to the US left.[1] Burnham recognizes that the Obama administration has two "bottom lines"—the stabilization of US capitalism and the rehabilitation of the reputation of US imperialism with its allies in Europe and Japan. However, "the effective-steward-of-capitalism is only one part of the Obama story." The Obama's campaign

brought together a new electoral rainbow coalition of people of color, youth, LGBT people, unionized workers, civil libertarians, and progressive urban professionals. According to Burnham, this new coalition was forged because Obama has moved the Democratic Party to the left:

[Obama has] wrenched the Democratic Party out of the clammy grip of Clintonian centrism. (Although he often leads from the center, Obama's center is a couple of notches to the left of the Clinton

administration's triangulation strategies)...

Burnham excoriates those on the left who failed to support Obama's residential campaign. She dismisses these comrades as hopeless sectarians, who rejected Obama because he was "insufficiently anti-capitalist." Those of us who did not campaign for Obama are caricatured as interested only in fighting for demands that directly attack capitalist rule—abstaining from real, concrete popular struggles.

Burnham concludes that the U.S. left has three tasks in the coming period:

1. The left needs to defend "the democratic opening" created by the Obama victory. This will require a bloc with "centrists against the right" through Democratic Party electoral campaigns. Those leftists who have traditionally rejected participation in the Democratic Party's electoral activity need to abandon their sectarian purity, and work to ensure an increased Democratic Congressional majority in 2010 and Obama's reelection in 2012. This will require the left's participation in voter registration and mobilization and actively campaigning for any and all Democrats in the coming four years.

2. The left cannot abandon the task of "building more united, effective, combative and influential progressive popular movements." The gap between Obama inspired rising expectation of change and a deepening economic crisis "will likely spark new levels and forms of population resistance." The left needs to continue to organize, educate, and agitate against US imperial policies in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, for national health care and pro-working people solutions to the economic crisis, and for a real answer to the looming environmental crisis.

3. We need to build the anti-capitalist left while simultaneously engaging in alliances with centrists in the Democratic Party, and rebuilding vibrant, progressive social movements.

Burnham's claim that Obama has moved the Democratic Party "several

notches to the left" of Clinton's administration is very questionable. Even more importantly, Burnham's strategy for left in the age of Obama is self-contradictory. Her first strategic priority—"an alliance with centrists in the Democratic Party to ensure a Democratic Congressional majority in 2010 and Obama's reelection in 2012"—is incompatible with her second and third strategic priorities—"rebuilding movements of social resistance and building an anti-capitalist left."

Is Obama to the Left of Clinton?

There is no question that many of Obama's voters and active supporters were well to the left of either Bill or Hillary Clinton. Especially during the primaries, Obama won support because he appeared to be left of Hillary Clinton on the wars, economic and health care policies, immigration, and a myriad of other questions.

However, even a cursory examination of what Obama himself wrote and said during the 2008 campaign revealed that he was well within the mainstream of the Clinton-Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) wing of the Democratic Party. African-American radicals at the Black Agenda Report (<http://www.blackagendareport.com/>) constantly hammered away at the huge gap between popular perceptions of Obama and his actual politics, as did the left-wing historian Paul Street in his *Barack Obama and the Future of American Politics* (Paradigm Publishers, 2008).

The record of Obama's first "hundred days"[2] only confirms Obama's fundamentally neo-liberal politics. Obama's cabinet not only includes recycled Clinton administration figures, but important representatives of major Wall Street investment houses and big Information Technology capitalists. The list of Obama's proposals to revive US capitalism at the expense of working people, people of color, women and queer people are too numerous to catalogue completely. Among the highlights:

* Obama's plan to restructure the auto

industry on the backs of auto workers.

* The administration and Congressional Democrats waffling on EFCA.

* Outsourcing the torture of "suspected terrorists" from Guantanamo to other countries.

* The refusal to discuss revising NAFTA, and backpedaling on global environmental regulations.

* The embrace of John McCain's proposal for immigration reform, including guest worker programs.

* The Obama "national health insurance plan" which will provide massive subsidies to private insurers.

As the world economy either continues to stagnate or grows at extremely slow rates in the coming years, we can expect even more pro-capitalist, anti-working people policies from the Obama administration. In the absence of significant movements from below—"built independently, and if necessary, in opposition to Obama and the Democrats"—any hopes of a new "New Deal" will be sorely disappointed.

Nor is it true that those on the left who did not support Obama's campaign are hopeless sectarians who reject any partial struggles that do not directly strike at the heart of capitalist rule. This is clearly not true of Solidarity, the International Socialist Organization, the Greens, or the comrades around Black Agenda Report. While these groups differed about the importance or effectiveness of third party campaigns like that of Cynthia McKinney, none reject struggling for reforms—"the end of US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, for single-payer health care, for amnesty and an easy road to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, in defense of affirmative action and social programs. We did not support Obama because neither he nor the pro-corporate, neo-liberal Democratic Party support these struggles.

Can We Build

Movements and Work for Democrats?

Burnham strategy of campaigning for the Democrats, and building social movement and the left is impractical. The idea that the left should work to elect pro-corporate Democratic politicians is based on the mistaken notion that electing liberal politicians is the key to winning reforms and fighting the right. This position mistakes cause and effect. It is not the election of "lesser evil" liberals to office that opens the possibility of reforms and progressive politics. Instead it is effective social movements that can force the ruling class and its political spokespersons to grant reforms. The experience of successful struggle grows the audience for left-wing, radical politics.

The left cannot lose sight of the fact that capitalism makes the class struggle a zero-sum game. Gains for working people, racial minorities, women, queers, and immigrants come at the expense of capitalist competitiveness and profitability. Reforms are won through militant mass strikes, demonstrations, sit-ins, and the like. Such struggles involve large-scale defiance of the law, and forge ties of active solidarity among working people. This experience of successful struggles for reforms is the basis for left-wing and radical politics among large layers of the population.

Historically, attempts to simultaneously build an alliance with Democratic Party centrists and build social movements have led the disorganization and decline of the movements and a shift to the right in politics. Time and time again—from the CIO upsurge of the 1930s, through the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s, to the movements against the Vietnam War[3]—the decision of the leaders of powerful and potentially radical social movements to pursue an alliance with the Democrats have derailed these struggles.

Electoral campaigns that are not expressions of social movements actually demobilize activists. Electoral campaigns are generally top-down, bureaucratic and seek to mobilize individual voters at the lowest common political denominator. Such campaigns, no matter what sense of satisfaction people gain from seeing their candidate win, reinforce the notion that change comes from above—through the ascendance of "good leaders" to office. Corporate funded Democratic Party election campaigns can not be anything but these sorts of mobilizations.

The dynamics of social movements—where people act collectively, organize democratically from the bottom-up and come to understand the connections between their particular struggle and those of other working and oppressed people—could not be more different from those of election campaigns. Successful social movements promote radicalism because they provide the lived experience of working and oppressed people exercising their collective power.

Once the elections are over, the continued alliance with Democratic politicians requires the leadership of movements of social resistance to trim their demands in ways that will not alienate the "centrists" - watering down their demands for pro-working class, popular reforms in favor of policies that the Democratic politicians and their corporate backers find "reasonable." Even more importantly, the alliance with the Democrats requires abandoning militant forms of struggle—mass demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes and other forms of social disruption.

As the movement leaders water down their demands for concrete reforms and abandon "street heat" for lobbying, electoral campaigns and other forms of "pressure politics," the movements become weaker. Democrats and Republicans only make concessions to working and oppressed people when compelled to—when the alternative is continued social disruption and conflict. Unable to win new reforms as movement leaders abandon their source of real social power, the gap between popular

expectations and real change grows feeding demoralization and disappointment. In the absence of powerful social movements, Democrats and Republicans are under no compulsion to grant reforms and are free to move politics to the right in line with the wishes of their corporate capitalist sponsors.

In recent years, we have seen this dynamic at work in the movement against the US war in Iraq. In the Winter and Spring of 2003, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets demanding no US war against Iraq. Despite the relatively quick defeat of the Saddam Hussein regime, renewed Iraqi resistance to the US occupation continued to fuel anti-war sentiment and activity in the US. Organized opposition to the war emerged among military families, veterans, active duty GIs and the ranks of organized labor at a much earlier stage than during the Vietnam War.

Unfortunately, many of the leaders of the anti-war movement—especially in United for Peace and Justice (UfPJ)—believed that they could harness this burgeoning movement to the efforts of anti-war liberals and centrists to elect Democrats to the White House in 2004 and 2008. During both election cycles, the UfPJ leadership put national demonstrations on the back burner and downplayed both the demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of US forces from Iraq and their opposition to the continued US occupation of Afghanistan.

Obama's election appears to have all but destroyed the national anti-war movement. Significant funders of UfPJ, like Moveon.org, and many activists who had sustained the anti-war movement no longer see any reason to continue anti-war activism at the grassroots. For them, Obama's election has made the war a "non-issue." Unable and unwilling to confront the Obama administration as it retreats from its promise to gradually withdraw from Iraqi cities and its fulfills its promise to increase troop strength in Afghanistan, the UfPJ leadership is no longer in a position to act as an organizing center for national anti-war protests. As the

anti-war movement declines, Obama is free to maintain US troops in Iraq and pursue new military adventures in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The same pattern is and will be repeated by the leaderships of the labor and social movements in the age of Obama. Not wanting to alienate Obama and the Congressional Democrats, the leaderships of both the AFL-CIO and CTW have done little to publicly oppose the Democrats backpedaling on the EFCA with Andy Stern of the SEIU, as always, leading the retreat. The labor officials and many mainstream immigrant rights groups are abandoning the struggle for universal amnesty and a direct route to citizenship for undocumented immigrants in favor of the Obama-McCain plan. Proposals for a single-payer insurance system appear dead in the water, leaving the Democrats and Obama free to implement their "universal health care" program based on massive subsidies for private insurance companies. The list can, depressingly, be multiplied across a wide variety of popular reform issues.

Robert Reich, Clinton's Secretary of Labor, grasped this dynamic quite well in a 2000 essay[4]:

No administration in modern history has been as good for American business as has the Clinton-Gore team; none has been as solicitous of the concerns of business leaders, generated as much profit for business, presided over as buoyant a stock market or as huge a run-up in executive pay... The Clinton-Gore administration delivered on policies that Republicans failed to achieve—fiscal austerity, free trade, and a smaller government—and Al Gore was in the lead. This confirms a pattern to American politics: Once in office, recent Democratic presidents in an era of business dominance have had an easier time moving right rather than left from where they campaigned since the Democratic base has no one

else to turn to.

The left needs to champion any and all popular demands—but refuse to water down these demands to placate centrists and liberals. We need to reach out to any and all Obama supporters who want to continue the struggle against war, racism, sexism, homophobia and for social justice—reminding them that change has come "from outside Washington", from mass movements from below. The anti-capitalist left needs to be in the struggle, building organizations and movements that have the power to force those in power to give concessions in the form of concrete reforms that benefit working people in this country and internationally.

If the anti-capitalist left is going to take advantage of the real opportunities of the "Obama moment," we will need to be rooted in real social struggles. We have already seen important struggles that have seized popular attention and enthusiasm—the Republic workers' sit-down strike being the most important. We need to build support for every strike and organizing drive among workers, no matter how local and defensive. Struggles against government austerity and cuts to social services are another important arena for building alliances between public employees and working class and people of color communities—like the United Teachers' of Los Angeles (UTLA) May 15th one day teacher-student-community day of action against budget cuts. Radicals and anti-capitalists need to rebuild the anti-war movement to press for immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Such movements cannot be summoned at will, but are the results of rising popular expectations confronting the realities of capitalist crisis and the intransigence of the ruling class. Today, the movements of social

resistance are at a low point. The left needs to help build and support the "militant minority"—those who attempt to organize and struggle even when mass movements are dormant. Such militant minorities can set larger struggles in motion—struggles that can win gains and shift politics to the left. The key to the building of militant minorities and the sparking of larger struggles is the need for political independence from the corporate rulers and their political representatives.[5]

[1] <http://www.ccds-discussion.org/?p=72>. It is also available on ZNet <http://www.zmag.org/znet/viewArticle/20694>

[2] Bruce Dixon, "Obama's First 100 Days—The Black Agenda Report Card" (April 29, 2009) <http://www.blackagendareport.com/?q=content/obamas-first-100-days-black-agenda-report-card>. Dan LaBotz, "Obama, The Crisis & The Movements" (Solidarity Working Paper, 2009) <http://www.solidarity-us.org/obamaworkingpaper>.

[3] Solidarity's pamphlet, Bush's War, the 2004 Elections and the Movements, pp. 16-29 recounts this history in detail. <http://www.solidarity-us.org/pdfs/2004ElectionsPamphlet.pdf>.

[4] "Why Business Should Love Gore," American Prospect On-Line <http://www.prospect.oorg/print/VII/17/reich-r.html>

[5] See Kim Moody, "Socialists Need to Be Where the Struggle Is," The Nation (March 23, 2009) [<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090406/moody>] and Dan La Botz, "Militant Minorities," The Nation (March 26, 2009) [http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090413/la_botz]

Fifty years of the transition to socialism

31 July 2009, by **James D. Cockcroft**

RaÃ¶l reminded "tomorrow's leaders" that they must not forget that "this is the Revolution of the humble, for the humble, and by the humble" and that leaders' militancy "impedes their destroying the party." He warned of the dangers posed by U.S. imperialism, saying that future leaders must not "become soft with the siren songs of the enemy" and must "remain conscious that, in its essence, (the enemy) will never cease to be aggressive, domineering and treacherous." (1)

Nonetheless, RaÃ¶l is open to dialogue with the Obama government so long as Cuba's national sovereignty is respected. He has offered to exchange all imprisoned Cuban (US-funded) "dissidents" for the "Cuban 5" â€" five Cuban patriots unjustly imprisoned in 1998 for having infiltrated Florida-based terrorist groups to protect Cuba from terrorist acts like the bombing of a Havana hotel that took the life of an Italian tourist in 1997. Self-confessed CIA-trained terrorist Luis Posada Carriles â€" who masterminded the hotel bombing and the 1976 bombing of a Cuban civilian airliner en route to Cuba from Venezuela that killed all 73 people aboard â€" walks free in Miami while the Cuba 5 remain in prison. Ten and a half years after their imprisonment, two of their wives are still denied U.S. visas to visit them.

Obama's defense of the 47-year-old U.S. trade embargo "to press for democratic reforms" is unacceptable to Cuba and the rest of Latin America. That embargo and U.S.-sponsored acts of terrorism, including biological warfare, have cost Cuba \$100 billion, killed 3,478 people, and maimed 2,099. Nor has Obama renounced the "Commission for a Free Cuba" reports of 2004 and 2006 calling for the overthrow of the Cuban government. In 2008 the U.S. government budgeted \$47 million to destroy the Revolution.

For Cubans, major goals in the early 21st century of their fifty-year-old process of transition to new forms and practices of revolutionary socialism include the following publicly proclaimed ones:

- â€¢ streamline ministries consistent with constitutionally secured socialism(2) and reduce excessive, inefficient bureaucracy

- â€¢ overcome economic/social problems deriving from the heightened class differences of the 1990s when former Soviet bloc trade collapsed

- â€¢ eliminate the "double currency system" introduced in the 1990s of a national peso one-twenty-fourth the value of a convertible peso (roughly equal to a euro) and the consequent black market and deformation of wage and price systems(3)

- â€¢ defend national sovereignty, fortify national unity, and consolidate and expand Cuban acts of international solidarity

- â€¢ facilitate family visits from the United States and trips abroad for Cubans

- â€¢ reform the PCC (Cuban Communist Party) at its Sixth National Congress in late 2009, there being no pre-established models of socialism (the Fourth and Fifth Party Congresses in 1991 and 1997 also introduced reforms).

State Restructuring and Streamlining

In his address to the newly elected National Assembly of People's Power on February 24, 2008, RaÃ¶l issued one of his frequent calls for meetings of trade unions, student federations,

women's groups, municipal councils, and other organizations to draw up lists of popular demands to help create a more "functional structure with fewer agencies under the Central State Administration and a better distribution of their duties." Earlier, in September-October 2007, in a typical Cuban way, more than 5 million of Cuba's 11.5 million people attended such meetings and offered more than a million concrete proposals.

On March 3, 2009, after another year of mass meetings (interrupted in late 2008 by three devastating hurricanes doing unprecedented economic damage to housing and crops), the Council of State announced a state restructuring. There were "movements of cadres" and nine new ministers took office in two fewer ministries (owing to the mergers of the Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment ministries and the Food and Fishing ministries). The changes were meant to begin to tackle some of society's problems by reducing the number of bureaucrats and streamlining ministries and agencies involved with economic planning.

Almost all the new ministers were promotions from within the administration, and many came from a relatively younger generation who since the 1990s had been assuming leadership positions. Three were women, one of whom was of peasant origin. One new minister and one key cadre change were drawn from the military. Brigadier General Salvador Pardo Cruz became Minister of the Iron, Steel and Heavy Machinery Industry, one of many economic areas with strong input from the FAR (Revolutionary Armed Forces). Major General José Amado Ricardo Guerra replaced Council of Ministers secretary Carlos Lage Dávila.

Two prominent revolutionaries agreeing to step down were Lage and Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque.

Both had served long terms and acknowledged they had made "errors." Lage, a doctor, had been credited for helping to pull Cuba out of the early 1990s' negative economic growth by introducing market reforms, joint ventures with foreign capital, and small-scale capitalistic businesses. Prior to his stint as foreign minister, Pérez Roque had served as an aide to Fidel. Both men had furthered Cuba's economic integration with the rest of Latin America.

Much of the foreign press interpreted their removals as some kind of "split" between Raúl and Fidel. This caused Fidel to write a strongly worded "reflection" in which he said that he was consulted even though it was not necessary "since I gave up the prerogatives of power a while ago" and that the "sweet nectar of power...awoke ambitions in them that led them to play out a disgraceful role. The external enemy built up their hopes with them."

Fidel later explained in an interview with the respected Argentine sociologist Atilio Borón that he wrote those words to "cut at its root the gossip about a conflict between the men of Fidel and those of Raúl. I could not by my silence lend credence to such foolishness." (4) As of mid-March, there were no officially released specifics about what "errors" Lage and Pérez Roque had committed and how those might affect future decision making on the economy and foreign relations. This left many questions still unanswered.

Defensive Military

Foreign analysts of Cuba sometimes suspect the FAR under Raúl Castro of being too influential. When shorn of its state funding during the economic crisis of the early 1990s, the FAR became self-financing through its generally efficient enterprises.

Cuba's is a defensive military, not an offensive one. It has an expensive defense system of sophisticated weaponry and "thousands of kilometers of tunnels," based on the theory that "to avoid a war is the same as to win a war." (5) In addition, the FAR is well integrated with civil society.

Over the past 50 years, millions of men and women, in Raúl's words, "have been workers, students, soldiers, or simultaneously all three things when circumstances so often have demanded it." (6) Recent military exercises trained 430,000 combatants of Cuba's more than one million militia and reserves, and this does not include the countless Committees for the Defense of the Revolution and resistance networks that make it "impossible to attack Cuba without annihilating its people in arms." (7)

"Our Army is the people!" proclaimed Fidel Castro in 1959. Indeed, 50 years later Cuba's remains a people's army, not a separate professional one, and consists principally of the younger generation. All fit males do military service from age 16 to 19, and women often join the military as well.

Three million Cubans are under 20. Almost all families have been involved at one point or another with the FAR, even though its numbers have become smaller over the years. Cubans are proud of their relatives who fought in Angola to help end apartheid in South Africa. Likewise, they are grateful to military personnel who have saved lives during hurricanes or other disasters. They appreciate the FAR for the educational work it conducts for its troops and local communities, as well as for its help in reforestation, the sugar harvest, developing mountain communities, and growing not only the soldiers' food but food for the population. (8)

Debating "Changes Within Socialism"

Public debates have become more widespread and nuanced ever since 2007 when the call went out for more candid criticisms and open debates. Based on interviews I have conducted with several party members and leaders, the PCC has different points of view within it. Part of the technocratic sector favors economic reforms resembling those of China or Vietnam. Some, though by no means all, old-timers and bureaucrats are resistant to change. But growing

numbers of members, like civil society as a whole, look for ways to achieve a less "verticalist," more decentralized and participatory Cuban socialism without jeopardizing national unity and sovereignty.

Judging from the Cuban media and countless personal conversations, Cubans of various generations, especially among those under 45, yearn for radical changes "within socialism" (since only socialism can conserve the Revolution and its social gains). Some want to attack problems of alienation and emphasize the ideas and example of Che Guevara. Most want to conquer poverty, reduce class differences, introduce more innovativeness with more direct workers' or community control and less top-down politics, in brief, a transition to new forms of socialist democracy while oxygenating existing ones. (9)

Several economic reforms are already well underway. Two examples indicate the dynamism of the current transition. The limit on wages a worker can earn has been removed as part of the effort to increase production and reduce worker absenteeism. An agrarian reform has begun, permitting development of public lands by private farmers, usually cooperatives at the request of those participating, with price supports for farmers' crops to reduce food imports and make productive unused tillable land that is to remain state-owned. Yet new complications loom on the horizon, including a potentially sizeable influx of money from families visiting from the United States, thus widening the gulf between the "new rich" and the rest of society.

So far Cuba, arguably the world's only surviving socialist system but one with problems typical of small Caribbean island societies, has managed to escape the tragedies wracking its neighbors and accomplish revolutionary changes of considerable magnitude. Its sui generis socialism has generated a highly educated, creative populace that can boast of several internationally recognized gains in free housing, public education and health, as well as in science, sports, culture and environmentalism.

This is a socialism that is always evolving and self-correcting, as in the 1980s rectification campaigns against Soviet-style Stalinist influences; the "Special Period" following the decline in trade with the Soviet bloc in the 1990s; or the successful "Energy Revolution."⁽¹⁰⁾

The Cuban Revolution has deep historical roots that permeate Cuban culture. It has always been a complex process based on realities like foreign aggression by the United States. It continues its transition toward an internationalist socialism based on Cuban practices and values developed since the earliest days of slave revolts and the struggle for national independence, social justice, freedom, and equality. Its guiding ideas are ones of "la ética" and "amor" — the struggle to create a unified ethical foundation marked by human solidarity and love for the other. That is why Cuban household names include historic figures like Hatuey, Céspedes, Maceo, Martí and Mella.⁽¹¹⁾

Key to the Revolution's successes has been its internationalism. Martí, Fidel, Raúl and Che, like Leon Trotsky, always insisted that no revolution could survive if limited to only one country. Cuba's renowned internationalism is also historically embedded in popular culture, marked by names like Máximo Gómez and Che Guevara.⁽¹²⁾ The poet-revolutionary soldier José Martí in the 1880s and 1890s proclaimed the struggle against imperialism and called for Latin American unity to confront it. Envisioning a utopia grounded on ethical principles, Martí insisted that "Patriotism is Humanity" and "Patriotism is nothing more than love." Martí forged a single unified political party that he realized, together with armed struggle, was necessary for achieving revolutionary goals. It is this heritage that continues to guide Cuba's transition today.

During the 1990s' economic hard times, instead of turning inward, Cuba expanded its internationalism, sending more doctors, teachers, and other professionals to needy countries, a generous move that — together with the Revolution's ethical grounding — helped save the island's socialism.

In 2004, together with Venezuela, Cuba launched ALBA — Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean — a trade model of human solidarity. Today, ALBA is spreading vigorously throughout the region while the world's capitalisms struggle in a state of semi-collapse.

Notes

1. Raúl Castro, Fiftieth Anniversary Address, Santiago de Cuba, Jan. 1, 2009.

2. In 2002, the National Assembly of People's Power amended the Constitution to make the socialist system — irrevocable, and capitalism will never return again to Cuba." Eight million Cubans signed a petition for the change.

3. One leading Cuban economist told me in March 2009 that unifying the two currencies is a very complex economic/social matter that will proceed only gradually at best in light of the world economic crisis and its impact on Cuba (e.g., world prices for Cuba's main mineral export, nickel, have plummeted).

4. Atilio Borón, "Una reunión en primera persona con Fidel," Página 12, March 14, 2009, author's translation. For Fidel's reflection, see posting on Fidel Castro News site, March 4, 2009, <http://fidel-castro-news.newslib.com/>.

5. Raúl Castro, interview by Cuban journalist Talía González Pérez, Dec. 31, 2008, author's translation from <http://www.cnctv.cubasi.cu/noticia.php?idn=12659>. The tunnels store major military equipment, from tanks to planes, but no boats.

6. See footnote 1.

7. Luis Britto García, "Cuba Revolucionaria," Tribuna Popular, Dec. 28, 2008, author's translation, <http://luisbrittogarcia.blogspot.com/2008/12/cuba-revolucionaria.html>.

8. For more, see Susan Hurlich, "Three Celebrations," People's Voice, 15:1, 2007, 7 & 10.

9. One demand involves gay and transvestite rights. Raúl's daughter

Mariela Castro Espín, a professional sexologist, has advocated legislation to reform the Family Code to grant homosexual couples the same rights as heterosexual ones. According to Castro Espín, even though society is more open to homosexuals than in the past, a broad educational campaign is needed. The PCC has homosexuals in its membership. Mariela plans to propose in the Sixth Congress of the PCC that this de facto acceptance be made explicit and mandatory in party statutes.

10. Cuba is a world class power in biotechnology and cancer research. Its cultural vibrancy in all the arts and critical thought is notable. The World Wildlife Fund has named Cuba as the world's most advanced country in ecologically sound and sustainable development. The organic farming advances of the "Special Period" and the renewable energy and energy conservation policies of the "Energy Revolution," launched in the 1990s but ratcheted up in 2006, contributed to this advance. Because of the devastation of the 2008 hurricanes, however, and despite economic growth rates of 8-11% in recent years, the "Special Period" still exists.

11. Revolutionaries who fought for these ideals. Hatuey was an Indian chieftain burned at the stake by the Spanish "conquerors." Carlos Manuel de Céspedes proclaimed Cuba's independence from Spain and an end to slavery, October 10, 1868, starting "the Thirty Years War." Antonio Maceo, an Afro-Cuban, was the main guerrilla commander in the war. José Martí died in 1895 fighting the same war that went on to defeat the Spaniards before the 1898 U.S. invasion tied an "independent" Cuba to U.S. capitalist interests. Julio Antonio Mella, assassinated in 1929, was a founder and leader of the University Students' Federation and the Communist Party who rejected "servile copies of revolutions made by other men" and defended "human beings who act following their own thoughts and by their own understanding, not by the reasoning of foreign thoughts." The triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 finalized the struggle for national sovereignty.

12. Gómez was an Afro-Dominican

who became the main general leading the independence fighters. Guevara was born in Argentina, became a key leader and thinker of the Cuban

Revolution, fought in Africa, and in 1967 was murdered on U.S. orders after his capture in Bolivia.

This article is dedicated to Celia Hart (d. 2008). It is published in [Against the Current](#), No. 141, July/August 2009.

End of a Model...or Birth of a New One?

31 July 2009, by **Au Loong-Yu**

Back in April 2008 President Hu Jintao spoke of the need to change the mode of development from export-led growth to domestic-led growth by expanding domestic demand. In November the 4 trillion RMB of rescue package followed. The economy is slowing down, and the target of the rescue package at "Baoba," or keeping the growth rate at 8 percent, is hard to achieve. Nevertheless, with a slower growth rate of 5-6 percent, which most commentators are speculating, is still outstanding when the US and EU are sinking further into deep recession. The global downturn on one hand and China's relative strength in containing the crisis on the other makes the topic "the rise of China" more heated than ever.

China's advantages

The reasons for China's performance must first be seek from the one party state's exceptional success in restoring capitalism over an exceptionally long period of 25 years. Deng Xiaoping's motto "Crossing the rivers by feeling the stones" has enabled the top leadership to integrate with global capitalism in a gradual and prudent way, so that as the global financial crisis set in, the state still retained control over commanding heights of the economy, giving China more leverage than the US or UK in containing the present crisis. China's capital account control is still largely in place, her currency, RMB, not yet convertible. Her banks, though floated inside and outside China, still have their major shares controlled by the state. Thus China has no shadow banking, nor toxic debts, as do the US, UK or even Hong Kong. Due to vast underground

banking, billions of RMB have escaped foreign exchange control to flow in and out of China, a factor that may prove problematic to China in the downturn cycle. Still, state control over cross boarder capital movement is not totally ineffective. In sum, a firewall, though one with holes, still exists for China's financial markets for the moment, and therefore China is to some extent able to insulate itself from the global credit crunch. This makes China's economic downturn more resemble the classic model: an overproduction crisis accompanied by credit over-expansion, but with a credit crisis far from the scale of what is happening in US or UK. Moreover, China had experienced her banking crisis at the turn of the past century, and had overcome it at the expense of working people, particularly the sacked bank workers in the tens of thousands. The government also cleared billions of RMB of bad debt from the banks. The banks have become healthier since then, with non-performing loans having dropped from 40-50% of their assets to the present 6%. On top of that, both household debt and public debt are small in proportion to GDP and much smaller than most countries.

A word of prudence is necessary, though, about these statistics. In China no figure is reliable, especially when we talk about company debts and bank loans, domestic and overseas. The Asian crisis ten years ago revealed just how serious the problem of hidden debts among those SOEs (State Owned Enterprises) which invest overseas were. The global crisis will still have an impact on China, and if the crisis expands, China's "firewall" will not hold.

Although China has not experienced what some term "financialization" and has thus been spared the worst financial crisis, a traditional over-production crisis could develop into depression, as the 1930's has shown.

The high economic growth rate has tempted many, including some on the left, to make exceedingly favorable assessment on China. The fact is that it has little bearing on the well being of working people, because China's growth has been close to a kind of jobless growth. The ILO has done a study in 2005 on the relationship between economic growth and jobs creation, and found out that in the period of 1990-2002, an average 9.3% growth only brings about 0.8% of employment growth, and for manufacturing jobs it is negative. No wonder the high growth rate is accompanied by high unemployment rate.

Social factors

In order to correctly assess China's economic and social situation the scope of investigation must be broadened to take account of societal changes as a result of the 1949 revolution. The revolution had a contradictory effect on peasants and workers. On one hand it accomplished land reform, and on the other gave birth to a highly centralized and bureaucratized party state which maintains incredibly tight control over peasants and workers. The subsequent evolution of land ownership into the "household responsibility system" entitles peasants the using rights to a small plot of land, which today acts as a kind of social security for the returning rural migrant workers who, because of the downturn in

manufacturing due to the global economic crisis, fail to find a job in the cities. For them going back to their home village is better than starving in the urban. It also works to the benefit of the party state, though. The state can simply treat these migrant workers as disposable labor: when crisis sets in it just tells the migrant workers to return to their home village and their miserable piece of land. This actually helps the municipal government in diffusing a social time bomb. It may not be effective in the long run, but it may have partial effects in the short and medium term.

If dissolving the angry jobless migrant workers into the vast countryside is not enough, the authority can always rely on the coercion of the state, which is particularly harsh and effective. While the South Korean state before 1990 was as ruthless as the CCP's state, it never had the ability to wipe out all civil associations; the church, for instance, always provided some space for initial workers organizing. In contrast, the CCP has succeeded in accomplishing precisely this since the 1950's. All Chinese traditional religious and civil associations either disappeared, that is, were destroyed or were co-opted into the bureaucracy, to the extent that even Taoist or Buddhist monks had practically turned into public employees and were paid by the state in accordance to the same pay scale of the bureaucracy, before they were forced to renounce their faith altogether during the Cultural Revolution. There was, and is, no civil society. There was, and is, no organized social movement, let alone organized political opposition. This social and political reality explains why when Indira Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, failed in her attempt to force poor women to sterilize in the name of birth control in early 1980, China could be terribly successful in imposing one child policy on her 1.3 billion population. Ironically, the rebirth of capitalism did create some space for *weiquan* (literally means defending one's legitimate rights), but no autonomous trade union is possible. The absence of organization independent of the CCP and state holds true even for the bourgeoisie. Nearly all chambers of commerce or industrial associations

are founded and run by the party state or its agents. In her book *China's New Business Elite*, Margaret Pearson explains why the market reform and the birth of this class have not led to civil society or democratization:

"Members of China's business elite have shown few signs of becoming an independent, activist political force. They desire to escape from politics, not to engage in it or to create a 'civil society'...Having gained structural independence, they try to rebuild informal ties to the state. Members of the business elite are characterized by neither strong horizontal ties to each other, nor strong links to other societal actors, both of which we expect in an emergent civil society."

The absence of civil society proves to be hugely profitable to business. China's attraction for Foreign Direct Investment, for some years had been top of the world, does not only lie in its cheap wages; as a matter of fact, her wages are not the lowest among developing countries. Indeed, it is the institutionalized barrack-like factory regime that gives China an advantage over other developing countries in attracting Transnational Corporations (TNC's) all over the globe to use China as the world sweat shop for export. While the power of Indian bourgeoisies and their government are being constantly checked by liberal democracy and organized labor, her Chinese counterpart is free from such constraints. In a report released by Globalization Monitor, the Maersk container manufacturing plant in Dongguang, Guangdong Province, was reported as making workers there to obey seventy three rules as laid down by the "employees' manual". Apart from banning leafleting, petition and strikes, punishable by instant dismissal if anyone violates, there are:

Clause 18: Violating canteen regulations, damaging canteen equipment and disturbing order, including but not limited to: destroying utensils, not queueing for meals, leaving utensils on the table or failing to put them back into the designated place after meals; failing to put scraps and rubbish in designated places; or leaving food, soup, fruit skin, drinks, etc, spattered on the

table or floor. 1st and 2nd offences: demerit recorded; 3rd offences: dismissal

The Dongguang Maersk workers responded to the prison-like factory with two violent strikes in 2008, but with the help of local government they were repressed and subsequently only got minimum improvement. We may add in passing: the plant is hugely productive.

China's success in her export drive has been to a great extent also depended on the China-US economic partnership. While China acts as a global supply engine the US plays the role of demand engine. China can do that is only because of the neo-liberal new world order since 1989, as pointed out by David Harvey.

The State: solution or problems?

For the nationalists and many 'new leftists', the state is a solution to both the problems of the capitalist market failure and the West/Japan's attempt in containing "the rise of China." They fail to see the other side of the coin, which the state could be a problem as well. It is because the state is never neutral, especially so when the bureaucracy that constitutes the state apparatus is free of all social control from all classes. In China, since 1950's, the bureaucracy has practically hijacked the state and makes it machinery for its own appropriation of social surplus. Beginning from late 1980's the bureaucracy has chosen to restore capitalism and has plundered the country to the point that it is driving working people more and more to the brink of rebellion. It is the evolution of the bureaucracy into a new appropriating class that one must take into account in any correct understanding of China's state-controlled capitalism, both for its strength and weakness.

In the course of the past 25 years of reform, the CCP could not enrich itself without first nurturing a private capitalist class, but any major measure of reform has been first and foremost aimed at enriching the bureaucracy itself. In the late 1980's, the price reform created the so called *guandao*, or officials who engaged in

speculation. Meanwhile nearly all level of state departments set up different kinds of companies to make money. The bureaucracy was beginning to transform themselves into capitalists as well. This enraged the people who rose in protest against the government in 1989. The CCP's crack down crushed all opposition to capitalist reform - workers bore the main blow - and the further enrichment of the bureaucracy. Deng Xiaoping's 1992 tour to the south signified the CCP have taken another big leap forward again, towards full integration with global capitalism. To make the leap successful the terror of the aftermath of 1989 crackdown was no longer enough, though. It was imperative to inflict more defeat on the SOEs workers, who accounted for the overwhelming majority of urban workforce. This time the purpose of the crackdown was to downsize the workforce of the state sector in order to turn these enterprises into competitive "modern corporations." More than 40 million workers were sacked, and protests against dismissal were all crushed. Small and medium sized SOEs were privatized, with municipal level bureaucrats and former SOEs directors as the greatest beneficiaries. The big SOEs fell into the hands of higher level bureaucrats and turned into commercial entities, mostly floated in domestic and overseas markets. Since the state or municipal government always retain the controlling shares, this level of bureaucrats and their cronies can simultaneously enjoy the benefits of "state ownership" and the "free market."

Meanwhile, a second wave of privatization of urban land (including those rural lands close to city suburbs) has also begun, enriching again the municipal government officials and their cronies.

Government departments at all levels run their own companies to make money for the bureaucrats, despite the official ban in effect since the late 1980's. For instance, the police department runs its own security guards companies, the labor department runs its own labor dispatch companies, the fire fighting department runs its own companies to sell fire extinguishers, and so forth.

Their companies are always successful because they always use their coercive power to sell their services to firms and factories under their jurisdiction. For instance, the fire fighting department will require factories to buy fire extinguishers from particular company run by them, or else face the consequences: the factories in question may end up being fined for the most minor offences. Their operations resemble the mafia; in fact, these officials often use local gangsters to do their jobs.

The metamorphosis of the bureaucracy from fiercely anti capitalist to bureaucrats/capitalists has thus been completed. This is not something new, though. The KMT party state of the 1930-40s has been described, ironically, by the then CCP as "bureaucratic capitalists" as well. The only difference is that the current CCP party state has institutionalized it to a phenomenal scale which profoundly surpasses the KMT model. To cast the present Chinese state as autonomous or even suspicious to the bourgeoisie, to contend that it has not subordinated to their class interest, and hence that China remains non-capitalist or even "socialist," as Giovanni Arrighi does in his new book "Adam Smith in Beijing", is wrong. Based on Western European experiences, this analysis treats the bureaucracy and the capitalist class as necessarily two entirely different or even opposing social groups. In contrast, the Chinese bureaucracy is the capitalist class. Martin Hart-Landsberg has argued convincingly that China's economy has long become capitalist, but he traces the point of departure from the "slippery slope" of market reform on which the CCP embarked. I would argue, in contrast, that it has been the conscious choice of the bureaucracy to restore capitalism rather than a wrong choice of policy, because apart from losing faith in socialism, they themselves want to be capitalists. Deng Xiaoping was already feeling his way in 1984 when China signed the agreement with the UK which is entirely against socialist principle: Hong Kong laissez faire capitalism is to be maintained for fifty years after being handed over to China. Later he was reported as saying that HK capitalism should be allowed to continue

beyond the timeline. In 1987 he told an African delegation "do not follow socialism. Do whatever you can to make the economy grow." His subsequent crackdown on the 1989 democratic movement signified his party had decisively and qualitatively transformed into a capitalist party.

It is utterly unconvincing for some Maoists to put all the blame on Deng Xiaoping alone, however. The fact that Deng encountered no significant opposition, on the contrary he received enthusiastic response from the bureaucracy, implies that he was just doing what the latter wanted. It should not be a startling thing to any socialist. Even in the Mao's era when the bureaucracy was fiercely anti-capitalist, it was also fiercely privileged as ruling elite, who monopolize the right to distribute social surplus through monopolizing the running of the state. They, like any other ruling elites, were never content with their salary - which was ten to 30 times the ordinary workers' -, and always wished to appropriate more social surplus than they deserve. Their fundamental interest lies in restoring private property rather than being the faithful public servant defending common ownership indefinitely.

It is like confusing the present continuous tense and the future tense when one argues that in the Mao's era the Chinese bureaucracy was already capitalist, as some Maoist did - they wrongly accept Mao's view that Liu Shaoqi was a capitalist roader, although there was not a single piece of evidence that Liu wanted capitalism then. Liu, or the bureaucracy in general, could not have been capitalist in the 1960's because by then they only appropriated an unusually large share of social surplus in the form of use value and small sum of exchange value (money wages), but never surplus value, as there was little commerce. But the bureaucracy, by their nature, could not be content with a kind of ownership which denies them the right to pass their privileges to their children, and after Mao's death the realignment of relationship of social forces both in China and the world had provided the bureaucracy with the best opportunity to break the constraint on private property and evolve into capitalist class. To argue

now that the present Chinese bureaucracy is still in the service of socialism is deadly wrong.

An inquiry into the present rescue package is illustrative of the hidden agenda of the bureaucracy: The government still resists in giving any detail even to the People's Congress, the supposed highest government body in China, as to the rescue package. Subject neither to transparency nor democratic control, when the government hands out the rescue money it is not going to be done impartially. Even the censored press finds it necessary to warn against corruption. The Legal Daily says that the package will "bring about a fierce competition between provincial governments for projects" and "behind these big projects there is always big corruption." That is also why the package focuses on investment on infrastructure rather than raising the share of wages in the national income, although the latter measure is more effective in addressing the problem of lack of consumer demand. It reminds us one thing again: it is the self interest of the bureaucracy that defines the package, or any reform.

To conclude: in contrast to former Soviet bloc, the CCP is exceptionally successful in restoring capitalism, because it achieves this without paying the cost of its own disintegration. It is this which gives all the advantages and leverage to the present party state. Only with this accomplishment could the bureaucracy drive wages down to a horrible level that allows a crazed accumulation of capital. According to a World Bank report, wages in China as a share of GDP declined from 53% in 1998 to 41.4% in 2005, as opposed to 57% in the US. The other side of the same coin is that profit as a share of GDP has risen dramatically in the same period. A Chinese scholar named Wang Lianli, wrote that in manufacturing the proportion of wages to profit rose from 1:3.1 in 1990 to 1:7.6 in 2005. Apart from spending extravagantly, the newly rich either invest or save their money, hence the exceedingly high saving rate and investment rate. For decades the share of investment in China's GDP has exceeded 40%, which is twice as

high as US and is top among the major Asian countries, including Korea when she was at the height of industrialization.

Nevertheless, the forces of capitalist development cannot promote the polarization of rich and poor without, at the same time, creating obstacles for its further development. High profit squeezes wages, further creating long-term decline of private consumption. Private consumption as a percent of GDP has declined from 47% to 36% between 1992 and 2006, whereas the figure in South Korea, India, Britain, Australia and Japan was over 50%. The World Bank reported that much of the decline of private consumption in China can be explained by the decline of wages as a share of GDP. Thus, China's rapid accumulation, bought at the price of brutal exploitation of workers and farmers, in turn creates severe imbalances in consumption and investment, or more precisely, under-consumption and over-investment, leaving productive capacity idle, and in turn causing increasing reliance on export of goods and capital to pay for the investment.

Exporting China's problem creates more problems

In 1998 the now dissolved State Economic and Trade Committee released a policy document: Index of Over-Invested Products for Moving Abroad. The title of the document is self explanatory. Export would solve China's excessive capacity and domestic problems. The report targeted the first batch of industries and products to move abroad: the light industry, machineries and electronics, motor cycles, refrigerators and TVs etc.

While export of goods has always been growing rapidly, export of capital began to experience leaps and bounds only since 2000. The next year Premier Zhu Rongji officially proclaimed the strategy of "going global". Within a short period China has become a creditor country for developing countries, especially Africa.

While Arrighi argues that China remains socialist, an article in Beijing

Review, February 2007, admits that China's role in Africa is capitalist:

"Though China is not a colonialist, it is a successful capitalist in Africa. The path it has taken on that continent is consistent with the logic of market capitalism-liberal trade based on fair contracts.....Although capitalism implies exploitation to many, China's capitalists have to limit their exploitation within the framework of the WTO and abide by local laws."

It has also been argued that China somehow has developed her own alternative model to US capitalism's-led globalization --- the so called "Beijing Consensus" which is allegedly in opposition to Washington Consensus. Even if we concede that there is something called the "Beijing Consensus", it has nothing to do with socialism. Both are in the service of capitalism, the same mode of accumulation that is extremely hostile to labor, welfare state and democratic rights. That China "only" privatized her small and medium SOEs, leaving the big ones in the state's hand, that the CCP opted for a gradual transformation for capitalism rather than "shock therapy", that the state still heavily intervened with the "free market", that it allows local and even rural party officials' initiatives for industrialization etc, do not constitute something substantially different from neo-liberalism. If the party state retains ownership control over the commanding heights of the economy, it is not because of any supposed adherence to socialism, as Arrighi suggests, rather it is simply because the ruling elite cannot tolerate any idea of giving away the most profitable sector of the economy. If "Beijing Consensus" is competing with "Washington Consensus" it only means that the Chinese party state wants to use the devil to heat the devil.

In the final analysis, despite occasional tension, the China-US economic partnership worked well for both sides until recently. If there is also a dimension of intense competition between them, it is only a struggle between great capitalist powers for hegemony, not anything near to a struggle between a progressive alternative and the evil

Empire.

With the global economy sinking further, leading figures of the US elite now point accusing fingers at China, blaming the crisis on China's high saving rate. The Chinese government has reacted by mocking the US as shifting the blame to others when it is American spending to be blamed. As a matter of fact, both are right, because the US - China global economic partnership is really a unification of contradictions: Reacting to the same problems of lack of buying power for common people, the US and China's ruling elites opted for opposing and at the same time complimentary economic decisions, ie, China, although a poor country, lent cheap credit to US to allow the latter to import from China. Each in its own way solved its respective problems for a while, and continues to benefit from it. China was made to pay more for the partnership, but she gets what she wants, though. On top of the smaller share of profit that Chinese companies earn, the Chinese government has earned a very powerful leverage in influencing US decision making. If the US government plays too much of the cards of the double Ts (Tibet and Taiwan), the CCP can always retaliate by selling its US bond reserve to disrupt US money market and the US government's budget. Therefore both US and China wanted to continue such kind of partnership, at the cost of creating a global imbalance in the longer term. Now both wish to look for alternative growth model, but it is not going to be easy. The Chinese government is deeply concerned about the continuing drop in the value of China's foreign reserves, but selling her US bond reserves is not an option. The partnership has so integrated both economies that China's sale of the reserves will result in catastrophes for both sides.

Hidden rules in the service of the hidden agenda of the bureaucracy

Arrighi's applauds China's model for its "accumulation without dispossession," but it is only half-true. While peasants still retain their small plot of land in the course of rapid industrialization — which we have acknowledged long ago — one must not forget that in return for the right

to till the plot of land, it came with a heavy cost for the peasants, namely all kinds of taxes and levies, which had been so heavy in 1990's until 2006 that it virtually bankrupted the peasants. The problem of "scissors" (the inverse relationship between prices of industrial and agricultural products) was the last straw. They were left with no saving, no cash. Millions of rural migrants began to flux into cities to find jobs, and end up being brutally exploited by the capitalists. This is the hidden dispossession of which Arrighi has not taken into account. Adding to the list of dispossession was the 100 million SOEs and collective workers: from 'ownership by all people' these SOEs have been transformed into share holding companies.

For the moment, the peasants' plots of land are still there but nothing is secure. After privatizing the state owned enterprises and urban land, the bureaucracy and the newly rich are now looking for a third wave of privatization: the privatization of rural land. Whereas the top leaders of CCP have not dared to risk rebellion by doing this, the neo-liberals, in the service of local officials and the business elites, have been tirelessly pushing the government on this matter.

In order to shift to a growth model led more by domestic demand, China requires nothing less than a redistribution of wealth. The bureaucratic capitalists and its minor partner, the private capitalists, would not allow part of their profit be re-allocated to working people without a fight, notwithstanding the central government's rhetoric of significantly raising social wages. While the party state carries more leverage and power in dealing with the economic crisis than in many other countries, the self interest of the bureaucracy also serves to offset the advantages they enjoy. Hence the objective of long term rebalancing of the economy, through a substantial redistribution of wealth to enlarge domestic market is excluded, although in the short term limited success of containing the crisis through more state intervention is possible. It is even conceivable that China's economy might continue to grow despite a narrow domestic

market by exporting her problem again, this time to developing countries and at the expense of working people there.

China's leadership very much resembles the Korean military junta, but ten times its scale: an authoritarian regime which actively supports rapid accumulation and export drive at the expenses of working people by denying the latter basic civil and labor rights. For Naomi Klein, China regime is comparable to Pinochet's Chile: free market combined with authoritarian political control, enforced by iron-fisted repression. The financial crisis boosts the self confidence of the CCP even further in maintaining an iron hand.

Why so many still fail to see the true picture of China? One of the reasons is that they take too lightly the rhetoric of the bureaucracy, and believe that the Chinese official policy of eradicating poverty, of raising the income of the peasants, of adopting labor laws to protect the workers, are really working. They apparently unaware that all written laws and regulations are not necessarily binding. Since the 1950's, a whole set of hidden and unwritten rules governed the Chinese bureaucracy, as was true for two thousand years previously, when China was ruled by a professional bureaucracy with the Emperor at the top. In a text book on laws, *Zhongguo fazhi shi*, or History of China's Laws, the author admits in the introduction that "today, behind the back of the written laws in China, still stubbornly exist some hidden rules, much of which is a legacy of thousands of years of our laws tradition. No matter you like or not, and no matter they are progressive or regressive, objectively they do exist and are functioning." .

The purpose of the hidden rules is obvious: it is meant to serve the hidden agenda of the bureaucracy, namely their own enrichment.

A third element at work in the politics of bureaucracy is *guanxi*, which is a central concept in understanding Chinese politics. In a broader sense it means personal network of influences, but it is better to be understood as a patron-client relationship or even

mafia like cliques. The Chinese bureaucracy is practically organized along cliques which overrides laws and regulations, or even the authority of central governments. They constitute the most powerful material obstacles in all levels of government and in the enforcement of laws.

The 1949 revolution, despite its achievement, is also deeply bureaucratically deformed and it eventually rebuilt an all powerful bureaucracy. Partly thanks to this long tradition of bureaucratic politics - hidden agenda, hidden rules, and guanxi,— the bureaucracy is able to undo all legal constraint laid down by the revolution and the constitution and eventually transform themselves into the new exploiting class. This is not to deny the possibility of reform in the future, but any significant reform by the party state is inconceivable without a social upheaval. The workers have already summed up their experiences in their own word: Big struggle big gain, small struggle small gain, no struggle no gain.

Further rise of China?

In view of the bankruptcy of free market, it is no doubt that the one party state of China owns more advantages than US/UK in imposing counter-cycle measures. In longer term it may achieve China rise in becoming a bigger power if the one party state remains unchallenged socially. This not only spell disaster for Chinese toilers, but also for the world labor, because it implies accelerated race to the bottom among them, with Chinese barrack-capitalism becoming the new global labor standard.

The further rise of Chinese barrack capitalism is not pre-determined, however. The hegemony of the party state works in a contradictory way as well. It is effective in controlling the people, but increasingly it also loses control of itself. It cannot control its own greed, nor its corruption, nor even its rank — for decades, despite repeated directives issued from central government to shrink the size of public servants, it goes on expanding. The tainted milk scandal is just one example of the depth of corruption, which results in deep distrust and hatred of government

officials and the disintegration of social fibres, driving people more and more to the brink of rebellion. The resentment against the officials is so high that the smallest skirmish in the street may quickly trigger confrontation between police and a large crowd. In a word, the repression is turning into its own anti-thesis. It will make the authority's plan to shift the burden of economic crisis to working people less easy. To sum up, China's future direction is going to be determined by a protracted social contest between the haves and the have not.

There are not many signs of optimism for the moment, though. The private bourgeoisie is merely an appendage of the bureaucracy. The intellectuals continue their drift to the right. The liberals are more like neo-liberals, and many well known new leftists have completed their journey to nationalism, some have practically become apologetics of the monolithic party state from the past to the present. The youth seems to be not much better. A jingle posted in the internet in response to the coming 90th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement - a youth movement in 1919 which aspired to individual freedom, democracy, and national renaissance - reflects the deep political apathy of young people: "The youth only care about their personal interests, and the May Fourth idea is now obsolete." College graduates have been experiencing downward mobility because the high growth rate fails to create jobs, but they have little idea of linking up with workers to stage united struggle, as the Korean students did in the past. The blow that the CCP dealt to people's spiritual lives in the 1989 crackdown is still being felt today.

Perspective on labor movement

Yet, a positive side of capitalist restoration in China - as opposed to what occurred in former Soviet Bloc - is accelerated industrialization. As a result the number of China's wage workers is constantly increasing, who now comprises half the working population and accounts for one-fourth of the world's wage workers. Being at the center of production and distribution makes them a potentially

phenomenal social force, the only force capable of stopping and eventually reversing the direction China now heading. For the moment they are still a class in itself, though. There is no labor movement in the strict sense. The ACFTU (All China Federation of Trade Unions) is very much part of the state apparatus and one of its missions is to monopolize the right to form a union. Although the ACFTU necessarily plays some role of coercion until now, say the enforcement of 'family planning' (producing 'pregnancy permit' for women workers as the necessary proof for 'legal' pregnancy), the eras of Mao and Deng differs. Before the reform, the official unions were also responsible for allocating apartments to workers and footing their medical bills. These are not small things. Unfortunately these benefits were lost when a full restoration of capitalism set in. In privatized SOEs, the workplace ACFTU virtually lost all functions in welfare provisions, except occasional recreational activities, while the repressive side of their functions remained largely in place.

There is a trend for official workplace unions to move away from the direct control of the National and local ACFTU, but only towards the direction of becoming tools of the new bosses. As for private enterprises the workplace unions are purely a formality, and it is common to see that the chairpersons of these unions are the personnel managers. Hence it is not accidental to see wages as a share of national income has declined to such a deplorable level, despite the presence of the chairperson of ACFTU in the Politbureau of the CCP and despite its 193 million members. ACFTU never strikes against the state or the bosses, regardless of how workers are treated.

Since 2006 the ACFTU seems to be more pro-active in organizing workers by targeting Walmart, which some overseas trade union activists may see as encouraging signs. As a matter of fact, two years after the Walmart organizing drive, the chairperson of the workplace union of Walmart in Nanchang City, Gao Haitao, was forced to resign from both the union and the company not only because the boss simply bypassed his union for

collective bargaining, but also the National ACFTU had practically supported the boss by making things difficult for Gao. Deeply frustrated, he left Nanchang altogether.

Another recent example of how ACFTU suffocated rank and file trade unionism is the Ole Wolff case. Ole Wolff is a Danish company which operates an electronic plant in Yantai City, Shangdong province. In 2006 the women workers decided to found a workplace union after a strike to protest against wage cut and lay off. It was met with hostility from the local ACFTU, although eventually the workers succeeded in registering the union. Within two years the boss sacked nine-tenth of the workers along with nearly all the leadership, and the local ACFTU did nothing at all. The workplace union, in a way never happens before in China, wrote to 3F, the Danish union, for solidarity and got a responsive reply. 3F pressed Ole Wolff to compensate six dismissed workers' representatives but was not able to make the company to negotiate with the workplace union. Towards the end of 2008, the national ACFTU praised the company for complying with the laws although it was not true.

In Guangdong province there are now scattered workers' legal aid centers, some from Hong Kong and some local initiatives. They are often registered under commercial registration as sole proprietor, because in no way can they obtain the license for running a workers association. They are so vulnerable that many of them prefer to avoid operating in industrial areas because the local authority hates the idea of allowing these centers to have close encounters with workers. Dagongzhe, or Workers, was a workers center which locates in Shenzhen industrial area. The person in charge, Huang Qingnan, was seriously injured last year when attacked by gangsters with knives, after the center had been repeatedly harassed.

In addition to workers centers are heilüshi, or 'bare-foot lawyers', who are often self taught people with no legal rights to practice laws. Some of them are themselves workers who have become familiar with labor laws after engaging in years- long legal

actions against their bosses. In general both workers centers and 'bare-foot lawyers' are met with hostility from the provincial ACFTU, which views them as potential trouble makers and contenders. At one point, in a Guangdong city the ACFTU opened an official worker center with the same name as another worker center, founded much earlier by common citizens, so as to out-compete the latter. In 2007 it was reported that the Shenzhen ACFTU joined hands with local government to crack down on the bare-foot lawyers and workers center. After the sticks then came the carrots: The Shenzhen ACFTU co-opted sixty of them who agreed not to contact foreign reporters and not to seek funding from foreign funding agencies.

There are deeper reasons for the difficult birth of labor movement other than state repression, however. First and foremost, is the deep division of the working class between two sections, the state sector and the rural migrant workers. The division is so deep that not only there is no common struggle, there is virtually no exchange of ideas and very rare inter-marriage. Although the rural migrant workers have not experienced the devastating defeat of SOEs workers, neither do they possess collective memory as a class. They are nongmingong, literally peasant workers, more peasants than workers, not because they really till the land - in fact, most of them rarely - but because the hukou system acts like a kind of social apartheid, barring them from raising families in the cities and sink their root there. No matter how long they stay in the cities they aware that it bounds to be temporary. Hence the sense of class identity is hard to forge.

But neither are they entirely passive. The rural migrant workers have staged numerous spontaneous strikes against their bosses and local authorities. These spontaneous strikes often win partial victories, and they are so common that the authority's defacto ban on strikes broke down long ago, to the effect that local governments have to learn to live with that.

Organizing is still very difficult,

though, and without it workers' resistance remains fragmented and ineffective in bringing about a substantial redistribution of wealth or a raise of confidence in collective resistance. The next stage of struggle will likely be a struggle to defy the ban on organization, though how this will occur I cannot predict. The spontaneous struggles of workers have achieved the unexpected goal of training small circles of individual activists, and from this milieu occasionally a loose or more integrated network of activists could be forged. Both the bosses and the authority have to live with that as long as the activists learn how to combine courage with prudence. Initial organizing drive is not confined to labor. In the recent tainted milk case, the victims have practically founded their own organization in making their voices heard, and the local governments have until now only dared to harass them but not disperse them - any such move may lead to an explosion of social discontent. For the moment these are individual cases, but the present economic crisis will definitely create more space for activists to develop into a close network if not official organizations.

But another obstacle will be more difficult to overcome, namely the fact that socialism is deeply discredited. If one talks to a worker activist about socialism very often his or her response will be: how can we build something new by using old crap from the communist party? Surely the degree of cynicism about socialism are different across different industries and regions, but the general indifference to left politics is too obvious to deny. Perhaps it needs a push from some left victory in some countries to revive the credibility of socialism in China.

The Chinese party state is far stronger than the Suharto regime of Indonesia on the eve of 1997, but even if the scenario of instant collapse like Indonesia is not very likely, there is still hope for a gradual expansion of autonomous civil associations and labor organizing. Activists must learn to be patient in this long drawn-out contest between the haves and have not. To it must be added that, with the absence of freedom of speech, it is

very difficult for both Chinese and foreign commentators to learn the real situation of China. Hence, any assessment of China's future development is bound to be speculative rather than scientific. We must prepare for ourselves shocks and surprises in the coming months and years.

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1. It has drawn several paragraphs from the author's two recent essays, Disposable Labor and A Human Right Charter that Excludes Working People, and also Preliminary Report on China's Going Global Strategy where the author is the leading member of the research team.

2. The author is editorial board member of China Labor Net.

3. Economist, 15 November 2008.

4. The current official rate of 4% is generally considered unreliable. According to the Chinese Academy of Social Science the actual rate is as high as 9.4%. Again, this is an underestimation, because it does not count those migrant workers who have returned to their home villages.

5. This is already exacerbating the problem of insufficient land for everybody in rural areas, hence a section of migrant workers have no retreat at all.

6. China's New Business Elite, Margaret Pearson, p.4, University of California Press, 1997.

7. A brief history of neo-liberalism, Chapter five, Oxford, 2005.

8. To assure the bureaucracy who was confused for a while by the temporary shift to the 'left' by Jiang Zemin - under the pressure of another top leader, the 'conservative' Chen Yun - Deng found it necessary to issue a new directive to ban all debate on 'whether the reform was capitalist or socialist', in addition to calling for more jiefang sixiang (liberate the thought). These calls act as green light for all levels of the bureaucracy to go capitalist.

9. It includes the army. The practice was halted, at least in appearance, in

late 1990's, because it posed too great a risk to the very existence of the state. Various reports show that these army runs companies, although being sold off and disconnected from the army, its high level officers still retain indirect control through their cronies.

10. See p. 332 and 369.

11. China and Socialism, Market Reforms and Class Struggle. Monthly Review, July - August, 2004.

12. It is a repressed speech but was reported in Hong Kong last year by the former chief of General Administration of Press and Publication, Dao Daozheng. See Ming Pao, October 14, 2008.

13. Before Cultural Revolution, the salary difference between the top and the lowest level of cadres was 30 times; after that it was 14 to 19 times. See the author's Tantan Pingjunzhuyi he Daguofan (On Egalitarianism and Daguofan), 1994.

14. The new leftists try to defend Mao's China by painting a rosy picture of equality in Mao era. Apart from a distortion of facts, the Achilles' heel of their argument lies in the fact that they confine their investigation to the economic side of equality, forgetting that political equality is more fundamental as a criterion in assessing any movement towards the emancipation of labor.

15. It was the same with Soviet Union. "The Soviet bureaucracy has gone far toward preparing a bourgeoisie restoration ...Privileges have only half their worth, if they cannot be transmitted to one's children....The victory of the bureaucracy in this decisive sphere would mean its conversion into a new possessing class." Leon Trotsky Revolution Betrayed, chapter nine, p. 253-4, Pathfinder Press, 1974.

16. http://legaldaily.com.cn/2007shyf/2008-11/14/content_981205.htm

17. China Economy Quarterly Update, Feb 2007, World Bank Beijing Office, p.6.

18. Tigao laodong baochou, zheli yu chuci fenpei (Raise the compensation

of labour, focus on initial distribution), by Wang Lianli, Xianggang Chuanzhen (Hong Kong Fax), published by research department of Citic Pacific, No. 2007-90, p.8.

19. Rebalancing China's Economy, He and Kuijs, World Bank China Research paper, no. 7.

20. The Economists, 'A Workers' Manifesto for China', 11 October 2007.

21. China International Economic Consultants Co. Ltd, <http://www.chinavista.com/business/ciec/ch/chciec19981013.html#cn00006>

22. See Preliminary Report on China's Going Global Strategy, Globalization Monitor, 2009. <http://globalmon.org.hk>

23. http://www.bjreview.com/print/txt/2007-02/05/content_54851.htm

24. Despite the financial tsunami which put neo-liberalism into question, the State Council has just released its plan to make Shanghai into an international financial centre in 2020, and the prerequisite will be relaxing capital control and making RMB convertible. This is not a sign of building a people's alternative to US-led globalization, nor is Chinese government's call for a new international reserve currency system to replace the dollars. China eyes eastern metropolis for economic boost, March 25, 2009. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/25/content_11072639.htm

25. See the author The Post MFA era and the rise of China. Interestingly, Arrighi has quoted approvingly in his book this part of the article to prove China's remains socialist, when the theme of the article is arguing the opposite, that despite of the fact that the achievement of land reform as fruit of the revolution largely remains intact, many other revolutionary achievements have been undone and China is unquestionably capitalist. See Arrighi, p. 370.

26. Except that Korea has been hostile to foreign capital investment all through her industrialization period, which is in glaring contrast to China's

experience.

27. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, P. 185

28. This March, Wu Bangguo, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, told the Congress that China would never simply copy the system of Western countries or introduce a system of multiple parties holding office in rotation.

29.

http://www.china.org.cn/government/NPC_CPPCC_2009/2009-03/09/content_17405700.htm

30. Quoted from Lian Yizheng, Chief Editor of the Hong Kong Economic Journal, July 21, 2008. In 2001 a writer called Wu Si wrote a popular book, *Qian Guize: Zhongguo lishi zhong de zhenshi youxi*, literally *Hidden Rules: The Real Game in Chinese History*, which deal with this subject. The reason for its success lies less on any new discovery - the phenomenon is never new to every informed person - but rather lies on the fact that the readers feel that

there is a taste of using the past to disparage the present.

31. If one enter *guanxi* in google one will find over a million entries. Books especially on *guanxi* are also many, and often considered as necessary reading in doing business in China.

32. The authority was shocked in 2008 when a lone killer, who was harassed by policemen, took revenge by killing 6 policemen, and was applauded by netizens.

33. Their Charter 2008 explicitly calls for privatization of farm land. For more please see the author's article *A Human Right Charter which Excludes Working People*.

34. For instance, the very well known new leftist, Gan Yang, wrote in *Dushu* to praise simultaneously the legacy of Confucius, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, seeing the three as succession of great Chinese culture, that most party cadres are taking care of the lower classes, that it is not true to say that an alliance of elites has consolidated themselves and consciously exclude the poor. See *Dushu*, June 2007.

35. The characterization of ACFTU as part of the repressive state apparatus is one thing, what strategy and tactics are adopted by activists towards the ACFTU is another. Although the two issues are related, they are nevertheless separate questions that need different approaches.

36. The workplace union runs a blog which reports on the event, including the responses of National ACFTU to the workplace union and the Danish union. For English report, please visit Globalization Monitor website: <http://globalmon.org.hk>

37. 16 December, 2007, Xinhua Net, http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/local/2007-12/16/content_7258499.htm

38. There is no law that ban strikes. The ban was an defacto ban.

(Author's note: This article was first published in the summer issue 2009 of the US journal New Politics. This slightly revised version corrected two translation mistakes and a minor error in the footnotes. September 3, 2009.)

Oligarchic resistance to popular struggles is growing

25 July 2009, by **Guillermo Almeyra**



Employment is subject to perpetual danger and work is carried out in increasingly poor conditions. Capitalism increases the extraction of relative surplus value by increasing productivity (thus lowering the value of goods relative to the reproduction of the labour force), while virtually freezing wages. This adds an absolute value due to the extension of the working day and the free labour that the working family and each of its members must perform to reproduce

the labour force.

In industrialized countries, such a policy requires the complicity of the bureaucratized union leaderships that sell out the rights of their members and repressive measures against combative trade unionists and against the immigrants who form a large part of the working class, with the aim of dividing, weakening and disorganising it.

In the less industrialized countries, however, the bulk of capitalism is based on a mix between the landed oligarchy with a "feudal vision" and

transnational corporations. It rests on racism of the urban middle classes (white and mixed races) against the rural and urban poor (indigenous or poor black) classes. And to maintain profit margins, capital must reduce the share of income going to workers. This task can be accomplished only by preventing any resistance through a dictatorial power. Attempted coups by those who control the courts, national assemblies, news media and armed forces are therefore on the agenda, and they will continue to be so.

In 2002, there were attempts by the

Venezuelan oligarchy, with the support of President Bush and the Spanish Government and urban middle classes, to overthrow Hugo Chavez. A popular mobilization divided the military politically and socially and the coup failed.

Last year, the big soya producers and cattle farmers in Santa Cruz, Bolivia attempted a coup against Evo Morales, which failed through the counter-mobilization of the peasants and the prompt reaction of the governments of Unasur (the Union of South American Nations, created in 2008).

Recently, the brutal Guatemalan bourgeoisie tried to organize a coup against timidly reformist President Alvaro Colom, who it had spied on and monitored since the beginning. The peasant and indigenous mobilization has created an uncertain situation: another coup with the support of middle classes who fear that the social advancement of the popular sectors will cost them their meagre privileges is still possible.

And now there is this coup against President Manuel Zelaya, who has led Honduras in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA). This is another coup carried out by the news media, corrupt judges and politicians

in the service of the big landowners, and the pretext that they give is ridiculous.

Nobody is obliged to participate in a consultation which is not binding. And if in the future it was eventually put to the voters whether they want to reform the Constitution, it would be sufficient, then, to answer no (and win the popular vote) to maintain the current situation.

But the Honduran army intervened at dawn to capture and expel the country's President as well as several ministers. Afterwards, Congress forged a letter of resignation from Zelaya and on that basis, 20 hours after the coup, they deposed him and appointed a usurper as interim President.

The OAS (Organization of American States), the United Nations, the countries of Central America and even the President of the United States have immediately said that they only recognized Zelaya.

As in the case of Bolivia, the presidents of the ALBA group, but also many other more moderate Presidents - Lula (Brazil) Tabaré Vazquez (Uruguay), Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (Argentina) Michelle

Bachelet (Chile), Oscar Arias (Costa Rica) - fear a return of 1970s, with coups and dictatorships, because in all these countries the right wants to defend its enormous profit margins threatened by the crisis and by the demands of workers.

Even Obama can no longer do what George Bush would have done (support coups) because he would forfeit the support of US Hispanics and some US workers, as well as that of democrats worldwide, and the recent fruits of his personal campaign of opening to Latin America.

We cannot talk about a new coup by "the gringo embassy" or the "first Obama coup" even if a good section of US transnationals and their representatives in the US establishment (Otto Reich, Negroponte and co.) may be behind the putschists.

However, it is clear that it is not enough for governments to repudiate them to overturn them. It is necessary to crush them in an exemplary manner before their example becomes a precedent, given that capitalism cannot recover within the margins of democracy and the social achievements that have been marked by workers since the Second World War.

Coup by a dominant oligarchy

25 July 2009, by Jan Malewski



The national Congress has declared a curfew from 10 pm to 5 am (on July 5 this curfew was advanced to 6:30 pm) throughout the country and has suspended the constitutional guarantees for citizens, which is equivalent to the establishment of a state of emergency. Andrés Pavón, president of the Civic Council of Organizations of Peoples and Indigenous Peoples of Honduras

(CCOPIH) explains the reasons that led the putschists to do this: "A high-ranking member of the military told me that General Romeo Vásquez [the Chief of staff] told Micheletti that he didn't have "legal mechanisms" to deal with the demonstrations against him, and that was the reason for this decree".

Left activists and members of worker and peasant organisations have been arrested. Congress has ordered the arrest of many leaders of popular or social organizations including Juan

Baraona and Carlos H. Reyes (Popular Bloc), Andrés Padrón (Human Rights Movement), the trade union leader Luther Castillos, Rafael Alegrón (Via Campesina), as well as CCOPIH activists: Caesar Han, Andrés Pavón. Marvin Ponce, Salvador Zúñiga and Berta Cáceres.

A front of popular resistance bringing together trade unions, non-governmental and left political organisations immediately started to mobilize the population against the "golpe", tens of thousands of people

invaded the streets of the capital Tegucigalpa and across the country; they were brutally crushed by the police and army. On 2 July the unions called for a general strike. On July 5, with the diplomatic support of the United Nations and OAS (Organization of American States) which has suspended Honduras following the coup), President Manuel Zelaya attempted to return to Tegucigalpa; the army invaded the landing strip, preventing the aircraft from landing, and then opened fire on thousands of unarmed demonstrators, gathered to greet the legal President, causing deaths and injuries.

The Zelaya government

A magnate in the wood industry and the candidate for the Liberal Party (centre-right), Manuel Zelaya won the presidential election in 2005 ahead of the candidate of the National party (conservative right). At the head of one of the poorest countries in Latin America (50% of the population live below the poverty line and illiteracy is at 20%), long one of the "banana republics" dominated by the United Fruit Company, confronted with the policy of restriction of aid and foreign credits, Zelaya attempted to reduce social polarization through a more socially aware policy. Thus he quickly lost the support of his own political formation and the local oligarchy which caused him to turn to the progressive forces.

Interviewed shortly before the coup by the Spanish daily *El País*, he presented his evolution thus: "my government is centre-left, because I practice liberal ideas, but with a Socialist, social trend. wanting to guarantee the rights of citizens. I come rather from very conservative ranks. I thought I could make changes in the neo-liberal framework. But the rich do give not one cent. The rich do not give their money. They keep everything for themselves. Therefore, logically, to make changes you need to integrate the people. Chávez helped me in the crisis. I have sought this support, it is not he who has sought me. Initially, there were countries who were opposed, I don't know why. Chávez is a democrat. He has elections every day. Now here my rapprochement with Fidel Castro, with

Hugo Chávez is accepted". [1] To a question from journalist concerning his isolation within the state apparatus, Zelaya answered: "This is why we talk about a bourgeois state. And it is the economic elites that make up the bourgeois state. These are the leaders of the army, the parties, the courts, and this bourgeois state feels vulnerable when it is proposed that the people have a voice and vote. (...) If I emerge strengthened this Sunday [in the polls] [28 June]... Perhaps I should grow closer to these power groups and convince them. Tell them that this is not against them, that it is a historical process, they must cooperate... They must understand that poverty will only end when it is the poor that make the laws." [2].

The Zelaya government has initiated a literacy campaign inspired by the Cuban and Venezuelan examples, attempted to improve the access of the poor to care services by importing generic medicines and granting scholarships to study medicine in Cuba, it has reduced the interest rate for loans to small farmers and has increased the minimum wage by 60%. Thanks to the agreement with Petrocaribe, based in Venezuela, it has been able to import fuel at a price below the world price. These measures have undermined the monopoly of the oil and pharmaceuticals multinationals. Denouncing the oligarchy's monopoly on the media, President Zelaya has suppressed state subsidies to big media groups, provoking their hatred.

In the diplomatic area Honduras has joined the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), with Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Dominica (joined since by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda and Ecuador).

If all these measures have increased his popularity among the poor layers of the population, they have fuelled the hostility of the local oligarchy and the state apparatus, which has begun to paralyse government policy. This polarization led Zelaya to turn increasingly to the masses. He took the initiative of a referendum on the convening, at the general elections next November, of a constituent assembly, drawing on the examples of

Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, that was to take place on Sunday June 28, 2009. The Congress and the Supreme Court said the popular consultation, which was of an indicative character only, was illegal. The army high command refused to give logistical support to the organization of this consultation and the coup has prevented it.

International isolation

Contrary to their expectations, the putschists have quickly encountered international isolation. The UN General Assembly has condemned the coup, the OAS has suspended Honduras (which has never happened to a military dictatorship!), the majority of the imperialist powers recalled their ambassadors. Washington, with a large military base in Honduras, has suspended its military relations with the Micheletti regime, Venezuela has suspended its oil supplies, the Inter-American Development Bank has frozen its lending to Honduras, the World Bank has stopped a \$270 million loan and so on.

These reactions indicate that, mired in crisis and seeking legitimacy, the world bourgeoisie is concerned above all about polarization and the radicalisation of resistance. The Honduran oligarchy, which has carried out the coup, is from this viewpoint only a second-order client and it risks opening Pandora's box. If it cannot tolerate even modest progressive reforms big globalised capital is not ready to protect it all costs. It is again time for "stability" and the initiative of the Honduran military has been condemned. "The international community" repudiates the putschists and leaves them to find a way out.

It prefers Zelaya who called for the demonstrators against the coup to welcome him "unarmed", faced with... armed forces. Of course, since the aircraft was prevented from landing and went to El Salvador instead, he also called on the military to "lower their weapons", but this has not prevented the first deaths by shootings. Because if soldiers are to be won away from their officers, so that they "change sides" in a situation

of confrontation, there needs to be another side, ready to fight on the ground chosen by the opponent. The

demonstrations against the military regime, although numerous, have not yet taken this step. The putschists are

internationally isolated, but hold their ground through the power of bayonets.

Historic defeat for 'traditional' Communist Parties?

24 July 2009, by **Pierre Rousset**



In India, during the Sino-Soviet conflict the original Communist Party split into three components : the "maintained" Communist Party of India (CPI) which remained pro-Moscow; the "Marxist" Communist Party (CPI-M) which adopted a "neither Moscow, nor Peking" international profile; and the "Marxist-Leninist" parties (CPI-ML), pro-Chinese, which would break up into a spectrum of competitor organisations. If the Maoists represent the dominant reference point on the far left (today still in part waging armed struggle), the CPI and CPI-M (in particular) have maintained a significant parliamentary representation.

India is a federation where no party has a homogeneous implantation on the scale of the sub-continent. The CPs can be in power in certain states whereas they are virtually non-existent in others (like Gujarat in the West). During previous electoral contests, the CPI-M had experienced success which had allowed it "a rare thing" to govern simultaneously the three states where it is best implanted; West Bengal and Tripura in the North-East, Kerala in the South-West.

Demographically (with more than 80 million inhabitants), politically and economically, West Bengal (capital Calcutta) is by far the most important. After a first victory in 1967, the CPI-M has governed this state permanently since 1977 via, latterly, a "Left Front". The CPI-M has also governed, but in

discontinuous fashion (namely one legislature out of two), Kerala and its some 35 million inhabitants.

At the federal level, after the previous parliamentary elections of 2004, the CPI-M set up a left bloc made up of 62 MPs "or the third biggest parliamentary group. The Congress Party having need of their support to be able to govern, this coalition around the CPI-M had a real influence, It has notably been able to impose the "freeze" on the rapprochement on nuclear questions between New Delhi and Washington and hold back some measures of economic liberalisation.

The CPI and CPI-M lead the two main left trade unions (the All India Trade Union Congress and the. Center for Indian Trade Unions); the biggest confederations being linked to the bourgeois governing parties (Congress and the far right, Hinduist, BJP). Via their mass organisations, they have also committed themselves thoroughly to the World Social Forums, playing an important role (in concert with other components) in the organisation of the Bombay (Mumbai) forum in 2004. The CPI-M claims nearly a million members.

At the international level, the CPI-M (it is less true for the CPI) occupies a specific place: it is one of the few to keep a real capacity for political initiative among the "big" parties originating from the pro-Soviet and Stalinist Communist movement. Nonetheless it has just suffered a serious electoral reverse during the parliamentary elections (they lasted a month, starting on April 16 and ending on May 13, 2009).

The number of federal MPs for the CPI-M fell from 43 to 16 and that of the CPI from 10 to 4. They have set up a parliamentary group with, notably, regional parties, including initially 67 MPS, but it is a very fragile, heterogeneous bloc. The alliance led by the Congress Party holds the majority and has freed itself from dependence on the CPs. In Tripura, the CPI-M has certainly kept its electoral base, but this little state (more than 3 million inhabitants) only represents a marginal political stake. On the other hand, support fell sharply in its bastions in west Bengal, where the left only won 15 seats (9 for the CPI-M) as against 35 in 2004, and Kerala (4 seats for the CPI-M against 19 for the left coalition in 2004).

The political game in India varies considerably according to the state and the reasons for these setbacks are not the same everywhere "in Kerala, for example, the CPI-M has been openly divided by an intense factional struggle. The CPI-M had moreover had the intelligence to not enter in the federal government during the previous legislature, supporting Congress from the outside, maintaining thus a certain political liberty. But crisis broke out in its stronghold of western Bengal, after decades of continuous power and the accompanying corruption. The government of the Left Front wished to open itself to capitalist globalisation and create industrial free trade zones, expelling peasants from their land in order to do this. Thanks to the implementation of land reform, the CPI-M benefited from significant popular support in the countryside.

But in Singur and Nandigram in 2007 it encountered violent rural *résistance*. It responded by a very brutal repression, the police behaving as in other states governed by the centre or right: there were numerous deaths, rapes and so on.

The impact of these events has been considerable. After exceptional unitary convergences, notably during the Social Forum, they created a veritable river of blood between the CPI-M and other Indian progressive components who supported the villagers of Singur and Nandigram. This impact is all the greater in that the conflicts between peasants and industrial groups (Tata cars...) are breaking out in various regions of the country and that the villagers generally receive the active

support of the left.

There has not really been, during the recent elections, a "wave" in favour of the Congress Party from which the CPs would have suffered. Congress has above all benefited from the decline of the other federal forces like the BJP and the lefts; as well as the rise of the regional parties which it can co-opt rally. The defeat for the CPs did not come essentially from "external" circumstances but rather it seems from a break in the links with their social base, at least in the states where they have been in power "singularly in west Bengal.

The defeat of the CPI/CPI-M is probably not solely conjunctural then. It reflects profound developments. In a subcontinent like India, one should

avoid hasty generalisations. But the CPI-M is wounded at its heart "west Bengal" and its overall orientation is threatened.

The elections of April-May 2009 concerned the National Assembly (Lok Sabha) alone. When the state assemblies are elected we will see whether they confirm the developments underway. But we are probably witnessing a historic turning point for the Indian left; a turning point of international scope. After the weakening of Rifondazione in Italy and the compromises of the South African Communist Party, the crisis of the CPI-M would in effect begin the decline and the loss of identity of one of the last (the last?) of the big "traditional" Communist Parties. [3]

Massacre at Bagua

23 July 2009, by **Hugo Blanco**



In my language, Quechua, "Ā'aupaq" means "forward" and "past" at the same time. "Qhepa" means "later", in place and time. Now we see that "progress" is leading to the extinction of the human species through global warming and many other forms of attacks on nature.

Who are the Amazonian people?

The Peruvian Amazon population comprises 11 per cent of the total population. It inhabits the most extensive of the three natural regions of Peru, the North, Centre and Southeast. It speaks dozens of languages and consists of dozens of nationalities.

The inhabitants of the South American rain forest are the indigenous peoples least contaminated by the "civilization" whose current stage is neoliberal capitalism.

They were not conquered by the Incas, or the Spanish invaders. The indigenous rebel Juan Santos Atawallpa, harassed by Spanish troops, fell back into the jungle, among these peoples, one of whose languages he had learned, and the colonial forces failed to defeat him. At the time of the exploitation of rubber capitalism entered the jungle and reduced to slavery and massacred native populations, for this reason many of them have kept themselves until today in voluntary isolation, wanting no contact with "civilization".

The Amazon peoples do not share the religious prejudices of the "civilized world" which lead to covering the body although the heat is intense. The strong moral offensive of the religious missionaries and laws that defend such prejudices have meant that some of them do cover parts of the body, especially when going to cities.

They feel themselves at one with Mother Nature and deeply respect it. When they cultivate they do not grow a single product. Clearing a place in

the forest, they put down different plants of different species, together, imitating nature. Avocado and pumpkin, besides bananas, maize, manioc (cassava), edible fruits. After a period of time this place returns to nature and another place for cultivation is opened.



They go out to hunt and gather, when they see something worthy of being hunted they do so, they go to their vegetable garden, if something is ripe they gather it, if they see that there is work to be done, they do it and they go home. You cannot say whether they are working or taking a walk. They drink water from rivers and streams and also eat fish.

They inhabit collective huts. There are no "parties" or elections; your social organization is the community. It is not a boss who leads but the collective, the community. They have lived there for millennia before the

European invasion, millennia before the Constitution of the Peruvian State that never consulted them when drawing up its laws and which now attacks them with the aim of exterminating them.

Multinational companies

This gentle life as part of nature is now threatened by the voracious needs of the multinational enterprises: oil, gas and mineral extractors. Predators of forests.

These companies, as devotees of the neo-liberal religion, don't mind aggression against nature or the extinction of the human species, all that interests them is to get the most money possible in the shortest time possible. They poison river water, uproot trees, kill the Amazon rainforest, mother of the Amazon peoples.

There is abundant Peruvian legislation that protects the indigenous peoples, including Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) which has the status of constitutional law since it was approved by Congress. This Convention stipulates that any provision concerning indigenous territories must involve consultation with the communities. There are also environmental protection laws.

But Peruvian law is just a small obstacle to the big companies who through bribery succeed in putting at their service the entire Peruvian state: President, parliamentary majority, judiciary, armed forces, police and so on. The media are also in their hands.

At the service of these companies which are his masters, Alan Garc a (the current President and leader of the ruling APRA party) has developed the theory that as small farmers or indigenous communities do not have capital to invest, they should give free passage to big predatory companies like mining companies in the sierra and the extractors of hydrocarbons in the jungle. Throughout the national territory they must allow free passage to the big agribusiness companies that kill the ground through monoculture and pesticides, which only produce for

export and not for the internal market. According to him this is the policy required for Peru to progress.

To implement this policy, legislation has been introduced in order to adapt to the Free Trade Treaty of the Americas (FTAA) with the USA. This legislation was a flood of decrees against the communal organisations of the indigenous peoples of the sierra and the jungle that impede the imperialist pillage and opened the doors to the depredation of nature with the poisoning of rivers, sterilization of soil with agro-industrial monoculture, use of pesticides and razing of the jungle by the extraction of hydrocarbons and timber. For lack of space I have not made an analysis of these laws, whose details can be found on other sources.

Indigenous reaction

Of course the indigenous peoples of the sierra and the jungle reacted against this attack and have carried out many courageous struggles. But there is no doubt that the least contaminated indigenous people, who have better preserved the indigenous principles of love of nature, collectivism, and "good living", are those of the Amazon, who are at the head of the struggles.

The biggest organisation of indigenous peoples in Amazonia is the Inter-ethnic Association of the Peruvian Jungle (AIDSEP) with strong support in the North, Centre and South of the Peruvian Amazon. It demands the withdrawal of the laws which affect their lives by contaminating rivers and promoting logging.



Its method of struggle is blocking of roads and river transport, much used by the multinationals, and the occupation of installations and airfields. In August 2008, they won a great success in pushing Congress to reverse the anti-Amazonian laws.

This year they began to struggle on April 9. The government used all sorts of manoeuvres to avoid debating with them and stopped Parliament from discussing the unconstitutionality of a

law when the parliamentary commission charged with studying it had found unconstitutional.

June 5

On June 5, world environment day, Alan Garcia turned his anti-ecological fury against the defenders of the Amazon. He employed the specialised repressive force used in the repression of social movements, the Special Operations Directorate (DIROES)

They attacked the Awajun and Wami comrades who were blocking a road near the village of Bagua. The massacre began at 5 am, launched from helicopters and from the ground. The number of victims is not known. The police did not allow treatment for the wounded, who were taken prisoner, nor were the families allowed to recover the bodies of the dead.

Our Amazon comrades defended themselves with spears and arrows, and then with weapons taken from their aggressors. In their anger they stormed an oil installation where they captured a group of police officers who were led into the forest where some were executed. In Bagua, the people stormed the APRA office. The police killed several villagers including children. The government decided to suspend civil rights and a curfew from 3 pm was introduced.

With this excuse, the police went into houses to arrest those who had sought refuge. The number of people detained is not known and they have no access to lawyers. Hundreds of deaths are spoken of.

Solidarity

Since June 11, there have been demonstrations against the massacre in several Peruvian towns: in Lima 4,000 people marched and there were clashes near the Congressional building. In Arequipa, more than 6,000 marched, while in the district of La Joya the Pan-American highway was blocked. In Puno activity was paralysed and the APRA office attacked. There were demonstrations in Piura, Chiclayo, Tarapoto, Pucallpa, Cusco, Moquegua and many other towns.

Abroad there were numerous protest actions outside Peruvian embassies in, for example, New York, Los Angeles, Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, Greece, Montreal, Costa Rica, Belgium, among others. The person responsible for Indigenous Affairs at the UN has protested, while the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has also intervened. Foreign newspapers have denounced the massacre, like La Jornada in Mexico. Anger has been increased by Alan Garcia's statements to the European press that indigenous peoples are not first-class citizens.

The Amazon comrades and their supporters are demanding the derogation of decrees 1090 and 1064 and other laws opening doors to the depredation of the jungle. Although the parliamentary commission responsible for the issue has decided on the abrogation of some decrees it found unconstitutional, the Chamber chose not to discuss this and to "suspend" them, as APRA wished. The government has created a "committee of dialogue" from which the representative body of the Amazonian indigenous population, AIDSEP, is

excluded. AIDSEP's leader has had to seek refuge in the Nicaraguan embassy because the government has accused him in relation to the events of June 5.

The Amazon struggle must continue, demanding respect for the rain forest. The Amazonian natives know that what is at stake is their own survival. We hope that the world population becomes aware that they are fighting in defence of all humankind, the Amazon jungle is the lung of the planet.

Declaration of the Fourth International on the political situation in Honduras

23 July 2009, by **Fourth International**



Photo: Indymedia US

Some thought we had entered a new era in Latin American political life. Social relations would be allayed. Democracy would be the norm.

Once again when their interests are at stake, the oligarchy and Army chiefs, even under 'democracy', overthrow Presidents and repress the popular movement.

The Honduras lives under the domination of an intractable oligarchy organized between conservatives and liberals. Balancing between them is an army equipped and assisted by the United States and steeped in the internal security doctrine. A political model, originating from the 1982 Constitution, has been set up out of several periods of brutal dictatorship when all political parties were prohibited. In the 1980s class violence continued and the death squads continued to assassinate opposition activists in their hundreds. The country was the basis of US operations against the liberation process in Central America and the

recycling of Argentine torturers.

Today, the fascistic right presents the overthrown President Zelaya as a dangerous radical whereas he is a liberal oligarch forced to make concessions in a context of a social upheaval which has become unmanageable. In April 2008, the people demonstrated massively against rising prices. Zelaya signed an agreement for an exchange of agricultural products against oil with Venezuela and entered into the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. This cooperation allowed him to finance some social programmes without however giving him the support of the three trade union confederations and the popular organizations participating in the Popular Bloc of Honduras, who were not convinced of a genuine break.

The Honduran people are violently affected by the blockages of a deeply inequitable society where national wealth is cornered by a minority and granted to multinational companies (mining, oil, water, and forest resources). Landless peasants continue to be shot down by the goons of the big landowners. Already sapped by poverty which affects 80 % of the

population and dependence on the economy of the United States, the country was devastated by Hurricane Mitch in October 1998. The Free Trade Treaty concluded in 2005 with the United States amounted to an abandonment of the country's sovereignty. Another equally harmful treaty is being negotiated with the European Union, with the aim of completion in July. For their part, the social movements demand the setting up of a constituent assembly, an inconceivable idea for the oligarchy, the United States and the multinationals.

The words of Obama are one thing, the links the US politico-military apparatus and the top brass of the Latin American armies another.

No clear condemnation of the coup was issued by the United States, which equated the two camps. The putschists were in permanent liaison with the US embassy to defeat the popular consultation. If Yankee imperialism is to keep its influence in this key stronghold the Obama administration will, faced with this brutal and clearly unforeseen coup, find itself in an uncontrolled situation which bodes ill for a refoundation of

relations with Latin America.

This coup follows that of April 2002 in Venezuela, defeated through popular mobilization, and that of Bolivia in 2008, defeated through the determination of Latin American governments not to see a new Pinochet emerge. This crisis is revealing of the polarity of the political-ideological currents that compete in the region. There is no question for the reactionary bourgeoisie of seeing the processes independent of imperialism promoted by the Venezuela-Ecuador-Bolivia-Nicaragua-Cuba axis extend. There is no question of leaving the initiative to the popular movements that everywhere resist the reconquest of the continent by multinational companies with the endorsement of their lackeys. We see the US

manœuvre promoted with the approval of the Latin American oligarchies: the possible return of President Manuel Zelaya in return for impunity for the putschists - who completely control the institutions of the Honduran State - and especially the abandonment of the main demand of the national front against the coup, the installation of a national constituent Assembly.

What the putschists and their allies had not bargained for is the extraordinary resistance of the Honduran popular movement that decades of repression have failed to silence and which now takes courageously to the streets.

The putschist regime (employers, oligarchy, the Church hierarchy and army) is hit by total diplomatic isolation, deprived of international

funding and Venezuelan oil. Some of the employers seek a crisis resolution negotiated with the United States. No goods are going through the borders thanks to popular blockades and the neighbouring countries have closed their borders.

In playing the card of the threat of supposed invasions at the Nicaraguan border supported by Venezuela, the putschists hope to find an echo within the country, highly polarised as it is, via media which are completely controlled, and to justify the repression. They also hope to regionalize the crisis. Therefore, only popular resistance in Honduras and the international solidarity of peoples will put an end to this coup.

Executive Bureau of the Fourth International

Condemn the State Terror in Lalgarh

21 July 2009

We believe that in the name of tackling the Maoists, the government is seeking to negate the legitimate demands [4] of the Lalgarh movement, and at the same time to annihilate that movement and its leading organization, the Peoples' Committee Against Police Atrocities (Polisi Sontras Birodhi Janaganer Committee). In this context, we want to remind the government that for the so-called "decline of the law and order situation" in Lalgarh, [5] the state and the central governments are both responsible. The people of that region have been compelled to take the path of protest and resistance because of the long years of ill-treatment, exploitation as well as the recent spate of police tortures.

Had the least alacrity comparable to that which is being displayed to establish the "rule of Law" been shown in improving the quality of life of the people of Lalgarh, then there would have been no question of civil disobedience. The immense funds that

are going today to discipline insubordinate masses, had they been spent in order to supply drinking water, water for irrigation, or to set up primary schools or health centres in the Lalgarh area, then people would not have been compelled to engage in a rebellion as they have done today, and the "cause" of unleashing the current ferocious military operation would not have arisen. If the billions of rupees that are wasted in order to provide security for ministers, bureaucrats and members of parliament had instead been spent in order to provide minimum comfort for the masses of common people, then the security of the bigwigs would not have been disturbed at all.

While the basic security needs of the people of India today call for food, clothing and housing for all, the Prime Minister of the country declares (and all the parliamentary parties lend their voices to the chorus) that the Maoists are the principal security threat. This lays bare their mentality, and the

nature of will and sincerity behind their plans.

We demand the revocation of the ban on the CPI(Maoist) [6] by the Union Government. We simultaneously demand that the state government must not apply the ban order. We also oppose the demand being made from certain quarters, including the Trinamool Congress, [7] that the concerned area should be declared a "Disturbed area". We believe such authoritarian steps will restrict the scope of democracy and further complicate the situation, while easing the path of establishing the reign of the police over the broad masses.

Alongside this, we declare unhesitatingly that we can in no way approve of certain types of incidents being caused by the Maoists in the name of establishing the right of the people or waging the peoples' emancipatory struggles - deeds such as the killing of individuals, passing "death penalties" through, or in the

name of, peoples' courts, causing landmine explosions, killing, beating up members and sympathizers of opponent political parties and threatening or terrorising their family members, obtaining bonds from them, and so on. In our opinion, such activities give rise to an anti-democratic political culture, they trample underfoot human feelings, harm the possibility of widest mobilizations for the peoples' legitimate struggles, lower reliance on the people's own fighting power, and at the same time they hand over to the state power an excuse to repress the legitimate struggles of the people. All this has indeed happened this time.

With grave concern, we have noted that though the PCAPA has repeatedly announced that it is not a Maoist organization and that it does not acknowledge responsibility for the activities of the Maoists, still the PCAPA leadership has failed to fully dissociate itself from such activities.

In a few cases, referring to the plea of "peoples' anger", they have protected such activities. While expressing our solidarity with the Lalgahar movement, we appeal to the PCAPA to reconsider this issue.

At the end, we demand from the government that it must move away from its strategy of repressing mass struggles and silencing the language of anger and resistance by the power of its guns. At the same time, we demand that the government must respect the anger and the spirit of protest of the people of the region, sit down to negotiate with all concerned forces including their representative organizations, and accept their legitimate demands.

We appeal to the people to join protests and resistance campaigns against the barbaric muscle-flexing by the state against the fighting people. Let us unite to demand:

* Immediately halt the military expedition to Lalgahar

* Stop repression and harassment in the villages on all the people, including women and children

* Accept the legitimate demands of the people of Lalgahar area

* Negotiate with the Peoples' Committee Against Police Atrocities

* Rescind the ban on the CPI (Maoist)

* Unconditionally release all those arrested on the charge of, or suspected of, being Maoists

* Make public the amount of public money squandered by the state in the Operation Lalgahar

2 July 2009

Protibadi Udyog, Mazdoor Mukti Committee, Radical Socialist, Sramajeevi Samiti, and Prosit Das, Jogin, Kaustav De, P.R. Ghosh [8]

The Tragedy of the Left's Discourse on Iran

19 July 2009, by **Saeed Rahnema**



James Petras

As there is very little substance to these analyses, they are hardly worth much critical review; and one cannot expect them to try to understand the complexities of Iranian politics and society.

As for the Left in the West, confusions abound. The progressive left, from the beginning openly supported the Iranian civil society movement. Znet, Campaign for Peace and democracy, Bullet, and some other media provided sound analysis to help others understand the complexities of the Iranian situation (see for example, <http://www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/21919>). Some intellectuals signed petitions along with their Iranian counterparts, while others

chose to remain silent. But disturbingly, like in the situations in Gaza or Lebanon, where Hamas and Hezbollah uncritically became champions of anti-imperialism, for some other people on the left, Ahmadinejad has become a champion because of his seemingly firm rhetoric against Israel and the US. Based on a crude class analysis, he is also directly or indirectly praised by some for his supposed campaign against the rich and imagined support of the working poor. These analyses also undermine the genuine movement within the vibrant Iranian civil society, and denigrate their demands for democracy, and political and individual freedoms as middle class concerns, instigated by western propaganda (a view shared by Khamenei, Ahmadinejad and his supporters).

MRZine and Islamists

The most bizarre case is the on-line journal MRZine, the offshoot of Monthly Review, which in some instances even publicized the propaganda of the Basij (Islamic militia) hooligans and criminals (<http://www.presstv.irdetail.aspx?id=98984§ionid=351020101>). The website has given ample rooms to pro-Islamist contributors; while they can hardly be considered to be on the left, their words are appreciated by the leftists editing the site. One writer claims that the battle in Iran is about "welfare reform and private property rights", and that Ahmadinejad "has enraged the managerial class", as he is "the least enthusiastic about neo-liberal reforms demanded by Iran's

corporate interests", and that he is under attack by "Iran's fiscal conservative candidates" (<http://mrZine.monthlyreview.org/pourzal270609.html>). The author conveniently fails to mention that there are also much "corporate interests" controlled by Ahmadinejad's friends and allies in the Islamic Guards and his conservative cleric supporters, and that he has staunchly followed "privatization" policies by handing over state holdings to his cronies.

During the 1979 revolution, the late Tudeh Party, under the direction of the Soviet Union, was unsuccessfully digging deep and looking hard for "non-capitalists" among the Islamic regime's elements to follow a "non-capitalist path" and a "socialist orientation". Now it seems that MRZine magazine is beginning a new excavation for such a breed among Islamists, not understanding that all factions of the Islamic regime have always been staunch capitalists.

Azmi Bishara's imagined Iran

In "Iran: An Alternative Reading" (<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2009/953/op1.htm>, reproduced in MRZine), Azmi Bishara argues that Iran's totalitarian system of government differs from other totalitarian systems in two definitive ways: Firstly, it has incorporated "such a high degree [of] constitutionally codified democratic competition in the ruling order and its ideology". Bishara does not explain however that these "competitions" are just for the insider Islamists, and all others, including moderate Muslims or the wide spectrum of secular liberals and the left are excluded by the anti-democratic institutions within the regime.

The Second differentiation Bishara makes is that "... the official ideology that permeates institutions of government ... is a real religion embraced by the vast majority of the people". He is right if he means the majority of Iranians are Muslim and Shi'i, but it is wrong to assume that all are religious and share the same obscurantist fundamentalist version as

those in power. He also fails to recognize the existence of a large number of secular people in Iran, one of the highest percentages among Muslim-majority countries.

He praises "such tolerance of political diversity", "tolerance of criticism", and "peaceful rotation of authority" in Iran. One wonders if our prominent Palestinian politician is writing about an imaginary Iran, or the real one. Could it be that Bishara has not heard of the massacres of thousands of political prisoners, chain killings of intellectuals, and silencing of the most able and progressive voices in the country? Doesn't he know that a non-elected 12-member conservative body (The Guardianship Council) only allows a few trusted individuals to run for President or the Parliament, and that the real "authority", the Supreme Leader, does not rotate, and is selected by an all-Mullah Assembly of Experts for life? The unelected Leader leads the suppressive apparatuses of the state, and since 1993 has created his own "Special Guards of Velayat" (NOPO) for quick suppressive operations. So much for tolerance and democracy.

Bishara undermines the genuine massive reform movement and claims that "expectations regarding the power of the reform trend ... were created by Western and non-Western media opposed to Ahmadinejad...". Had Bishara done his homework, he would have learned about the massive campaigns led by large number of womens' organizations, the youth, teachers and select groups of workers. He warns us of "elitism" and "arrogant classist edge", and implicitly dismisses these movements of "middle class backgrounds" and claims that "these people are not the majority of young people but rather the majority of young people from a particular class". It is unclear on what basis he makes the assertion that most of the youth from poor sectors of the society support Ahmadinejad.

James Petras
message: freedom

is not "vital"!

One of the most shocking pieces is by the renowned controversial Left writer and academic, James Petras. In his piece "Iranian Elections: 'The Stolen Elections' Hoax" (<http://www.globalreach.ca/PrintArticle.php?articleId=14018>), Petras conclusively denies any wrongdoings in the Iranian elections and confidently goes into the detail of the demographics of some small Iranian towns, with no credibility or expertise in the subject.

The abundant facts pointing to massive electoral fraud speak for themselves, so I will not waste time refuting his evidence and "sources", but will rather focus on his analysis. The most stunning aspect of the Petras piece is the total absence of any sympathy for all the brave women, youth, teachers, civil servants and workers who have been so vigorously campaigning for democracy, human rights, and political freedoms, risking their lives by spontaneously pouring into the streets when they realized they were cheated. Instead we see sporadic references to "comfortable upper class enclave", "well-dressed and fluent in English" youth, etc. Women are not mentioned even once, nor is there any recognition of their amazing struggle against the most obscurantist policies such as stoning, polygamy, and legal gender discriminations. Neither is there any reference to trade union activists, writers, and artists, many of whom are in jail.

Instead, the emphasis is on crude class analysis: "[t]he demography of voting reveals a real class polarization pitting high income, free market oriented capitalist individuals against working class, low income, community based supporters of a 'moral economy' in which usury and profiteering are limited by religious precepts." Petras could not be more misguided and misleading. Of course this would fit well within the perceived traditional class conflict paradigm (with an added touch of imagined Islamic economics!). However, the reality is far more complex. The Ayatollahs on both sides are "market-oriented capitalists", so are the

leaders of the Islamic Guard, who run industries, control trade monopolies, and are major land developers. There are also workers on both sides. Failed economic policies, the rising 30% inflation rate, growing unemployment and the suppression of trade unions turned many workers against Ahmadinejad. The communiqués of Workers of Iran Khodrow (auto industry) against the government's heavy-handed tactics, the long strikes and confrontations of the workers of Tehran Public Transport and the participation of workers in the post-election revolts, are all examples of opposition to Ahmadinejad by workers. It would also be simplistic to talk of the Islamists 'moral economy', when both sides have been involved in embezzlement and corruption, much of which was exposed during the debates fiasco in which they exposed each other.

On the basis of his limited understanding of the situation, Petras declares that "[t]he scale of the opposition's electoral deficit should tell us how out of touch it is with its own people's vital concerns." Firstly, like many others he cannot distinguish among different groups and categories of this "opposition", and worse, is telling Iranian women, youth, union activists, intellectuals and artists, that their demands and "concerns" for political and individual freedoms, human rights, democracy, gender equity and labour rights are not "vital". It seems he's telling the Iranian left: rofagha (comrades), if you are being tortured and rotting in prisons, your books are burned and you are expelled from your profession, don't worry, because the "working class" is receiving subsidies and handouts from the government! Professor Petras and those like him will not be as forgiving if their own freedoms and privileges were at issue.

The left has historically been rooted in solidarity with progressive movements, women's rights and rights for unions and its voice has been first and foremost a call for freedom. The voices that we hear today from part of the Left are tragically reactionary. Siding with religious fundamentalists with the wrong assumptions that they are anti-imperialists and anti-

capitalists, is aligning with the most reactionary forces of history. This is a reactionary left, different from progressive left which has always been on the side of the forces of progress.

Å½iÅ¾ek also misses an important point

In a much admired and distributed piece, Slavoj Å½iÅ¾ek, the prominent voice of the new left, refers to versions of events in Iran. (<http://itself.wordpress.com/2009/06/24/will-the-cat-above-the-precipice-fall-down/>). Å½iÅ¾ek explains that "Moussavi supporters... see their activity as the repetition of the 1979 Khomeini revolution, as the return to its roots, the undoing of the revolution's later corruption." He adds "[w]e are dealing with a genuine popular uprising of the deceived partisans of the Khomeini revolution", "'the return of the repressed' of the Khomeini revolution".

Å½iÅ¾ek does not differentiate between the "partisans of Khomeini" during the 1979 revolution, and the non-religious, secular elements, both liberals and Left, who actually started the revolution and in the absence of other alternatives, accepted Khomeini's leadership. Lack of recognition of this reality, that sometimes draws us to despair, is a big mistake. Along the same line, Å½iÅ¾ek, wrongly attributes all of today's movement to support for Moussavi: "Moussavi ... stands for the genuine resuscitation of the popular dream which sustained the Khomeini revolution." On this basis he concludes that "the 1979 Khomeini revolution cannot be reduced to a hard line Islamist takeover." To substantiate his point, Å½iÅ¾ek refers to the "incredible effervescence of the first year of the revolution...". In fact much of the 'effervescence' of the first year, or before the hostage taking at the American Embassy, was because of the actions of the non-partisans of Khomeini; from the workers councils movement, to confrontations of Fedais and other left organizations in Kurdistan and in Gonbad, to the

women's and university-based movements. It was a period when Khomeini and his supporters had not consolidated their power. After the hostage crisis and beginning of the Iran-Iraq war "the Islam establishment" took over.

All these draws Å½iÅ¾ek to conclude that "what this means is that there is genuine liberating potential in Islam." Å½iÅ¾ek does not recognize that Moussavi is a conservative Islamist, and this "liberating potential" can hardly be applied to him. For sure, there exists a new breed of Muslim intellectuals, the likes of Mohamad Shabestari, Mohsen Kadivar, Reza Alijani, and Hassan Eshkevari, who believe in the separation of religion and state, and can be the champions of such liberating potentials, but definitely not the likes of Khomeini and Moussavi.

There is no doubt that the Iranian 1979 revolution is an unfinished business and its main demands for democracy and political freedoms, and social equity have remained unfulfilled. But these were not Khomeini's demands, in the same manner that not all today's demands are those of Moussavi.

What is happening in Iran is a spontaneous, ingenious and independent revolt by a people frustrated with thirty years of obscurantist tyrannical religious rule, triggered by electoral fraud but rooted in more substantial demands. Much to the dismay of the clerical regime and their supporters inside and outside the country, the ever expanding Iranian civil society brilliantly seized the moment of the election to take strong steps forward. They have no illusions about the Islamist regime, or about their own capabilities. Their strategy is to gradually and non-violently replace the Islamic regime and its hegemony with a secular democratic one. This is a hugely significant, delicate and protracted confrontation. It is essential that they get the wide-ranging effective support from the left in the West so that they don't fall prey to the misleading conception of the left not having concerns for democracy and civil liberties.

This article appeared earlier at ZNet.

Time, Acceleration, Crisis and Climate Change

19 July 2009, by **Thadeus Pato**

Preface

It is worth it. As we will attempt to show below, the phenomenon of acceleration is playing a central role in this crisis. And we will see that the same social mechanisms that have formed our understanding of time, our "time-concept", are responsible for the way the present deceleration debate got under way. Therefore it is just as necessary as useful to deal firstly with the concept of time.

As far as we know, there is no proper historical-materialist based explanation of the time-concept, nor of the phenomenon of acceleration. One can find some more or less cryptic remarks[1] in the writings of Marx and Marxist scientists as well as references to certain Marxist bywords in bourgeois sociological literature, but at the most as more or less "additional" contributing factors. We will return to this later. Below we will therefore try to outline the bases of a time and acceleration theory from a Marxist perspective. This appears necessary because in our opinion the present combined crisis cannot be fully understood without an understanding of the temporal dimension of society's development.

We cannot develop the entire problematic completely here, as a far more extensive investigation would be necessary. Thus we will focus on outlining the baselines of a dialectical-materialistic approach.

Time

One could simplify the problem and state that time in accordance with Einstein's General Theory of Relativity is simply one dimension of the curved four-dimensional space-time

continuum. But that would not contribute much. And, as the sociologist Norbert Elias states correctly, it is also useless to divide the time term simply into its social and physical aspects, contrasting "social time" with "physical time"[2]. Because human beings are an inseparable component of the natural, or in other words, the physical environment and therefore the evolution of their time concept is a function of it. Human beings cannot be conceived of without their natural environment, nor can their notion of time without the existence of the 4th dimension, physical time.

The latter is neither directional nor absolute. According to the findings of Relativity Theory it depends on the respective position of the viewer's movement in space and is thus theoretically reversible.[3] In short, one can say that from the physical viewpoint there is no such thing as time in the sense of the usual subjective perception of "time", meaning a continuous, vectored time-flow, a "time arrow", but that only at different "spots" of the four-dimensional space-time different energetic states of the system exist, or in more descriptive terms: Each momentary state of the universe expresses one of the inherent possibilities of the system, to organize the existing total energy (mass is in accordance with Einstein: $E=mc^2$ nothing else as one of the states of energy) at a concrete "time" (i.e. at a certain point of the space-time continuum). Our respective momentarily noticed existence is in the sense of the Relativity and Quantum theory one of the realised possibilities of the overall system and not the result of a temporal, directional movement.[4]

The conception of a continuous,

vectored "time flow" in the sense of a self-standing, "objective" or "absolute" entity is a development from human history, which cannot be explained by genetic material. There are "built-in" timeswitches in the human organism, such as the so-called circadian rhythm, adjusted to the times of day, but these are not directional time-settings, but rather a circular operational sequence, not consciously controllable physiological reactions to periodically returning environmental changes.

We must thus, and this is not easy, take our leave of the assumption, taken for granted by human beings today, that the perception of vectored time has been unchangeable since it first existed.[5] Elias[6] and others have proven with reference to the relevant ethnological research, that a time concept such as our current one is the outcome of a long-term development process, which most probably began with a circular perception, a sense of an everlasting return. Furthermore, the German neurologist Schaltenbrand says: "The time term results only from the fact that conscious beings provided their experiences with time markings", and, "it is not correct to build up existence out of smallest time atoms, but rather to say that the existence contains a tremendous, even if limited number of presence-situations of differing lengths, which we try to bring into a systematic order".[7]

As we have said, no coherent sociological theory of the time has existed, till this day. Since Einstein, at least leave has been taken of the Kantian and Cartesian conceptions, in which time is set as absolute or unquestionable.

It is paradoxical that there is a host of studies about the change of the

(social) time term and in particular about the question of acceleration, but the respective authors usually begin by pointing out that there is no consistent "sociology of time".[8] This is paradoxical indeed, because without including the time concept in the debate about acceleration and its consequences the latter takes place on a quite swampy ground - acceleration is finally a function of time and thus a reflection of the former without a consistent determination of the concept of the latter seems as reasonable as a theory of swimming without secure knowledge about the characteristics of water. Without an at least provisional determination of a time term it seems scientifically dubious to expound on the phenomenon of acceleration.

From a materialist viewpoint, a definition of the time term must start out from the above-mentioned physical definition. One could presume now that, if time is in fact non-directional but we perceive it directionally, we are falling into a simple illusion. That is only partially correct: Correct in so far as there are natural energetic transitions, measurable and expressed in a temporal dimension, but directionality, classification as "past", "present" and "future", must be doubted in physical terms considered an illusion. Incorrect, because this directionality is a human thetic, and thus represents one of the possible ways of dealing with the phenomenon of time so as to make it "useful" for the social life of the species.

What we understand as "time", generally qualified as "social time" in sociology, the conception of a vectored time-arrow, therefore is the realisation of one of the possible subjective ways of dealing with physical time.

How humans deal with physical time, as previously mentioned, has fundamentally changed over the course of history. In primitive societies, as far as we can gather from the relevant empirical socioethnological research, only time-settings existed, deduced from the periodic changes in the natural environment, and related to vital activities, for example the annual sowing or harvest.

In an agrarian society the determination of times for sowing and harvest is a vital condition for subsistence under given environmental conditions (climate, seasonal change). For example, it is different in climatically favoured regions or in pre-agrarian societies, in which such a time-setting for subsistence is more or less insignificant. But this regulation (still) does not imply the development of a time consciousness in the modern sense. It sets the beginning of the social process of development of time perception, but does not yet refer to directed processes, but to circular ones. And these beginnings of time setting - because as stated an absolutely and objectively assignable "time" does not exist - referred to the observation of periodically returning natural phenomena (New Moon, sunrise, Solstice), and thus in no way abstracted "time" from the natural environment. The time term at that time referred exclusively to collective nature-related activities; "individual time" did not exist nor was it necessary. It was (still) an "integrative time" in the sense that it did not separate humans and their activities from the natural environment, but positioned them within the latter, not individually, but collectively. That correlated with production conditions at the time, because in the context of the agrarian subsistence economy, work was directly linked to circular natural phenomena (seasons).

Therefore, corresponding to what Elias[9] and, with reference to the former, Garhammer[10] also point out, except in activities related to subsistence, time setting was not necessary. (Lingering relics of this are the extremely "lax" approach to time by modern standards, still found today in certain societies, where "punctuality" is rather unknown.)[11]

A further point, which one must be considered in terms of development of the time term in history, is harnessing technical possibilities (by which we do not mean time devices in the first place, as these are a rather secondary phenomenon, because they represent merely a reflex to an before-existing/newly emerging necessity and not a cause), which initiated a dissociation from "natural time". The

discovery of fire and thus of lighting is a highly relevant example in this respect, because it made a certain emancipation of humans from natural day-night cycles possible for the first time.

We can therefore state that the beginnings of a determination of fixed times had a direct relationship to the mode of production of the respective society, or, in other words, to the level of the productive forces, referred both in terms of the need for and/or the extent of a differentiated time-setting as well as the technical possibilities of emancipation from the nature-referred rhythmic cycle.

Further differentiation of time perception occurred accordingly complementary to the increasing social and technical differentiation of the respective societies. Each increase in social complexity required a functional, but also a temporal adjustment according to the ever-closer relations among ever-more complex social functions. This process can be deduced very clearly, notably from the continuous advancement of time measurement systems - from the observation of the stars on to the water clock, the mechanical clock, the ship clock (indispensable for positioning in shipping traffic) up to the atomic clock -, which took place complementary to the respective differentiation of social functions.[12]

A proof of time-setting's dependence on social needs is also the way it was handled differently in various regions for a very long time. The development of conventions concerning world time and time zones was a relatively recent occurrence; one can interpret this as a result of incipient globalization. Thus it was a consequence of the gradual extension of local and regional interdependences within the sphere of production and distribution. The system-theoretician Niklas Luhmann[13] expresses it in the way world time means synchronization of individual social systems concerning time orientation. That is a relatively late achievement.

Acceleration

In recent years (once again) a violent debate has broken out on the question of the reasons behind and consequences of observable acceleration in all areas of life. Rifkin characterized this newly awakened interest as follows: "Until today time consciousness existed directly beneath the surface of consciousness, and has always influenced and shaped the experience of our species, but never enjoyed much open attention as a key force in the historical process. Now time consciousness has stepped to the surface of our collective consciousness and begun to offer a variety of new metaphorical chances to re-evaluate and rethink the political process again".[14]

It is also necessary here to clarify first of all what one is talking about, when speaking about acceleration.

Physically, acceleration is an exponential function: the change of speed per time unit. But whose speed? It is necessary to differentiate here. On the one hand we have to investigate acceleration in the area of transport. Here the available data is clear, so we won't return to it.

We can say something similar respecting the acceleration of production processes, which naturally are intertwined with developments in the field of means of transport. Fordism would not have become possible without the development of engines appropriate to driving conveyor belts. In addition, the acceleration in information transmission, from the jungle-drum and the marathon runner, the optical transmission of news by light signals up to the post office, telegraph network, telephone and Internet, falls into this category, which we would like to call technical or material acceleration.

Today's acceleration discussion suffers partially from the fact that "detiming" of socialtheoretical practice, determined by Pierre Bourdieu[15], appears paradoxically to certain of those authors, dealing with the phenomenon of acceleration, so as to restrict their view as Rosa does to

specific time periods. Due to this partially ahistorical outlook, they are coming to absurd conclusions.

Because, as e.g. Rosa[16] himself is diagnosing, there have been periodically returning debates (and complaints) over the last 200 years about increasing acceleration of "life". Usually they referred first to the feared health consequences of the increasing speed of different means of transport (railway, automobile and even bicycle), but in the last century with the differentiation of the respective sociological disciplines also a discussion started about the sociopsychological and thus sociopolitical consequences of acceleration. In each case, the different protagonists then stated a more or less worrisome new dimension of acceleration.

The fact is, the history of humankind can also be rightly viewed as a history of acceleration. However the latter, as we already proved in the section over the time, should not be seen as a phenomenon sui generis, as some kind of human "drive" or objective natural phenomenon. Just as the development of a time term represented a response to needs, resulting from certain conditions of production and subsistence, acceleration also represents such a response. Two points are central: on the one hand the generation of a social surplus and on the other private property of means of production and its consequences. The first generation of a social surplus as a condition for the social differentiation in terms of division of labour can be understood as an initial acceleration phase, in the sense that this differentiation again generated a further increase of the social surplus e.g. by the availability of better tools.

At first, this still involved procedures that generated acceleration in terms of production, as due to the positive effects of the division of labour/specialisation, products required for subsistence could be produced in shorter time than before. But that still did not mean acceleration in the sense of an overall social speed increase. In today's language we would say that it simply produced more "spare time".

The next "acceleration boost" could roughly be connected to the beginnings of exchange between different populations. This provided an incentive to the development of means of transport, as their use allowed goods intended for exchange to be transported more easily and faster, whether through breeding appropriate domestic animals or developing the wheel.

Up to this time however we could not speak of "forced acceleration", apart from temporary phenomena, such as direct obligation to bring in a harvest before the heavy rains or the like, because these pertain to initially mentioned cyclic phenomena and not a continuous acceleration.

Directly forced acceleration developed only with the formation of commercial capital and private ownership of the means of production. The substantial mainspring thereby represents the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall[17] and the resulting efforts to increase the speed of capital turnover. In the context of the existing mode of production these are objective obligations, which are no longer left up to individual or collective freedom of choice. A regular compulsion for the acceleration originated only with the formation of the trading capital

The law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall has the consequence that the respective capital owners try to compensate this trend through different measures. Beside other means such as compression of labour costs the major instrument for the question of acceleration is shortening of the time between production of the respective goods and their sale. This shortens the time during which the capitalist cannot dispose of what is "dead capital" for him, in this phase.

Entrepreneurs who would today still transport their products by sailboat or oxcart to the market, would encounter a crucial competitive disadvantage in comparison to competitors using airplanes or trucks, because they would recover the capital used for production of the respective goods with a far greater time delay and in the meantime could neither realize the surplus, nor get any interest on the invested capital (moreover, it is

possible that he had to pay interest for any credit in the meantime).

The degree to which corresponding turnover speed has increased since medieval trade empires such as Venice can be estimated via the simple example that at the time merchants of Venice, who had fitted out a ship, had to wait up to two years (or longer), depending on the region they were dealing with until they could realize their profits and/or recover the invested capital, not to mention transport risks at that time.[18]

Whereupon also Marx already referred to: "The main means for the shortening of the circulation time are improved communications. And herein the last fifty years brought a revolution, which can be compared only with the industrial revolution of the last half of the last century. In the country the paved road was pushed into the background through the railway, on the lake the slow and irregular sailing boat through the rapid and regular steamer line, and the whole globe becomes embraced by telegraph wires. The Suez channel opened Eastern Asia and Australia for steamer traffic. The circulation time of a consignment of goods to Eastern Asia, 1847 still at least twelve months, now approximately is reduced to approximately just as much weeks".[19]

Complementary to the acceleration which took place in fits and starts (by the development of new means of transportation, which in each case represented a qualitative leap, for the distribution of raw materials necessary for production or pre-products as of finished goods (rowboat / sailing-ship / steamship / motorboat; oxcart / horse carriage / railway / automobile; airship / airplane / rocket) also took place within the range of production. Breathtaking acceleration of the production cycles took place from manual production to manufacture up to Fordism and full automation.[20] And when production and distribution could be hardly be sped up much more, the next development, "just in time" production was introduced, cutting down on warehousing of raw materials and pre-products, thereby reducing the temporary accumulation of dead

capital.

A further point, compelling an ever-higher turnover rate, is the acceleration of innovative cycles. Take the aforementioned example of a producer of a good such as fashionable clothes. If he shipped these via sailing ship around the Cape of Good Hope from Asia to Europe: he would not only face the aforementioned disadvantage of the low turnover in terms of "dead capital", but would also realise that in the meantime fashion had changed and face a total loss of his invested capital. Acceleration within the communications field is also a direct consequence of this fundamental pressure, which results from the unconscious inevitability of the development of means of production and respective modes of production. The beginning of information transmission via artefacts (from smoke signals to the stagecoach up to satellite telephone and Internet) did not arise from desires for private communication, but primarily by social activities such as trade, as well as war.[21]

That secondarily a diffusion of acceleration technologies took place among the entire whole population, due to three substantial reasons which we cannot explain here in depth, but should at least mention for the sake of completeness:

On the one hand acceleration processes within the range of the material sphere have repercussions on the consciousness of people acting in an appropriate social context.[22] In a society in which an increase in speed can be converted more or less directly into material advantages, and in which this material advantage is the benchmark for positioning within the social context, "time", speed and acceleration (more or less unquestioned) become values in themselves. And in such a way it comes down to a classical dialectic reciprocal effect between the acceleration processes flowing from the described objective obligations and the consciousness flowing from these processes that reacts in turn to the material sphere.[23]

Secondly the diffusion of artefacts

providing general acceleration beyond the originally intended practical use follows the principle, that for an acceleration of the rate of turnover of the capital also the one, who is indispensable for the increase in value realization, i.e. the customer, as well has to be "accelerated" - on several levels. On the one hand simply by offering him for example public or individual means of transportation in order to provide him the possibility of acquiring the respective products in the shortest time possible.[24] On the other hand by claiming through appropriate mechanisms of manipulation, i.e. advertisement, that faster is better (an example is the development in the field of information technology, advertising the ever-higher speed of microprocessors, which 90% of users most probably do not even realize).

This happens by calling on the consciousness resulting from the described dialectic acceleration process.

The third point is the tendency of capital, to open a market as large as possible for (acceleration) products, which have been developed through significant expenditure. (This is a phenomenon to be found not only within the field of acceleration technologies, however as we will see, it particularly devastating effects in this field.) Therefore, again through utilization of the mentioned consciousness, the respective products are adjusted for a mass-market.[25] (In this context we had to thematize the necessary social-psychological precondition for the production of such a mass-market, e.g. for individual means of transport, i.e. the tendency towards individualisation accompanying the formation of the capitalistic economic and social order. Since this would go beyond the scope of this work, we prefer to simply refer to this issue.

We can thus state in summary that acceleration in all areas of life can be detected everywhere and sometimes lamented, in the base or superstructure, under the conditions of the capitalist mode of production is not a deliberately steered process, but the product of necessities inherent to the structure of this production

system and which the individual acting in this system has to obey with upon pain of his or her downfall.

Crisis and Climate Change

What has all of this got to do with the present crisis? In order to answer this question, one must first look into the nature of the crisis. It is twofold:

On the one hand it is a classical overproduction crisis. The reason it appears in the consciousness of the mass of the population as a financial crisis has something to do with the fact that the outbreak of the crisis took place with a substantial delay. In accordance with the macro-economic data the worldwide depression already taking place now already had to be expected approximately 15 years before.[26] The reason for the delay was in short the consequence of the enormous blister of private and public debt over the last 20 years. The final blowout of this credit bubble produced the impression of a crisis "of financial capitalism".

In reality for more than fifteen years already there has not been adequate purchasing power compared to the enormous growth in production capacity - a fundamental characteristic of an overproduction crisis.

Secondly it is a profound ecological crisis, primarily resulting from the consequences of unrestrained emission of climatic harmful so-called greenhouse gases - primarily carbon dioxide - over the last 150 years, by the destruction of the "green lungs" of the earth by clearcutting the rain forests, and the rise of meat production (methane emissions), as well as further factors, which cannot be described here in detail.[27] In summary: without a reduction of the greenhouse gas output by around 90% at the least up to the year 2050 we will enter an irreversible process, which will make large parts of the earth uninhabitable either by floodings, desertification/lack of water or other consequences of climate change.

This combination of economic and ecological crisis is tremendously explosive for an obvious reason: One of the main causes of the looming climatic disaster is precisely acceleration in all spheres of life over the last 150-200 years, thus within the industrial capitalist phase. The development and exponential increase of modern individual traffic is a striking example. The carbon emissions of traffic constituted about 14% of the total output in 2000, 76% of it related to the road traffic, far over half this from individual vehicles.[28] In the meantime by the increase of the individual motor traffic in the so-called emerging countries the portion continued to rise.

In addition, the irrational type of worldwide production and distribution is responsible for a large share of the increase of long-distance traffic with the ensuing greenhouse gas emissions.[29] (What is less known, by the way, is that in terms of energy and environmental balance the by far the "dirtiest" means of transport is the ship. Navigation constituted 10% of the traffic-related emissions in 2000.)

While the examples just now specified are common to most people interested in environmental policy, one speaks less about another point: about the increase of output, with respect to the durability of products. The latter points are of substantial importance, because current attempts of management of the economic crisis all focus on economic growth.

Let us regard two well-known (German) examples of this strategy: the "scrapping premium" for old cars and the discussed issue of so-called consumer coupons:

- Ongoing subsidies to individual traffic via the former measure are justified officially by the argument that they lead to conversion to new, pollution-free vehicles. This is of course nonsense. Firstly, with regard to ecological balance the production of a new vehicle releases so many greenhouse gases that it is environmentally better to drive old cars without catalysts for at least another ten years longer than to buy new ("clean") ones. These are simply subsidies to the car industry, which

are clearly counterproductive environmentally. Secondly it is a fact that further promotion of individual traffic overall is completely irresponsible from an environmental standpoint.

- So-called consumer coupons again demonstrate the unconscious logic of the ruling economic system with rare clarity. It is imperative to produce, and in the case of doubt the citizens are coaxed to acquire what may be completely useless rubbish for them, so as to redeem the consumer coupons, in order to keep the utilization of capital going on under all circumstances. Any production of goods however requires a more or less large energy input, once again at the climate's expense. One cannot argue either in such a way that the problem could be solved by conversion to climatically neutral forms of energy. Because the ecological balance of the respective forms of energy is (with exception of biological gas facilities) in more or less extent negative as well. The growth rates necessary for the continuation of the present economic system cannot be reached in a climatically neutral manner - not at all in an economic system, which incorporates predetermined breaking points into its products, to accelerate turnover and sticks to single-use products instead of sustainable circular flow economy.

Deceleration?

To get back to our topic, this means the solution lies in reducing harmful acceleration. The current debate about "deceleration" characteristically predominantly takes place on the individual level, for example in terms of "traffic avoidance", while the institutional level attempts to exorcise the devil climate change with the Beelzebub of CO2-certificates. (On the subject of the individual-psychological approach to "deceleration" the German author Oliver Schmid in his satirical novel "The best novel of all times" recently created a suitable monument with the figure of the "diplomized decelerator").

By this we do not wish to imply that it is not meaningful and necessary to struggle also on the individual-

psychological level for a change in consciousness. But this must not be done in a way that has the effect of masking the fact that the real causes of time-handling and acceleration lie in the makeup of our social system and on the basis of the latter no deceleration to the extent urgently necessary can take place.

Moreover, respecting the already described inseparable dialectical connection between mode of production and "speed consciousness" an individual change of consciousness on mass level independent of a change of the material base is simply not possible.

We must think of something more intelligent - or risk our own downfall.

Translation from German: Marie Lagatta/Thadeus Pato

Notes

[1] For example, in chapter 4 of the third volume of Capital, dealing with the speed of turnover of capital. We will come back to that later. Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels - Werke, Band 25, "Das Kapital"; Dietz Verlag, Berlin/DDR 1983

[2] Elias, N.: *Über die Zeit*; ("About time"), Suhrkamp 1988, p.XV

[3] You can find a popular explanation of this subject in the German magazine "Spektrum der Wissenschaft Spezial" Nr. 1/2007

[4] In this respect we must disagree with Elias' opinion that in addition to the four dimensions there is a "fifth", which he defines as humankind's ability to synthesize. In the sense explained above, this is also the realisation of one of the possible energetic states in the framework of the four-dimensional space-time.

[5] We will not deal here with the epistemological problems, which result from the Heisenberg uncertainty principle or the quantum theory; we would just like mention Virilio's attempt to include them into the respective considerations. (Virilio, P.; *Rasender Stillstand*; Fischer Verlag 1997)

[6] Elias, op. cit., p.XVI ff.

[7] Schaltenbrand, G. (1988): *Bewußtsein und Zeit*. ("Consciousness and time") In: R. Zoll (Ed.): *Zerstörung und Wiederaneignung von Zeit*. Frankfurt am Main

[8] i.e. Rosa, Hartmut: *Beschleunigung* ("Acceleration"); Suhrkamp 2005, p.23 ff. Rosa first points out in reference to Pierre Bourdieu that there is no consensual sociological or philosophical theory of time, and then without any clarification of the term or at least an attempt at one formulates as a hypothesis for his work: ".....that modernisation is not only a multilayered process "in time", but at first and above all means a structurally and culturally very important transformation of the temporal structures and horizons...."

[9] Elias, op. cit. a.a.O

[10] Garhammer, M: *Wie Europäer ihre Zeit nutzen* ("How Europeans use their time"); edition sigma 1999, p. 48 ff

[11] on this subject: Levine, R.: *Eine Landkarte der Zeit* ("A map of time"); Piper Verlag 1999

[12] On the history of time-measurement cf. Levine, op. cit. and Rosa, op.cit.

[13] Luhmann, N.: *Weltzeit und Systemgeschichte* ("World time and system history"); in: Lutz (Ed.): *Sonderheft 16 der Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*; 1972

[14] Rifkin, J.; *Uhrwerk Universum*, ("Clockwork Universe") p.253, Kindler Verlag, Munich 1988 (re-translated from German)

[15] Bourdieu, Pierre: *Sozialer Sinn*. ("Social sense") *Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft*. Frankfurt am Main 1993

[16] Rosa, op. cit., a.a.O.

[17] cf.: Mandel, E.; *Der Spätkapitalismus* ("Late Capitalism"), Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1972, especially p. 459 ff.

[18] cf. W. Shakespeare; *Der Kaufmann von Venedig*. ("The merchant of Venice"). By the way there were already banks at that time, which offered risk capital in return for profit-sharing, what in some cases led to bankruptcies - speculation has been risky for a very long time....

[19] Karl Marx - Friedrich Engels - Werke, Band 25, "Das Kapital", Bd. III; Dietz Verlag, Berlin/DDR 1983; p.81

[20] In economic science this is expressed as "increase of productivity"

[21] For instance, the World Wide Web did not originate with the US Department of Defense by accident.

[22] Figuratively a few authors such as McLuhan, but also Virilio and Postman express that as "shrinking of space".

[23] The extent to which the velocity delusion has reached an irrational stage can be seen for instance in the production of automobiles such as the 1000-PS-Bugatti by the enterprise Volks(!)wagen. (meaning people's car!)

[24] This can take place through selling cars but also through online-ordering on the Web, including a 24-hour delivery service.

[25] The production of real mini-racing cars for children is also an example both of how to open additional markets as of how to set speed and acceleration as "values in themselves" in the consciousness from an early age.

[26] Respecting the subject "delayed crisis" and the related debate about Kondratieff's long waves of conjuncture we will discuss this in another context in the next time.

[27] Source: The reports of the IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change), which you can access on the Internet. However, aspects of the prognosis are already outdated, the situation has worsened considerably in the meantime.

[28] Source: IPCC report

[29] A small example is the sale of

American, Australian and South African wine in Europe, and the

corresponding export of European

wines to these countries, although the quality is not very different.

A balance sheet of the European elections

16 July 2009, by **François Sabado**



Crisis of legitimacy

First of all, the recent European elections confirmed widespread popular abstention. The rate of abstention, at 57 per cent on the level of the European Union, increased further compared to the elections of 2004 where it had already, at 54.6 per cent, beaten the previous record. The level of abstention decreased in 9 countries and increased in 17.

This level of abstention provides a fresh demonstration of the crisis of legitimacy of the European Union and the governing parties which situate their policies within this framework. It is the result of the peoples of Europe being marginalised in the process of building a European Union that is neoliberal and anti-democratic.

In spite of the “No” votes from the left in France, in the Netherlands, and in Ireland, in the referendums on the European Constitutional Treaty, the EU has maintained its neoliberal policies. Furthermore, far from constituting a protection against the economic crisis, the EU has shown itself to be incapable of coordinating a response to it. The massive abstention is a protest against these policies. Given the high level of abstention, this election can thus only give a deformed reflection of the real relationships of forces. That does not, however, invalidate the principal tendencies of the situation, in particular the progression of the Right and the collapse of social democracy.

But as a result of this level of abstention, the majority parties won only a limited number of votes and percentages of registered voters: in

France, the UMP, Sarkozy’s party, which came top of the poll, with nearly 30 per cent of the votes cast, won only 11 per cent of registered voters! This phenomenon can be seen in a number of countries. It indicates the volatility of the electorates, the crisis of representativeness and of representation of the parties and institutions.

It is a sign of profound political and social instability in the countries of the EU, and therefore of the possibilities of sharp turns in the situation. Once again, that does not cancel out the progression of parties of the traditional and populist Right, and of the far Right, but it relativises the consolidated character of these relationships of forces.

Progression of the Right

The traditional Right progressed in 16 countries and regressed in 11 others. It won in the big countries that it controls: in Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Austria and Hungary. In Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, as well as in Slovenia and at Cyprus, the parties of the Right also came top of the poll. The paradox of the situation is that the first stages of the crisis are reinforcing the parties of the conservative Right which have precisely been the most zealous in the application of neoliberal policies. The acceptance, the support or the moderate criticism of the “stimulus programmes” of the Right by social democracy have benefitted the traditional Right.

In this first phase of the crisis, the reactions of fear, anxiety, of “turning inwards”, in a situation of deepening of the crisis of the workers’ movement and the Left, have indeed reinforced

the conservative Right. This push of the Right was accompanied in a series of countries by a rise in the forces of the populist Right and the far Right, in particular in the Netherlands, where the far-right, islamophobic and anti-European party of the deputy Geert Wilders obtained 16.4 per cent of the votes and 4 MEPs. In Austria, Finland and Hungary, the forces of the far Right, which unleashed campaigns against immigrants, also made progress. In Britain, the British National Party (BNP) obtained 2 MEPs, with 6.7 per cent of the vote. Greece also saw a breakthrough by the far Right, with 7.2 per cent for LAOS.

This progression is related to the rise of xenophobic and racist currents in a series of countries. The idea of making immigrants a scapegoat for the crisis is spreading in Europe. Witness the anti-immigrant diatribes of the Northern League in Italy and the reactions in Britain, in certain sectors of the working class, around the slogan “British jobs for British workers”. The movement of public opinion in certain Central European countries against the “Roms” (Gipsies), can give a certain social base to the populist Right or the far-Right. The Right as a whole progressed in 18 countries and regressed in 9 others.

Losses for social democracy

The third of the principal lessons of the poll is that social democracy has suffered losses and in some cases has seen its vote collapse. Whether in power or in opposition, it has lost ground. It regressed in 17 countries, it was stable in Sweden and progressed in only 9 countries - Greece, Ireland and Malta as well as the countries which were formerly ruled by the

bureaucracy, but there it is a particular kind of "social democracy", coming from the former ruling parties: in Lithuania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Slovenia.

The European Socialist party (ELP) thus regressed in the majority of the principal countries of the European Union. The ELP lost ground in particular in the countries where social democracy is in power: in Britain, Spain, Portugal.

It experienced a real electoral rout in Germany where it only managed 21 per cent of the, one of the poorest electoral results in the history of the Social-Democratic Party (SPD), not to mention the collapse of the Socialist Party (PS) in France (a drop of 13 per cent compared to the last European elections in 2004). Social democracy is paying for its "social-liberalism". From concession to concession, from adaptation to adaptation, from "reformism without reforms" to "reformism with neoliberal counter-reforms", the European socialist parties have become increasingly integrated into the management of the capitalist economy and institutions and have experienced a relative loss of their social and political bases in the popular classes. That does not mean the end of the socialist parties. They can return to the foreground, as a result of a deepening of the economic crisis or of social and political crises... but the increasingly strong tendencies towards their transformation from classic social democratic parties into American-style democratic parties, a process already completed in Italy with the transformation of the ex-Communists into partisans of the Democratic Party, can spread today through the whole of European social democracy.

Breakthrough for the ecologists

In a series of countries, the crisis of the big traditional apparatuses of the Right and of the social-democratic Left has left considerable space for several currents, from ecology to the radical Left, via a whole series of left reformist forces. In these elections, it was the ecologists who took most advantage of this space.

With nearly 60 MEPs elected, they

have come out of the election strengthened. One of the most significant breakthroughs was that of the Europe Ecology list of Daniel Cohn-Bendit in France, which obtained more than 16 per cent of the vote. The considerable increase in their votes is the product of two phenomena: the aggravation of the crisis of political representation of the traditional apparatuses, but above all the steadily increasing importance of the ecological question.

The problems raised by climate change and the unease based on the whole of the environmental questions naturally favoured the ecologists. These socio-political modifications must lead anti-capitalists to reinforce the ecosocialist dimension of their programmatic responses and their political intervention. The ecologists cover the entire political spectrum, from left to right. There are among the forces of the ecologists, "ecosocialist" currents, there are "ecoreformist" currents, linked to the Left, there are fundamentalist currents, but the political force which will dominate in the European Parliament, in particular around the figure of Cohn-Bendit, is a "centre-left ecology".

Based on the institutions of the European Union, Europe Ecology in France and the European Greens are aiming for a broad alliance of socialist parties, "centres" and ecologists. In France such an orientation aims, on the one hand, at the transformation of the Greens, judged "too much on the left", "too amateur", into a party that unites ecologists, through a candidature at the next presidential election of Nicolas Hulot (an ecologist and a popular presenter of television programmes on ecology on the TF1 channel) - and on the other hand, at the construction of a centre-left alliance, involving the ecologists, the PS, and the Movement of Democrats (Modem) of Francois Bayrou. Will the ecologists confirm their results in the next elections? Can such projects of construction be carried through to the end? Much will depend on the developments of the crisis, on social resistance and on the capacities of the anti-capitalist forces ...

Radical Lefts

If the ecologists saw an increase in their votes, the radical Lefts (left reformists and anti-capitalists) did not make any new breakthroughs, except in Ireland and in Portugal.

Parties like Die Linke in Germany, the SP in the Netherlands or the Left Front in France maintained or slightly reinforced their electoral positions. The Left Front - involving the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Left Party - obtained 6.3 per cent of the vote, increasing by only 0.5 per cent the score of the PCF in 2004 (5.8 per cent). In spite of a good campaign, there was no dynamic of the Left Front. In Germany, Die Linke hoped for a two-figure score, but they only got 7.3 per cent of the votes... And already the right wing of the party, represented especially in the regions of East Germany, is reproaching Die Linke, with having had a campaign... "too much on the left"!

The Party of Communist Refounding (PRC) in Italy, with 3.23 per cent, no longer has any representatives in the European Parliament. In fact the crisis of the PRC led to the constitution of two blocs, one headed by Bertinotti (one of its former leaders), whose rainbow project, with the Greens and the ex-Socialists, was oriented towards new alliances with the Democratic Party and the centre-left, and another based on a "communist identity" project involving the continuation of alliances with the centre-left in the governing executives of the cities and the big regions.

In Britain the results of the radical Left were disappointing, with the list NO2EU getting one per cent, the same as the SLP of Arthur Scargill.

Syriza (a coalition of the radical Left) in Greece, by winning 4 per cent of the vote and getting one member of the European Parliament elected, did not achieve its goal of getting 3 MEPs elected.

The Danish organization Folkebevægelsen mod EU (Popular Movement against the EU), by centring its campaign against the European Union, by affirming clear positions of defence of the rights of immigrant workers coming from the Eastern European countries,

succeeded in getting re-elected its MEP, Søren Søndergaard, who is also a member of the Red-Green Alliance and of the Fourth International.

Finally, in the anti-capitalist Left, we must underline the results of the Socialist Party in Ireland, which, after the campaign of the Irish "No" to the Treaty of Lisbon, sent an MEP to Brussels. In the local elections, which took place at the same time in Ireland, other active forces of the "No from the left", such as "People Before Profits", also had some success.



Bucking the trend: Left Bloc did well in Portugal

But we must especially remark on the excellent results of the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) in Portugal, which made a real breakthrough, winning 10.73 per cent of the vote and getting 3 MEPs elected. The advance of the Bloc is related to the collapse of the ELP but also to the absence of ecologist formations. In fact the success of the Bloc comes from the accumulated experience of its councillors and its MPs, from its ability to promote popular campaigns, from its ability to intervene as a global political alternative.

In France, the NPA consolidated its electorate by obtaining 4.98 per cent of the votes cast (840,713 votes). It progressed compared to the results of the LCR-LO lists at the previous European elections in 2004 (+ 2.3 per cent) but did not manage to have an MEP elected, which led to a certain disappointment. But the NPA made real breakthroughs in the working-class and popular districts, getting scores of up to 8-10 per cent.

The evolution of the political situation, the ability of the trade-union leaderships to channel and contain working-class combativeness and then to make it decline, had a negative effect on the level of struggles and slowed down the dynamic of the NPA.

For many organizations of the anti-capitalist Left, it was their electoral baptism of fire. The Polish Party of Labour, Izquierda Anticapitalista in

the Spanish State, ArbetarInitiativet (Workers' Initiative) in Sweden, the LCR-PSL in Belgium, the SSP in Scotland, Antarsya (an anti-capitalist coalition) in Greece conducted militant campaigns, but their results did not exceed one per cent. In spite of the weakness of these results, these organizations made advances in their construction: more influence, more implantation, more members.

These elections did not permit the formations of the radical Left (left reformist or anti-capitalist) to make a leap forward on the road of constituting a political alternative. The polarization to the right in these elections limited the emergence of forces to the left of the Left... except in Ireland and in Portugal. But they remain a factor in the political situation in many countries of Europe. Political lessons

What are, within this framework, the general political lessons?

1. These elections are the confirmation that the workers' movement, the Left and anti-capitalists are in a difficult situation. The first phases of the capitalist crisis are benefiting the traditional neoliberal Right. We thought that the crisis would open up spaces for anti-capitalist ideas and policies. We have scored a series of points in the political and ideological debate. But we have not been able to transform our ideas into a material force. The Right held firm and confirmed its policies. Contrary to what some people have explained on the way the crisis is being managed, there has been no Keynesian or neo-Keynesian turn. There has been more state intervention but it has been to consolidate neoliberal policies. The industrial restructurations have reinforced the attacks against the workers: freezing or lowering wages in some companies (either directly or by an increase in working hours), reduction of social budgets, privatizations, new attacks against social security and pensions. That is what the workers and the unemployed of Germany must expect after the elections in September.

2. After some skirmishes, the level of struggles, in Europe, has not

measured up to the attacks brought on by the crisis and by the policies of the governments. There have been trade-union days of action, mobilizations and demonstrations by sectors of the trade union movement, as in Germany, but not struggles on a national level that could inflict setbacks on the policies of the employers and the governments. In France, where the level of struggles and resistance remains strong - the highest in Europe - the social mobilizations of several million workers were channelled into a succession of trade-union days of action which exhausted the combativeness of the workers. Having adapted to the main lines of neoliberal policies, the trade-union leaderships did everything to avoid confrontation with the employers... the result was to provoke demobilization and confusion...

3. Although the present European political conjuncture is difficult, this conjuncture is part of a new political period which is heavy with tensions, with social and political contradictions. The main outlines of the period have not been called into question. We are going to see twists and turns and new political conjunctures. In the first place, we are at the beginning of the crisis. It will last and it will deepen. Its systemic dimension, its multiple economic and ecological dimensions will lead to changes in the political situation.

Although one cycle of struggles and of social reactions, corresponding to the first year of the crisis, is ending, there will be other reactions, further resistance and more social struggles. Of course nothing is automatic. The crisis will not lead mechanically to social struggles, and even struggles do not lead naturally to a rise in political consciousness. There is even polarization, and we can see it today, on the right and on the left, and even between the radical Left and the far Right. But we should not forget our analysis of the crisis as a global crisis. The radical Left has not been able, at this stage, to present a credible political alternative, but the situation of the Left after these elections indicates, more than ever, than what is at stake is an overall reorganization. The PS and entire sectors of social

democracy will be led either to make alliances with centre-left forces, including ecologists, or will themselves undergo qualitative mutations that will accentuate their "social-liberalism".

The trade-union leaderships are undergoing a process of increasing integration into the mechanisms of managing the crisis. The spaces created by the social-liberal evolution of the traditional Left call for audacious policies of anti-capitalist unity.

4. We have to hold to our course, taking into account the difficulties of the present conjuncture. Faced with the attacks of the Right and the retreats of the workers' movement we must persist in our policy of unity of action - the unity of action of the entire Left, of the entire workers' movement against the capitalist plans - but also to give more place in the profile of our organizations, in their proposals, to anti-capitalist unity. We have to take up with more force the proposals of anti-capitalist unity. This unity has a content: the response to the economic and ecological crisis. The radical Left must be a left of struggle, but it must especially be a left of answers to the crisis. Immediate demands must be

articulated with answers to the crisis, in the field of distribution of wealth, public and social property right across the economy and not only in the "public services", in a new mode of production and consumption based on social needs. From this point of view, our ecosocialist responses are central. Lastly, the anti-capitalist Left must assert itself as a party defending a governmental alternative centred on immediate proposals ("if you were in power what would you do first?") and also on new democratic practices and institutions. Within the Left, we have to re-launch the debate on alliances and perspectives of power, combining there too unity of action against the Right and the employers and anti-capitalist unity. Confronted with the offers of alliances from social democracy (or even, as in France or Italy, of "common houses"), we have to oppose anti-capitalist unity to social-liberal unity.

To reiterate the two possible options in the coming situation: social-liberalism or anti-capitalism; and to challenge all the formations situated on the left of the Left, on this question. "Do you choose unity with the social-liberals or anti-capitalist unity?" The question of the independence of anti-capitalist formations with respect to the

traditional leaderships of the Left remains a decisive criterion for reorganizing the Left.

5. Within this framework, we must continue to construct an anti-capitalist pole in Europe. Because one of the points of support to re-launch activity, encourage the unity of action of the entire Left, continue the strategic and programmatic discussion, is the existence of the organizations of the anti-capitalist Left. Of course, their development is unequal, but their responsibility is decisive. Over and above the present conjuncture, they have accumulated forces and experience, and some of them, such as the Portuguese Left Bloc or the French NPA, have an electoral and political audience which makes them credible forces to the left of the PS.

But a series of significant organizations - like the British and Irish revolutionary organizations (the SWP and the SP), left currents inside and outside Die Linke in Germany, the anti-capitalist currents in Greece, Sinistra Critica in Italy and Izquierda anticapitalista in Spain, the Polish Party of Labour (PPP) - represent forces which it is necessary to take into account in order to advance along the road to a new anti-capitalist force in Europe.

Crisis of the Iranian regime and popular mobilisation

13 July 2009, by **Babak Kia**



Photo: Indymedia

If the Council of Guardians of the Constitution authorised four candidates from within the establishment to run, the "Supreme Guide" had designated the victor well before the first round. In carrying out a veritable coup d'état intended to sideline from power the so called

"reformist" and "pragmatic" factions close to the former presidents Khatami and Rafsandjani, Ahmadinejad and the "Supreme Guide", Ali Khamenei, have opened a crisis at the summit of the regime. Faced with this acceleration of the political game, the defeated candidates, Mohsen Rézaï, historic leader of the Guardians of the Revolution, Mehdi Karroubi, former president of the Parliament and Mir Hossein Moussavi, former prime

minister (1981-1989), have entered into a showdown with the Guide and his protégé. This conflict has unleashed a new episode of internal struggle opposing the different factions. This gaping fracture at the summit of the state has opened a breach through which the democratic aspirations of Iranian youth, women and workers have poured. The dynamic of popular mobilisations deeply destabilises the edifice of the Islamic Republic and for the first time

the "Supreme Guide" has become the target of the demonstrators.

In supporting Ahmadinejad well before the vote and characterising his re-election as a "divine miracle", Ali Khamenei has just dealt a significant blow to his own function. The Supreme Guide is the first personage of the state. He directs the key organs of the regime, the armed forces, notably the Guardians of the Revolution (Sepah-e Pasdaran) and the Islamist militias (Bassidjis), the state media, the legal apparatus, and he monitors the executive power.

The constitution of the Islamic Republic is based on the *Velâyat-e faghih*, the government of the legal expert, incarnation of divine power and the domination of the religious over the political. As a general rule, the "Guide", who traces the guiding lines of the regime's policies, has the mission of arbitrating between the different factions. But in taking part in the coup d'état against the "reformist" camp, Khamenei has thrown all his weight into the balance and exposed himself to popular rejection. He thus strengthens the position of those who think that the regime is not reformable.

Dynamic of the popular mobilisations

The dynamic of the mobilisation, which initially was centred on the denunciation of the massive electoral fraud, tends today to challenge the Islamic Republic as a whole. The slogan "death to the dictator!" is addressed as much to Ahmadinejad as to Khamenei. However the only consolation for the mullahs is that the legal opposition to the clan of the "conservatives" and fundamentalists (Osul Garayan), led by the Supreme Guide and Ahmadinejad, do not intend to challenge the bases of the Islamic Republic. Indeed, the so called "reformist" opposition, represented by Mir Hossein Moussavi and Karroubi, wish to rest on the wave of popular opposition, while confining it in the current institutional framework. Far from controlling the dynamic of the street, the "reformists" would like to channel the popular mobilisation and use it against their adversaries.

Despite the repression and media blackout organised by the regime the popular mobilisation continues. Demonstrations are attempted in Teheran and in the big cities. The regime seeks to impose a significant degree of violence so as to smother the mobilisation. The big cities are in a quasi permanent state of emergency, with blocking of the main roads and filtering of traffic. The Guardians of the Revolution and the Bassidjis occupy the key points of Teheran. So as to avoid a direct confrontation with the militia and the Pasdaran, the population finds various forms of action, but doesn't cede an inch. Calls for strikes, including a general strike, have multiplied but their extension has been until now limited by repression and the absence of trade union rights and independent unions.

At the head of these initiatives are the employees of the enterprises and services which have mobilised most in recent years, like those of the public transport company in Teheran (Sherkat-e Vahed) or Iran Khodro (the biggest carmaker in the country with 60,000 workers) as well as those in health or the universities. Contrary to a vision spread outside of Iran by Ahmadinejad supporters, the social mobilisation involves youth, women and workers. One of the characteristics of the current movement is that, unlike in 1999, the students are not alone in confronting the regime. When they can take place, the demonstrations in Teheran take place in the south of the city, in the popular neighbourhoods and cross the capital towards the north.

The human chain that its inhabitants tried to organise on Monday June 29 was to extend over twelve kilometres. This initiative, little related by the media, was partially successful despite the attacks of the riot squads. Each evening, the roofs of Teheran resonate with slogans launched by the population, leading to regular forays by the militias into the residences. Of course, the absence of revolutionary leadership and independent organisation at the political and trade union level constitute a real handicap. However, the dynamic of mobilisation and radicalisation underway will not be without consequence. Because even if the regime succeeds in

retaking control of the street, its loss of legitimacy opens a situation of profound and durable instability.

The Iranian people are paying a heavy price for courageously opposing the Islamic Republic. More than two hundred dead, hundreds of wounded, nearly two thousand arrests and news that detainees are being tortured so as to make public "confessions" of "links with foreigners".

Division of ruling élites

In a rare event, several grand ayatollahs like Ali Montazeri, Nasser Makaram Chirazi, Assadollah Zanjani, Moussavi Ardebili or grand ayatollah Sana'î have expressed their concern as to the loss of legitimacy of the regime. Some, like grand ayatollah Ali Montazeri, supported the demonstrators. Indeed, those who know the Shiite world know that the religious and moral authority of these grand ayatollahs is superior to that of the "guide". In the doctrinal system of Shiism, they are "marjaas" (poles of imitation for the faithful, which is not the case with Ali Khamenei who was raised to the rank of Ayatollah so as to accede to the post of Guide). These positions taken by the higher clergy witness to the importance of this crisis which broadly transcends the "simple" issue of electoral fraud.

The current situation is only the culmination of a long and complex process which has taken place inside the regime on the one hand, and in Iranian society on the other.

With the usurpation of the 1979 Revolution by Ayatollah Khomeini and the creation of the Islamic Republic, a two headed institutional system was set up, together with a hypertrophy of institutions and religious functions. Thus, parallel to the theocratic nature of the regime, there are institutions of a republican character. In Iran, elections (municipal, parliamentary and above all presidential) are not held for the purpose of representation, inasmuch as they are obviously not democratic. Opponents of the Islamic Republic to not have the right to exist politically and the candidates are selected in advance by a higher body of the regime, in the event the Council of Guardians of the Constitution.

These elections have another, more fundamental, objective: the legitimating of a “revolutionary” regime which wishes to be popular and present itself as massively supported by the citizens. Indeed, there is a permanent tension between a regime which, while awaiting the reappearance of the Mahdi (the 12th imam, who disappeared in the year 874) defines itself as the emanation of God (the *Velāʿyat-e faghih*) and “representative” institutions and functions (Parliament, President of the Republic as “expressions of popular sovereignty”). From the dismissal of Bane Sadri by Khomeini a year after his election in 1981 to the permanent conflict between Khatami and Khamenei from 1997 to 2005, this contradiction persists as it has since the earliest days of the Islamic Republic.

In the Islamic Republic both clergy and lay persons, in the manner of Ahmadinejad, justify their action by religious “theorisations”. Each of the factions thus develops its own explanations which can develop according to the conjuncture and reflect shifting alliances. However, for more than ten years, a profound debate has been going on among Iran’s clergy. This debate is linked to the bipolar aspect of the Iranian political system and the rise of the democratic and social aspirations of the population.

Some religious dignitaries, very much in the minority, advocate a separation between the religious and the political. Their concern stems from the desire to preserve Islam from the risks of political power. These ideas have influenced some student activist circles.

Other positions, supported within the ruling cabal by Moussavi and Karoubi notably, stress “popular sovereignty”. The so-called “reformist” factions think that the *Velāʿyat-e faghih* should be elected and that universal suffrage and the choice of the people constitute the basis of the Islamic state.

What does Ahmadinejad represent?

Ahmadinejad, inspired by some

influential members of the clergy like Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi or Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani, considers that Islamic government should be based on the principles of Islamic faith. Thus, in 1998, Mahdavi Kanisaid that “for us, each government whose governor is designated and determined by God is legitimate even if the population does not accept it, and, on the other hand, each government whose governor is not designated by God is illegitimate and a usurper, even if the population accepts it”. The latter do not talk of the Islamic Republic but rather of the Islamic Government. The so called “pragmatic” faction incarnated by Rafsandjani, the richest man in Iran and reputedly the most corrupt, defends an intermediary position, according primacy to the Guide while insisting on “popular participation”.

The current political crisis reflects the attempt of the Khamenei-Ahmadinejad camp to se dismantle universal suffrage which, until these elections, allowed different factions to carve up and share power. In “freeing” itself from it, the Ahmadinejad clan intends to control totally the state apparatus as well as economic and financial resources. These theorisations on the question of Islamic government have only one function: to justify the grip of the Pasdaran and a section of the clergy on the wealth of the country, toughen still further the regime so as to contain the revival of social and democratic struggles and to eliminate from the regime all the other factions. Indeed, in the competition raging inside the ruling cabal, the desire of the “reformers”, close to the private industrial sector, to open the Iranian market more to foreign investors and break up state monopolies in the hands of the Pasdaran sharpens the conflict for the control of the regime.

The popular upsurge and the war which the different clans and fractions of the bourgeoisie are waging have intensified under the pressure of the world crisis of capitalism. Partisans of economic deregulation and a strengthened insertion of Iran in capitalist globalisation, the “reformers”, come up against the bureaucratic-mafia interests of the Guardians of the Revolution.

The ascent of the Guardians of the

Revolution has taken place progressively. To reduce this body to an elite ideological army devoted to the Guide would be much exaggerated. The leadership of the Sepah, which has a preponderant political and economic place, intends to direct the state and serve its own interests. The Pasdaran actively support Ahmadinejad who has made himself part of this elite body. He represents their interests at the summit of the state. The real social base of Ahmadinejad is made up of the traditional layers around the Bazaar who play an unavoidable economic role, the Bassidjis and their family, a part of the higher state bureaucracy and all those who form part of the civil organisations directed or financed by the Pasdaran. The latter control various economic and financial activities.

From building to leisure activities via the oil and weapons sectors, nothing escapes them. Their area of activity has no limits, even smuggling and the organisation of prostitution networks for the oil monarchies of the Gulf. They have in their hands, besides firepower, a considerable financial power. By its grip on the Foundations (*Bonyad*) – the bodies created after the revolution of 1979 to manage property expropriated from the dignitaries of the Shah – the leadership of the Pasdaran is one of the major actors in economic life. The Foundations amount to holdings in very varied activities and are among the most powerful companies in the Middle East. They represent more than 40% of GDP outside of oil income. A veritable state within a state, the Foundations are outside the control of the administration and are vectors of corruption and clientelism. Only a few people, including the Guide Ali Khamenei, are informed of their activity and that of the Pasdaran.

The argument according to which Ahmadinejad would be the representative of the more deprived layers is not supported by any tangible element. As shown by numerous surveys, his victory during the presidential elections of 2005 was not the result of the vote of the impoverished layers as is too often portrayed, including by the Western left.

In relating Ahmadinejad's electoral support in 2005 to unemployment rates, the least developed departments and regions or the rural world one can easily see that his score was mediocre. In fact Ahmadinejad won in 2005 by resting on popular disillusionment in relation to the "reformers" and thanks to the territorial networking ensured by the Bassidjis and Pasdaran as well as the links between the economic and military activities of the Guardians of the Revolution.

His first term was marked by a massive privatisation plan which benefited those close to him, but also by a dizzying rise in inflation (30% per year) and by a significant rise in unemployment. The clientelist use of the oil rent (Iran is not a case apart in this sense), which ensures the support of certain pauperised social layers, was not enough. Indeed, the latter lost more through inflation than they received via the arbitrary redistribution of a part of the oil manna. The dilapidation of the oil income, which represents 85% of export income and 75% of budgetary income, has prevented any modernisation of infrastructures. In the absence of refining capacity Iran imports 40% of its petrol consumption. Wages have never been squeezed so much and this despite the higher barrel price and the increased oil income of the country. To obtain payment of their wages both public and private sector workers have increasingly had to resort to strike movements. Each time, Ahmadinejad and those around him have responded by repression and arrests. Far from breaking the determination of the workers, repression has had as a consequence a growing radicalisation among youth, feminist activists and the working class in general.

In a country of nearly 71.2 million inhabitants, where youth represent 67.9% of the population, the absence of social perspectives and spaces of liberty represents an explosive cocktail for the regime. The corruption of the clergy and the guardians of the revolution, the political, economic and social violence imposed by the regime of the mullahs have largely contributed to the loss of legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. The political

sequence underway with the fraudulent elections, the support from the Guide for Ahmadinejad and the violence of the repression accentuate the factors of rejection of the existing order.

"Anti-imperialism of fools"

Rejected massively in its symbolic, ideological, social and political dimension, the Islamic Republic now only survives through the exercise of violence. Indeed, the demonstrations of recent weeks witness to it, the fear of denouncing the regime as a whole has gone. Faced with the breadth of the mobilisation Khamenei and Ahmadinejad try to appeal to the nationalist feelings of Iranians. Denouncing foreign conspiracies, the ruling clan seeks to isolate the demonstrators and to free its hands for a blind repression, in the name of the defence of the interests of the nation. Obviously one should not be duped. The imperialist powers have long coveted the wealth of the country. If they can act and install a regime more favourable to their interests they will do it. It should however be noted that at this stage no imperialist power proposes to break diplomatically with the Islamic Republic. As for Obama, he continues his "outstretched hand" policy.

Beyond this, the best way of counteracting the imperialist projects is not to support Ahmadinejad and company, but to build a movement of international solidarity with the Iranian people. It would be aberrant to analyse the crisis opened today in Iran as the expression of an imperialist conspiracy or to understand the mobilisations against electoral fraud as support for a pro imperialist faction, going so far as to justify the repression. If the Iranian people reject any imperialist interference, neither are they disposed to accept a reactionary, brutal and corrupt theocratic regime any longer. It has enough reasons to go onto the streets. Young people, women, workers do not cease to struggle for equality, social justice and democratic rights.

In line with the positions taken by Iranian left activists, it is necessary to support the popular mobilisations, to provide a point of support for those

who struggle in Iran and this without backing this or that faction. Some on the left internationally affirm that the millions of persons (3 million demonstrators in the streets of Teheran on June 15), who physically confront the riot squads and other thugs of the regime, are manipulated by the US, Israel or Britain. The conspiracy theory ignores the real bases of the crisis which relate primarily to internal factors. Nor does it take account of the specific conditions of politicisation in a context where the dictatorship has dismantled all political and trade union organisations.

These positions borrow from an approach which in other times which has done great damage in the international workers' movement. The theory that "my enemies' enemies are my friends" has led certain sectors to support Stalinism, indeed to seek unnatural alliances with the far right. It is unthinkable for anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist activists to denounce the state of Israel by making any kind of concessions to discourse of the anti-Semitic type. To accredit the idea that Ahmadinejad is an anti-imperialist leader is to forget the role played by the Iranian regime in the relative stabilisation of Iraq. The Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the supports of the puppet Iraqi prime minister Al Maliki, installed by US imperialism.

Today, the Islamic Republic participates, as the guest of the United States, in international conferences concerning the stabilisation of Afghanistan. What kind of anti-imperialism which collaborates with the forces of occupation? The US administration knows that the leaders of the Islamic Republic share the same position concerning the nuclear questions. Ahmadinejad, like the other presidential candidates, can adopt a tough surface language and negotiate in the corridors. Moreover in the area of foreign policy, there are no deep differences between the factions. The first Ahmadinejad term in this area has been no different from that of its predecessors. The foreign policy of the Islamic Republic is as much dictated by its interests on the regional and international scene as by the necessity of the regime to firm up its social base around a populist-nationalist

discourse.

From the fatwa affair launched by Khomeini against Salman Rushdie via Ahmadinejad's speeches denying the holocaust, each time the Islamic Republic has undergone difficulties, its leaders have sought to create a tension on the international plane so as to mask the gravity of the crisis. Khomeini's virulence during the 1980s with respect to the "Great Satan" and its Israeli ally did not stop the Islamic Republic from buying US arms and having them delivered by the Zionist state. The vision according to which a crisis of the regime or a change of regime in Iran would be a defeat for the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance and would play into Israel's smacks of an "anti-imperialism of fools".

The Israeli state has nothing to fear from Ahmadinejad's anti-Semitic ravings. On the contrary, the Israeli leaders seize on the emotion created by the Iranian president's words to justify and accentuate their colonial policy against the Palestinian people.

It is not enough to finance this or that organisation of the Palestinian resistance to win the stripes of anti-Zionism or anti-imperialism, in which case the Gulf monarchies and the corrupt Arab regimes would be classed in this category.

An anti-imperialist like James Petras claims that "neo-conservatives, libertarian conservatives and Trotskyites joined the Zionists in hailing the opposition protestors as the advance guard of a democratic revolution". Without saying a word on the contradictions at work in Iran, or the legitimacy of the mobilisations and aspirations for democratic and social rights, for gender equality, Petras and many others have allowed themselves to be blinded by the grotesque bluster of Ahmadinejad.

Accentuating the confusion, Hugo Chavez's positions in support of Ahmadinejad reflect an approach to the construction of a relation of forces which rests more on the cynical diplomacy of states than on popular mobilisations. They basically reflect a narrow conception where control of oil

prices appears as a strategic economic weapon in the consolidation of positions conquered in relation to imperialism, whereas the only serious and progressive road lies in the development of popular, social and democratic mobilisations.

Yet as we know consistent anti-imperialism is situated alongside the peoples who struggle for their emancipation. Our anti-imperialist struggle cannot be dissociated from the fight for social justice, the sovereignty of peoples and against all forms of oppression and exploitation. Realpolitik and selective denunciation should not form part of our methods of analysis and struggle. These are the weapons of the bourgeoisie. In this respect we should salute the appeal signed by a good number of left activist intellectuals, including Daniel Bensaïd, Noam Chomsky and Alain Badiou supporting the Iranian people in the struggle against the dictatorship without making any concession to the imperialist powers. The Iranian people should not remain isolated. They need our solidarity!

Destiny of a Revolutionary

12 July 2009, by **Phil Hearse**



Ernest Mandel being interviewed on German television

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDtBR7nUSwk>

Mandel had such a range of contacts and interests that it's extremely difficult to see the wood from the trees, to see what's important and what is either very secondary or just gossip. Then again, Ernest touched so many lives and influenced so many people that many in the book's audience have their own version of Ernest Mandel, and are certain to have individual opinions and memories that contrast with what some of what

the books says.

Indeed being for or against Ernest Mandel was part of the identity of many in the Trotskyist movement - Militant and its successors referred (and refers) to the Fourth International as the "Mandelites", while some English speaking supporters of Mandel's political trend referred to themselves, only half jokingly, as "Mandelistas".

Mao Zedong, when asked for his balance sheet of the French Revolution is alleged to have replied "It's a bit early to tell". And maybe it's too early to write a balanced biography of Mandel, since this involves making an assessment - perhaps the book's central theme - of

his eternal "optimism", and his eventual exasperation at the turn of events in Eastern Europe and the advent of neoliberalism; in other words making an assessment of the prospects for socialism in the foreseeable future.

But Stutje has made a bold attempt, and in many ways a successful one, to weave together narrative and analysis and to give a picture of the man's personality and personal life, as well as his theoretical achievements and political successes and failures. Stutje has talked to a lot of people and had the advantage of access to the Mandel archives; Mandel was a prolific correspondent and could reel off half a dozen treatise-length letters in an evening. Some of the correspondence

quoted, for example exchanges of letters with Perry Anderson, is very revealing. In the era of email this is a resource that is unlikely to be available to future biographers, unless they have strong contacts in the security services.

So this is a serious book, packed with information about Mandel's life, which leftists everywhere will find interesting. But in the end I think it is seriously unbalanced, and while individual criticisms are well founded, overall it doesn't really situate Mandel's extraordinary abilities and achievements.

Everybody is a product of their times and what they can do with their lives depends not only on their own abilities and character, but on the circumstances in which they find themselves. As Marx put it, "Men (sic) make their own history but not in the circumstances of their choosing". The circumstances as far as revolutionary militants are concerned also include the accumulated theoretical and political concepts with which they have to work, or attempt to modify.

To evaluate Mandel means to look at what he achieved against what he could have achieved. Looked at in that light Ernest Mandel's achievements are extraordinary; his weaknesses he often shared with the whole of the movement (â€˜Trotskyist') that emerged from the Left Opposition's struggle against Stalinism. But first a digression on Mandel's personal life, about which the book says a lot, and maybe too much.

Stutje has extensive coverage of Ernest's repeated failure to stabilise his personal relations with women, more specifically the difficulties of his love life. The mental illness and eventual suicide of his partner Gisela Scholtz is extensively covered, including Mandel's inability to help her. Part of this is certainly that he always put political work ahead of personal life. But having a relationship with someone like Mandel would have been in any case extraordinarily difficult. Being a significant revolutionary leader is always going to put enormous strains on one's social and personal life.

Stutje derives a whole theory out of this, arguing that Mandel's emotional development was arrested at adolescence, leaving him incapable of real intimacy. This is biographer as psychoanalyst, an unnecessary extrapolation from the known facts. Isaac Deutscher's biography of Trotsky, by contrast, manages to integrate movingly his subject's personal life without stooping to pop psychology.

More substantially I think the book, while accurately engaging with some of Mandel's political and theoretical weaknesses, doesn't accord enough credit to his extraordinary achievements. In addition, in covering the political debates and actions of the Fourth International, it leaves out some of the most important things and spends inordinate space on some secondary or irrelevant things.

First on Mandel's theoretical achievements, mentioned but inadequately assessed. Without question it was his ability to analyse the dynamics of modern capitalism and its coming crisis, and in the process re-excavate some of the basic concepts of Marx, that constitutes his lasting theoretical contribution. In this, it's true, he depended a lot on the work of and personal discussions with Roman Rosdolsky, whose path-breaking book on Marx's *Grundrisse* (*The Making of Marx's Capital*) did a lot of the spade work for *Late Capitalism*. But then new theoretical insights rarely emerge fully formed from the brain of one person.

The announcement of this â€˜new' theoretical paradigm was not really his first theoretical work *Marxist Economic Theory* (a rather leaden production), but his 1967 book *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx* (Verso). This book was really a polemic against Althusserian â€˜structural Marxism' and showed the importance of dialectical thought for understanding the innermost workings of â€˜generalised commodity production'.

His masterwork *Late Capitalism* was the most complete analysis produced by Marxists of the dynamics of the Keynesian-welfare state model of capitalism and why Keynesianism

would not be able to withstand the fundamental contradictions and inevitable periodic crises of capitalism.

We should remember this book was written in 1970. If some of it is dated now, this is because it was basically correct and that Keynesianism collapsed. What is not dated in the book – and lots of it is highly relevant as a theoretical model – is the notion of â€˜long waves' of capitalist development. Building on the ideas of Kondratieff, Mandel developed a paradigm that was not just another model, but highly relevant in understanding the sweep of post-Second World War history, and locating the relationship between capitalist economic development and the class struggle. Is there any doubt there was a â€˜long wave' of capitalist expansion after world war two? Or that neoliberalism constitutes another â€˜long wave'? In any case the notion of long waves helps us understand the long periods of capitalist civilisation, with implications of course for politics and ideology. Which is why it was so inspiring as a theoretical model for a social critic like Frederic Jameson who has attempted to chart the evolution of postmodernism as precisely the ideology of â€˜Late Capitalism'.

Not mentioned by Stutje is Mandel's 1975 collection *The Second Slump* (Verso). Mandel was able to use the ideas developed in *Late Capitalism* to see how the economic crisis of the 1970s could be situated historically and its implications for politics.

With his economic theories Mandel complemented his political work in the Fourth International. As is well known, his pamphlet *An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory* sold in hundreds of thousands in many languages in the late 1960s and â€˜70s. This helped win thousands of young militants to Marxism, without a shadow of doubt. These economic writings helped sustain the whole of the revolutionary left with the gut feeling – always important – that only Marxism could explain the contemporary world and that Marxists, and the Fourth International in particular, were at the cutting edge of theoretical analysis, much more than social democrats, liberals,

theoretically dead Stalinism or the ideological right. This was a feeling more difficult to sustain from the 1980s onwards, of which more below.

But Mandel did more than this at the theoretical level. His writings, often in the form of long magazine articles or interviews, helped connect up the new generation of militant leftists with the best traditions of the pre-war European workers movement. He helped situate the contributions of Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky, although he never wrote anything substantial on Gramsci. In other words he helped celebrate and explain the grandeur and extraordinary theoretical achievement of the pre- and post-first world war militants of the Communist movement, a generation whose ideas still dominate the revolutionary left, and whose contributions and strengths are well explained in Perry Anderson's book *Considerations on Western Marxism*.

Now we come to politics. Stutje's book has some extraordinary omissions. There is nothing about the formation of the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil and the crucial role of the Fourth International militants in helping to establish it and subsequent debates about it. Or indeed about the eventual failure of the PT experiment and the balance sheet of that - particularly suprising in the light of Stutje's assertion that Mandel never developed a theory of the party. The Mexican PRT (Revolutionary Workers Party), at one point the biggest section of the Fourth International, is merely mentioned in passing in a footnote. Again its crisis and failure, and what that meant for the FI and its political methods, might have been a significant thing to discuss.

Perhaps even more amazingly the long fight in the 1980s with the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is absent from the book. This was fundamental because it involved an analysis of the whole state of the modern Marxist movement, the theory of permanent revolution, and the role of the Fourth International. Nor, incidentally, does the fate of the once important Spanish section figure, or by contrast the extraordinary successes of the Portuguese revolutionary Marxists in forming the

Left Bloc, which has just won more than 10% in the European elections and elected 3 MEPS.

Astonishingly however there are pages and pages on the mid-1980s psychodrama in the FI leadership over the organisation's Polish work. This, Stutje claims, damaged Mandel's reputation, damage that his reputation 'never recovered from'. This is nonsense. Most people who knew or knew of Mandel didn't know anything about this incident, in which he was not anyway a central actor.

If you want to make a balance sheet of Mandel's political achievements you have to start off with the success - and basically success it was - of the FI leadership team around Mandel, Pierre Frank and Livio Maitain in the 1950s and '60s. Their success, once they had broken with the mercurial Palbo (Michael Raptis), was to orientate around three basic political options united by one method. First, unlike their sectarian opponents, an openness towards the colonial revolution which enabled them to see the importance of the Algerian independence struggle, celebrate and welcome the Cuban revolution and spot from a mile off that Vietnam was going to dominate world politics. Second they stuck firm to the idea that Stalinism would go into crisis. And third the idea that crisis would break out in the advanced countries, leading to new opportunities for the then isolated left.

Politically this leadership team held firm to non-sectarianism and tried always to link up with left developments - few as they were - in the European workers movement. This led to an over-long experiment with entrism in the mass workers parties, which hindered the turn to the newly emerging radical student and anti-war movement, the 'youth radicalisation'. But in most places they turned in time. And it was of course the attitude to Cuba and Vietnam - and the central role played by FI sections in the Vietnam solidarity movement - that enabled them to make significant gains in this milieu, gains that led to the creation of new sections of the International and the growth of old ones. The biggest success of course was in France,

where Mandel spoke at a rally on the eve of the Night of the Barricades, alongside key leaders of the revolutionary youth like Danny Cohn-Bendit, Alain Krivine and Daniel Bensaid.



Mandel with Danny Cohn-Bendit, Henri Weber, Daniel Bensaid and Alain Krivine, Paris May 68

At the November 1970 'Red Europe' rally in Brussels (not mentioned in the book) thousands of young militants from across the continent celebrated the new 'arrival' of the Fourth International, many of them at the conclusion of the final rally holding up four fingers rather than a clenched fist. 'Construisons le Quatrième International!' proclaimed the next issue of Rouge, the Ligue Communiste paper. As detailed by Stutje, the euphoria was sustained by the Ligue Communiste-FI demonstration on the 100th anniversary of the Paris Commune in 1971, attended by perhaps 25,000 people, at which Mandel was the key speaker.

There was significant growth for the FI in the 1970s, but by the end of the decade - and Stutje is absolutely right about this - significant new difficulties. The new difficulties were twofold: first how to stabilise mainly young organisations for a long term intervention in the workers movement, and second, more fundamental, the onset of the worldwide capitalist counter-offensive and the swing to the right.

Out of these difficulties, primarily caused by defeats of the workers movement and eventually the collapse of the Soviet Union, came organisational stagnation and internal crisis for the FI. These revealed some of Mandel's weaknesses and Stutje makes some acute comments about all this.

On the organisational front was the collapse of the 'leadership of all the talents', the concentration in Paris of leaders from around the world in a single over-arching 'Bureau', politically led by Mandel and Charles-

Andre Udry. Stutje quotes one of the Bureau, Daniel Bensaid, as saying this project employed 'megalomaniac ambition'. It was a group of generals without an army, capable of making high quality analyses, but not of directing the sections of the Fourth International, let alone the world revolution.

The mismatch between ambition and reality led to a long attempt, mainly successful, to redefine the role of the International in more modest ways, no longer 'the world party of socialist revolution' but one detachment of the movement for revolutionary social change..

But more fundamental, and again Stutje is correct on this, was the shift to the right and the difficulty of being revolutionary in a world with little time for revolution. Mandel was resistant to accepting the need for redefinition, but then so were lots of people.

Stutje charges Mandel with a persistent failure, an inability to politically stand up to valued allies for fear of breaking with them. I think there is something in this, but it has to be qualified. Leading an international revolutionary tendency is a complex business and compromises are inevitable. We saw, for example, the light-minded way the British Socialist Workers Party broke with their American co-thinkers in 2002 over very secondary questions, an act of self-defeating stupidity. Mandel rightly tried to avoid that kind of thing.

But Stutje's charge that Mandel compromised too much with the 'guerrillaist' orientation in Latin America in the late 60s and early 70s, in order not to break with the young and leftist French leadership, probably has some weight. It had negative effects right through to the mid-1980s. The compromise with the American SWP in the 1970s, engineered by Charles-Andre Udry, eventually involving the disastrous 'turn to industry', was backed by Mandel who must have had severe doubts about it.

Mandel was unwilling to break with people he regarded as important intellectuals. For example, when the rightward-moving Ken Coates was

expelled from the British section in 1967, Mandel defined it as a 'split' and maintained his personal links with Coates. Ernest thought that you couldn't build anything significant without winning a section of the most important Marxist intellectuals in any particular country. He was able to use his personal prestige to build a wide network of personal contacts, but had frequent illusions in people who impressed him intellectually, sometimes wildly exaggerating the possibility of recruiting them. On the other hand his personal prestige enabled him to do some very positive things, outside the formal framework of the International. The attempt he made to win over Rudi Dutschke and a section of the SDS leadership in Germany in the late 1960s was absolutely right; the local section stuck in social democracy was incapable of doing it. His relationship with Perry Anderson led to very positive results, both for New Left Review and the International. The same is true for a series of personal intellectual exchanges he conducted with Marxist intellectuals worldwide, outside any attempt to recruit them to the Fourth International.

Stutje spends a long time charting Mandel's increasing frustration with the turn of events internationally and his refusal to face up to the possibility of capitalist restoration in Russia and the Soviet Union, a shocking refusal to look reality in the face. But here it's not just a question of an old man's obstinate optimism, but of theoretical failings.

Ernest stubbornly held onto quite dogmatic and unnecessary schematism when it came to discussing Stalinism. For example, he defined Stalinism as subordination to the Soviet bureaucracy, without seeing that the Chinese regime or even the Vietnamese had - to put it politely - significant traits in common with East European and Russian Stalinism. Here social reality was subordinate to a definition.

Over the Soviet Union he held on mechanically to the idea that there was a triangular struggle between the working class, the bureaucracy and emerging capitalism - and inevitably the bureaucracy would fight capitalism to defend itself. The

possibility that important sections of the bureaucracy would recycle themselves as a key constituent of a new capitalist class was excluded - because it didn't fit the theory.

One of the most interesting suggestions that Stutje makes is that Mandel never developed a theory of the party, outside his early 1970s pamphlet *The Leninist Theory of Organisation*, which is really, as the author suggests, a theory of proletarian class consciousness, not of party organisation. Which doesn't mean that most sections of the Fourth International didn't have fairly fixed notions of party organisation, and fairly rigid there were too at least in the 1970s and into the 1980s. Since then there has been substantial rethinking and some of the most important discussion is contained in the new book by Daniel Bensaid about to be published by Resistance Books.

Much debate on this issue revolves around the relevance of Lenin's alleged model of the party for modern times. But is it really true that Lenin had a fixed notion of party organisation? This is a long debate, but it seems to me that Lenin was the ultimate pragmatist on organisational forms. Be that as it may, Ernest's 'failure' to develop a theory of party organisation isn't really a failure, because it was probably impossible to develop one in the period he was active. I suspect that it is not possible, faced with the diverse circumstances we face today and with experiences like the New Anti-capitalist Party in France and the Left Bloc in Portugal, to develop any general theory of the party, or at least any general model. Of course we have to defend the party form against anarchism and ensure the organisation of Marxists. Beyond that? - it depends.

I started out this review saying that people can't be judged outside their time and circumstances. Unfortunately historical rhythms are no respecters of individual biographies. You do what you can with the resources you have in the period in which you live.

To quote Mao again, in a thousand years time we'll all look pretty ridiculous. Whatever the final verdict

on Ernest Mandel, another Ernest Mandel is impossible. The sum total of human knowledge, even important general knowledge let alone scientific discovery, makes it impossible for any individual to synthesise the most important aspects of that knowledge for revolutionary practice. Team leaderships – and thus lots of political and theoretical disagreements – are the only way to develop militant left organisations. The era when international tendencies could be dominated by the thought of a single individual is over. Towards the end of Mandel's life this was already obvious, when the accumulated gains of 'Mandel thought' were insufficient to explain a series of developments like the ecological crisis and an

intelligent Marxist response to it.

My verdict of Stutje's book is that it is overly concerned by the disappointments of the final years of Mandel's life, by Polish nonsense and his personal life. Ernest Mandel played a vital role in transmitting the revolutionary heritage of the pre-war period to new generations, of re-establishing the reputation of authentic Marxism after years of Stalinist distortion, of revitalising what was in the 1950s a near-moribund revolutionary Marxist movement and of preparing that movement for inevitable capitalist crisis. You don't have to write hagiography to recognise that. Mandel's political 'children', the

type of people who are today found in the leadership of Marxist organisations like the New Anticapitalist Party in France, the Left Bloc in Portugal, Sinistra Critica in Italy and the PSOL in Brazil, but also involved in a wide range of political activism and theoretical work worldwide, represent an astonishing array talent that continues to embody Mandel's revolutionary commitment, without the illusions.

Buy the book

The volume can be bought from the IIRE at a discounted price. Visit <http://www.iire.org/content/view/159/1/lang,en/> for details.

Re-Arming the Left

12 July 2009, by **Socialist Resistance**



Gordon Brown British Prime Minister
Wikimedia

Economic Catastrophe

Now we know the answer to the question. It's not only possible, but we are in it. Or rather, we have lived through the crash and are now just entering the slump. Even if there are occasional glimpses of recovery, the fundamental factor in the situation is that we have entered a long wave with an undertone of recession. This will have profound social implications: outside of spectacular political developments and major struggles, it will result in a huge social crisis in Britain, the consequences of which on the political front cannot yet be foreseen.

The economic crash has thrown into crisis two things simultaneously. First,

the neoliberal regime of accumulation, devised under Thatcher and Reagan, has gone into major crisis and cannot be revived, at least in its old form. What started out in the early 1980s as monetarism evolved into the domination of finance capital, symbolised by the deregulation of the City in 1986. This was topped off by economic globalisation as finance capital demanded of industry higher and higher short-term profits. This in turn resulted in the neoliberal work regime and the international low wage economy, as production was outsourced, nationally and internationally, to lower labour costs. It was on the basis of the international low wage economy that the debt mountain based on the massive overpricing of assets (mainly housing and real estate) needed to sustain consumption and production was built.

As profits declined in the late 1960s and early 1970s the international bourgeoisie looked for another way of regulating the economy and society to replace the post-war mixed economy, welfare state, consensus. After several false starts, neoliberalism was the

outcome. Now the debt mountain that sustained it has collapsed. No one can predict exactly how capitalism will evolve. What we do know is that the crisis of the old form of neoliberalism will lead to very nasty consequences for working class and the oppressed, as well as broad sectors of the middle layers, in Britain and internationally.

New Labour's Collapse

Second is the collapse of the New Labour Project. It is almost certain now that Labour will be heavily defeated and the Tories elected on a right-wing economic and social programme; however the dangers of a Tory government will bring a lot of abstentionists in the European elections back out to vote. Brown or his successor will get more than 15%, but not enough to win. The only thing that could prevent a big Tory victory would be the introduction of proportional representation, which Brownite New Labour will never agree to.

New Labour was always centred on continuing the Thatcherite revolution, being City friendly, offering a business friendly fiscal regime, ignoring tax havens and moderate degrees of corruption, and most of all giving strenuous support to the low wage economy and the new harsh labour regime. It is therefore no surprise that the economic crash has resulted in the exhaustion of the New Labour project, and the exposure of the ideological and political bankruptcy at its core.

What we are seeing in Britain and throughout Europe is the last death throes of historical social democracy that emerged from the split in the world workers movement after the Russian revolution. This does not of course mean that we shall see the early demise of the parties that originated in social democracy, but the project – in the early phase socialism via successive reforms and then pro-working class reforms within the framework of capitalism – is all but dead, and in any case nowhere the majority or the leadership of parties like the French SP or the SPD in Germany.

New Labour did have an idea of ‘fixing’ the decrepit public services and ending child poverty. But the way it was done undermined real improvements. The New Labour plan, with which Gordon Brown was particularly associated as Chancellor, was this. The City would let rip and Britain would become along with the United States the centre of finance capital. Huge tax revenue would then accrue that could be invested in public services and in tax credits for the poorest families. This plan was indeed put into operation but failed to achieve the desired results. And now, with the government being indebted to the tune of hundreds of billions of pounds, this flawed mechanism cannot be repeated for generations – for it will take 20 or 30 years for the government to pay back what it borrowed to save the banks from collapse.

New Labour’s tax and spend plan didn’t work because of the way it was done. It’s core was ‘public-private partnerships’; in other words projects like building new hospitals had to be done in concert with private

companies, who were given vast sums to bring in projects that would have cost much less if done by local or national government. These 14 years have been the era of the ‘consultant’ and the ‘advisor’ – the myriad teams of middle class professionals paying themselves mountainous salaries to be the go-betweens among companies and public agencies. And – here is the beauty of it – much of that tax income taken from the financial sector was recycled back to them as major investors in the private side of public-private partnerships.

Classic cases are the privatisation of the railways and the London tube. Real improvements have been made of course, there’s not doubt about that. But in both cases the price is some of the most exorbitant fares anywhere in the world, major grants to the companies concerned to stay afloat and huge profits and salaries for top personnel, all coming from the public purse.

While the people at the top enjoyed lavish lifestyles when Labour reduced tax rates for the best off, those at the bottom foundered. But many sections of the middle class and regularly employed workers, felt they weren’t doing too bad. Most people had to work longer and harder, but real spending power seemed to hold up. This, celebrated by Tony Blair as ‘Mondeo Man’, was the real social basis of New Labour – permanent employment, a house, a car, children and foreign holidays, not to mention cheap Chinese-made electronic goods, could be supported on the basis of the income of two adults. Of course Mondeo family was an average that millions did not achieve, but millions did – except it was all an illusion.

The illusion was based on inflated house values against which millions of British workers borrowed large amounts on credit cards. The depressed level of income that the international low-wage economy had imposed on even employed British workers, did not justify the lifestyles enjoyed on it. Debt was rolled over in most families because it seemed that it always could be, a fatal illusion.

Now that house values have slumped

and credit is tight, spending has also slumped. The results are well-known: unemployment once again becomes a social catastrophe, all-round consumption is cut back to pay off debt, foreign holidays are ditched for the wonders of the British seaside or no holiday at all. Worse, everyone knows that after the 2010 general election the new government will sharply raise taxes to service its new astronomic levels of debt. The vicious circle of deflation is deepened: in terms of unemployment and consumption, the worst is still a long way ahead for the British working class.

Gordon Brown finds himself politically defenceless against the Tory accusations of having presided over the accumulation of the debt mountain and the run-down of British industry. New Labour should be able to say – look it was Margaret Thatcher who deregulated the City of London, Margaret Thatcher who smashed up manufacturing in the early 1980s with her ‘lame ducks’ philosophy and Tory ideologues who hatched the plan for Britain to become a European ‘Hong Kong’ based on finance and service industries. But of course they can’t – because it was these central tenets of Thatcherism that Blair and Brown picked up, lovingly polished and promoted with religious zeal. David Cameron’s charges against Brown and New Labour on these issues are hypocritical, but undeniable.

Labour’s limpet-like adherence to the low wage, flexible labour, economy has worsened social inequality, and while benefitting the wealthy and sections of the middle class, has punished the poorest section of society. The bottom 20% of the working class, especially in places in the North and the Midlands where traditional industry collapsed, never benefitted from the increased consumption of the debt mountain years. The bottom 10% of wage earners are worse off absolutely than they were five years ago; millions have never broken out of the syndrome of unemployment, the sink estates, health and life expectancy disaster and hopelessness – all too often topped off by social problems like high rates of drug addiction and teenage

pregnancy - that started in the 1980s after Thatcher crashed manufacturing industry. This, the most economically and culturally deprived sector of society, rightly feels betrayed by New Labour, and is the most vulnerable to the appeal of right wing populism and the fascist BNP. Regrettably elements of this demoralised syndrome have seeped into former mining areas where dozens of pit villages have never recovered from the closure of the mining industry and the defeat of the NUM.

What we should never forget is the responsibility in the process of the fiasco of New Labour is the responsibility of the trade union bureaucracy. Messrs Simpson, Woodley and Prentis have been the almost uncritical flank guards of New Labour. The TUC has been reduced to little more than an education and advice centre. If this passivity continues under the Tories, reaction will have a field day.

Rebellion against corruption: beware the democratic counter-revolution

In this dire economic and social situation Labour MPs are caught up in the parliamentary expenses row. How could it happen? Of course corruption is everywhere in capitalist societies. But New Labour has been particularly prone to it because of its ideological and practical enthusiasm for the rich and powerful. Wealthy business people are the natural social milieu for Labour Ministers. They compare themselves - very important people you understand - with people getting giant salaries in the private sector. It's galling as a government minister on only £140,000 a year to be regularly dealing with people earning multiples of that. In an ideology-lite party with few central beliefs except business and management efficiency, politics becomes simply a matter of prestige, career and personal gain - hopefully topped off with a period as a minister, and then hopefully some nice juicy directorships in private companies, especially those you helped while a

minister.

Ordinary people expect Labour to be something better than that. They also notice that while MPs can explain they made 'mistakes' in their claims, mere mortals get sent to jail for fraud. This is leading to a general feeling that all the main parties are 'in it for themselves' and not to be trusted. However rebellion against 'all politicians' and the discrediting of all the main parties can lead to some nasty results, depending on who leads the rebellion and with what objectives. The most striking examples in Italy, where the vacuum opened up by the collapse of the Christian Democracy and the old PCI, was eventually filled by Berlusconi and his alliance of Northern League xenophobia, nationwide racism, the fascist National Alliance, and the most corrupt business-dominated government in Europe.

Outside the populist mood with its bizarre dimensions - for example Esther Rantzen's determination to become an MP in Luton and the emergence of a 'non-political' Jury Team party - the beneficiaries of this crisis will be the Tories and other right-wing parties (bizarrely in the case of the UKIP which has claimed millions in expenses for its MEPs). Overwhelmingly the expenses scandal has rebounded against Brown and New Labour.

The coming economic and social crisis

The hundreds of billions spent on bailing out the banks have torpedoed state expenditure for a generation. This year alone the government needs to borrow £175 billion. As the borrowing starts to be paid back, the present level of government spending is unsustainable. The net result will be massive cutbacks in every part of the public sector. Tory shadow health minister Andrew Lansley let slip that Cameron's Tories plan to cut public expenditure by 10%. Cameron claims he will ring-fence health and education. Given the Tories will certainly try to avoid cuts in defence and the police, that promise is

worthless. Even if it were true, it would still mean swingeing cuts of social services, civil servants and council workers. Already a campaign on the 'inefficiency' of the public sector is underway in the right-wing press.

"Tory cuts versus Labour spending" is a joke. Any capitalist government would be compelled to do exactly what Cameron proposes. Ten per cent is of course a working hypothesis, not an upper limit. It depends on what happens in the economy. But the general pattern is clear:-

- * Tens of thousands of public sector workers will be fired. This will not mainly take the form of national edicts but of NHS Trusts, schools and colleges and local councils running out of money. National government will downsize most of its departments.

- * At a time of rising unemployment increased benefit payouts will put immense pressure on national finances. Probably the present level of unemployment and social security payments cannot be sustained. The result is bound to be a much more intensive application of means testing measures and maybe, eventually, a freeze or even cuts in absolute levels of payments. The same is true of pensions.

- * The NHS will become effectively a two tier service as spending by the free NHS proper gets downsized by cuts and a radical reduction in the provision of drugs. More complex procedures will eventually follow in the path of dentistry - 'there is no NHS solution', you must go private.

- * The poor, the sick, the elderly and the growing legions of the unemployed will bear the brunt of this crisis as more and more services are withdrawn. Probably services that have to be paid for - like home help visits for the elderly - will have their prices ratcheted up.

- * Income tax and national insurance payments will rise sharply, and especially VAT and duties will also sharply rise.

It goes without saying that such a huge (and inevitable) assault on the

public sector will lead to massive struggles, which together with the fight against redundancies more broadly, are the core challenge that will be faced by the unions. Paradoxically this provides a framework for the labour movement to move once again centre-stage in the social life of the country, if the union leaders can be made to fight.

The youth will also be hard hit by the crisis. This year 40,000 university graduates will not find jobs. Next year there will be 30,000 fewer university places. Most school leavers face a difficult task in finding a job; while this will be partly ameliorated by the raising of the school leaving age to 18, in the end it is doubtful whether the government's 14-19 agenda is fundable. A Tory government might scrap it. Either way, hundreds of thousands of young people are going to be added to the unemployment rolls.

As real levels of unemployment climb to 4 million by the end of this year and upwards from then on, crime and other forms of anti-social activity are also likely to rise sharply. The \$64,000-dollar question is whether this social desperation will lead to a real radicalisation, a real social and political rebellion.

Beware the social counter-revolution

Cameron has always positioned himself as being the rejection of Thatcherism, moving more towards the political centre and being the 'soft' and 'caring' (as well as green) face of Toryism. But in the new economic and social situation his discourse of 'broken Britain' has an ominous and repressive flavour about it. In a biography of Cameron he is quoted as saying "I'm going to be as radical a social reformer as Mrs Thatcher was an economic reformer, and radical social reform is what this country needs right now. Margaret Thatcher in her time realised that the big challenge was reviving Britain's economy, and we should recognise that the challenge for the modern Conservatives is reviving our society. It's dealing with the issues of family

breakdown, welfare dependency, failing schools, crime, and the problems that we see in too many of our communities."

In the absence of the economic means to 'fix' these problems, this can only mean an upping of a reactionary discourse around the family, the importance of 'self reliance', of taking 'economic responsibility' and of not being 'dependent' on the state. It is almost certain too that this reactionary discourse will be used to target 'irresponsible' single mothers and make their situation even more impossible, and we can fully expect a new right-wing onslaught on abortion and reproduction rights. There will also be attempts to target financing of organisations like the Terrance Higgins Trust, and other organisations that provide sexual health and/or reproductive health advice. These however will be explosive questions which would probably even split sections of even the Tory ranks. Social advances for women, for example equal pay in many public services and in some companies, as well as abortion rights are deeply ingrained in wide sectors of the population. Any attempt to challenge them and to impose the Daily Mail's social agenda, would lead to a massive and bitter struggle.

Racism in Britain and the emergence of the extreme right

The outcome of the European elections and the relative success of the UKIP and BNP will lead to a big debate on the left, especially on the themes of why there was this big vote and how it can be turned around. It should be said this vote is just a snapshot, and UKIP's Euro election vote never repeats in general elections. Nonetheless this is a very worrying trend. In order to understand it we have to separate out different issues.

* The use of cheap labour from abroad, eastern Europe in particular, to undermine the conditions of

workers across a wide range of industries is wide open to demagogic and racist interpretations - "British jobs for British workers". The left has to oppose the use of casual labour from wherever to do this. The answer is trade unionisation and trade union negotiated rates of pay, not racism and xenophobia.

* Islamic fundamentalist terrorism has been a gift to racists and xenophobes of every kind.

* In every social crisis of the 20th century - particularly the 1930s (Mosley), the late 1960s (Enoch Powell), the 1970s (National Front) and now - the extreme right wing and racism have come to the fore. In each case it took a big effort by the left and the labour movement to throw them back. In the 1930s the start of the war and in the 1970s the election of the Thatcher government were also key factors in marginalising the racists and fascists.

* The emergence of anti-immigrant racism bases itself on deep-seated wells of racism in Britain inside the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie, but also in the working class. The social roots of this racism is the history of British imperialism and the experience of that especially among older people - particularly people who have been in the forces. This is a fundamental factor in dividing the working class and promoting social and political conservatism that has never gone away. Put it another way: large numbers of white working class people are racist.

* UKIP and the BNP have always had a petty bourgeois social base, especially in white suburbs on the borders of multi-cultural areas, example the Essex-London and Hertfordshire-London borders, where the East End diaspora has made good as small business people of affluent workers (9 BNP councillors in Cheshunt for example).

* Socially however the experience of multiculturalism has ameliorated the situation. One in ten couples is now multiracial. There is a big social divide in the experience of the working class between, for example, multiracial boroughs in London and areas where

the population is either all-white or divided between white and just one minority ethnic population. Multiracialism will not in itself prevent the rise of racism and the BNP without being articulated at a political level. The example of ex-Yugoslavia where many Serb, Croat and Bosnian families were inter-married shows that inter-racial couples can be marginalised, victimised and split up in a storm of ethnic hatred..

Finally however the explanation, while noting the above factors, is overall much simpler. *In a situation where important sections of the working class feel abandoned by New Labour and are pushed to anger and even desperation, and where the solidarity and egalitarian traditions of the labour movement has been pushed back by defeats, the extreme right can appeal to racist and xenophobic sentiments of more backwards workers and the petty bourgeoisie – especially in the absence of a coherent, untied and dynamic left alternative. This is facilitated by the existence of a viciously racist and reactionary news media, especially in the popular press, but also increasingly in some of the broadcast media.*

For this situation to be overcome requires that a) the labour movement seizes the leadership of the struggle against the effects of the crisis b) a united and campaigning left is built at an electoral level and in all the social struggles and c) the left now relaunched a massive campaign of the Anti-Nazi League type, mobilising prominent people from all walks of life, to take a stand against racism and the BNP – we should raise this directly with the SWP and other left forces.

Let us note here that this process of pushing back the extreme right is not impossible – it has been done, at least for a period, in France. Le Pen is in the doldrums because of the social revolt against neoliberalism and because the non-mainstream political star is Olivier B. and the NPA. Rebuilding social struggle, building a united left and anti-fascist/anti-racist activity is all part of the same process.

Ecology in a time of crisis

As John Bellamy Foster has pointed out, the basic trend in a time of crisis is for the capitalists to lessen investment in expenditure ameliorating workers health and protecting the environment. These effects are likely to dwarf the marginal short-term effects of a reduction in overall production, which will reduce the amount of greenhouse gases etc pumped into the atmosphere. The overall problem is the trend for concern with the environment to decrease as ‘more pressing’ economic and social matters come to the fore.

For socialists the key point is this: how can we put forward a sustainable model of economy that breaks with irrational capitalist production and consumption, without it being posed as austerity. Let us remember the unfortunate example of Enrico Berlinguer who in the late 1970s said that the onset of the austerity crisis was the opportunity for a ‘new model of consumption’, ie a reduction in wages so you can buy less. The issue of a conversion in the model of everyday life however has to be an integral part of an overall plan from the left to resolve the crisis in the interests of the working class.

Anti-capitalism

The Westminster expenses scandal, the European elections and the strikes over low-wage foreign workers have diverted attention to the crucial aspect of this crisis – the role of the bankers, the greed of finance capitalists and the leaders of the cash-rich corporations that became virtual banks, their responsibility for this dreadful crash and developing slump. Much though MPs corruption needed to be exposed, the Tory right and the further right have succeeded in diverting attention from the central responsibility of capitalism and the capitalists for the dire situation of the British and world economy and for the precipitous collapse in living standards that is about to take place.

The left needs to debate an action programme – we should draft one – that raises centrally the issue of making the rich pay:

- 100% taxation on all income over £100,000; no to redundancies
- nationalise bankrupt firms; stop the bonuses and payouts to bankers
- public works and state funded work and training projects
- a living wage for all workers, unemployed, carers, the disabled and pensioners
- blame the bosses not foreign workers
- defend public services
- stop wasting millions on foreign wars
- action now to stop climate change
- reject Tory or Labour cuts
- defeat the fascist and racist BNP, who's to blame? – capitalism!

A framework for left renewal

Socialist Resistance is too small and too weak to lead any significant section of the left in action on a national scale – although we may be able to sometimes in a few localities. This is not just a question of absolute numbers, but a question of age profile and the attendant matters of health, activism, family and work responsibilities etc. We need to renew and remobilise our membership in order to develop our activist profile and make an ideological and political contribution in a credible way.

Recent developments in the left create some very complex tactical issues. The framework around which we have to address them integrates the following:

A) In the next 4-5 years there will be a massive attack on working class living standards, more severe in Britain than any other advanced country. While this is likely to generate a swathe of community campaigns, the centre of

resistance has to be the unions. This will include a long and bitter struggle against a do-nothing and minimalist union bureaucracy adept at presenting the tiniest concessions from management as victories (Gate Gourmet and Visteon show Unite's leadership are masters of this) [9]. The experience of the Poll Tax, which some of us got wrong by insisting it had to be based on union action or fail, shows that we are likely to see the emergence of new forms of struggle, certainly ones that go outside the control of the union bureaucracy and probably out with the control of the unions altogether. The regrowth of struggle, albeit on a desperately defensive terrain at first, is vital to create the basis for stopping an

historical defeat of the working class and the oppressed, as well as throwing back the right.

B) Conflict over the effects of the crisis is likely to deepen, rather than undermine, anti-capitalist and environmentalist protests. This is crucial for linking up with the youth and providing a channel for youth radicalisation.

C) Anti-racism and anti-fascism activity has to be deepened and probably inevitably will be in the next period. Mass mobilisation against the BNP and racism will find a ready audience in the youth.

D) It is vital that an alliance of the

socialist left can appear at an electoral level. This is just one aspect of the overall problem of building a broad socialist party, of which the NPA is a positive example. This can no longer be posed as simply building Respect, which no longer organises forces broad enough to be the major vehicle for this process. Passive "discussions" are not enough in this process; people can talk to each other forever. We urgently need a new left alliance, well known in advance and broadly supported, before the next election - as a step towards a new broad socialist party.

This resolution was adopted by the [Socialist Resistance](#) conference on July 4 2009.

Obama's Cairo Speech

5 July 2009, by **Gilbert Achcar**



The president's assets were intensively used : the colour of his skin, his Muslim paternal background, his early opposition to the invasion of Iraq and, last but not least, his Rooseveltian posture suited to our times of global economic crisis. The speech was very obviously inspired from FDR's famous "Four Freedoms" speech of the 6th of June 1941 : the language of peace and disarmament, i.e. freedom from fear ; freedom of thought ; and religious freedom. Only Roosevelt's "freedom from want" was missing, a testimony to the extent to which this concept is embarrassing for governments that are temporarily resorting to "Keynesian" tools only in order to rescue the neoliberal economic system.

This being said, the difference with the Bush-Cheney administration was not only one of style and tone. The difference in substance too was blatant, despite preconceived hostile assertions that it was pretty much the same discourse and that, although the

new president is black, the White House is still... white. The key substantive differences could be summarized as follows : a criticism of the U.S. invasion of Iraq ; a commitment to withdraw all troops from that country ; an acknowledgement of the Palestinian people's more than sixty-year old tragedy (implicitly recognizing the Nakba) ; a clear and firm rejection of Israel's expansion of its settlements in the occupied West Bank ; a relatively open attitude toward Hamas ; an acknowledgment of Iran's right to develop nuclear energy within the boundaries of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty ; and a willingness to talk to the Iranian government, without preconditions.

These are important substantive differences, although they represent no dramatic break with the longer perspective of U.S. foreign policy. The truth is that it is the Bush-Cheney administration that represented a discontinuity with the long tradition : Obama's attitude is actually much closer to that of Bush senior than was that of the latter's own son. The

commitment to settle the Israeli-Arab conflict, as a major source of harm to U.S. strategic interests, and the willingness to exert pressure on Israel to that end, were already displayed by the Bush senior administration. And the openness to Tehran (and Damascus) was clearly advocated by the bipartisan Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group in 2006, although the Bush administration refused to follow this part of its recommendations.

The rest is hardly new, even when compared to the record of the previous president : the advocacy of a "two-state solution" for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and "despite all false impressions" the discourse about Islam, democracy, etc. People tend to confuse the neoconservative discourse with that of the Bush-Cheney, and for that matter Rice, administration : they were different. George W. Bush could outbid anybody in his "respect" for Islam "and", to be sure, in his close friendship with the Saudi dynasty ! And, needless to say, Barack Obama will ultimately be judged for his deeds and not, or not only, for his words.

Beyond these differences and convergences, nothing else could be expected from Obama's speech, if one adhered to a sober assessment of what he and his administration represent. Not the leftward shift in domestic and foreign policies brought with the election of FD Roosevelt in 1932 on the crest of a wave of social radicalization, but a return to the centre after eight years of dramatic shift of the White House to the far right of the mainstream political spectrum, and a return to the fundamentals of bipartisan consensus in U.S. foreign policy.

On one point however, one could have expected better from Barack Obama than what he delivered : His speech was lamentably constrained within the parameters of the "clash of civilizations" paradigm whose main theoretician, the late Samuel Huntington, did not advocate the clash, as his non-readers believe, but warned of it. The paradigm was one of a world divided into blocs, the majority of which are constituted around a single religious criterion. Thus, Obama in Cairo exclusively addressed the "Muslims," scattering

his speech with quotes from the Koran, expressing a view of the world dominated by religion "and only Abrahamic religions at that, forgetting that in his own country there are millions who do not belong to any of Christianity, Judaism or Islam, not to mention those who refuse to belong to any religion at all. In doing so, he paid an unintended tribute to the man whom he mentioned at the beginning of his speech and built up as its main target : Osama bin Laden.

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