



## IV418 - November 2009

# Population growth is a feminist issue

30 November 2009, by **Sheila Malone**

Are such numbers ecologically and socially sustainable? The huge problems posed by climate change have reignited this debate.

In Britain the Optimum Population Trust says a firm 'No', claiming that our planet is already beyond carrying capacity, and we would need yet another one to support 9.2bn people. They want governments in both North and South to address this issue with measures like the 'Stop at Two' family planning policy of the 60s and 70s in Britain. They also want controls on migration.

Capitalist states in general (both the rich North and the 'catch-up' South) look to advances in technology and market competition to take care of both sustainability and population growth. So switches to alternative energy, agribusiness (like the misnamed 'green revolution') and genetic engineering will heat, cool, feed and transport the world. There is no need for population policies. Actually it is increased life expectancy, rather than high birthrates, which currently accounts for large populations in the North. Hence all the talk going on now about retirement age and pensions.

Nevertheless, birth rates also remain a factor. Historically high fertility rates have been seen as a positive accompaniment to high economic growth - ensuring an expanding,

flexible, mobile workforce and carers within the home. So now that rates are dropping in the North, governments in Europe are offering financial incentives to women to have more babies to bump it up again (£1,650 per child recently in Spain).

By contrast, many governments in the South, unable or unwilling to aid their huge and growing poor (resulting from inequitable, export-led development), are adopting population controls to reduce these numbers. These have sometimes been coercive, inhumane and damaging to women's health. So, perversely, in the high carbon-emitting rich North, with its huge average carbon footprint, we have policies to increase the birthrates. But in the low-emitting poor South they are being restricted. Apart from economic issues, there are the morality, justice and rights aspects of population growth and control.

Many religious leaders oppose any restrictions on human numbers as interfering with divine purpose. They may oppose both government policies and women's individual reproductive rights (the Vatican position). On the other hand liberals (and others) may oppose limits as going against natural law, human rights, migrants' rights, women's rights. In the 60s and 70s many greens did consider rates of population growth ecologically unsustainable, particularly after the publication of the UN Limits to

Growth report. But they later dropped the issue.

Reds also tended not to talk about it. Both are now returning to the issue, especially as public opinion often links it to climate change. Reds and greens support the rights arguments and are against the top-down social control and engineering aspect of population policies.

But they see the unfettered profit-driven growth models of both the rich North and dependent South as the problem. Alternative, sustainable growth models and the elimination of inequality and poverty are seen as the main issues. Concerns about population growth are seen largely as a diversion.

George Monbiot argues along these lines in recent articles in The Guardian, as does Jonathan Neale in his book Stop Global Warming, Change the World. In a chapter on population, Neale confines himself to economic arguments. Cuts of 80-85% in carbon emissions, he maintains, will allow both economic development to continue and population to grow to the predicted 9.2bn in the South. Monbiot takes up some more areas, including lifestyle, which would also have to change for Neale's ideas to have a chance of succeeding.

Green Party leaders like Caroline Lucas have taken up the issue by defending population policies if they

answer the real needs of women.

Phil Ward, in his latest article in SR argues for a very radical alternative development model, involving social and cultural as well as economic changes. He also points to the rights, interests and needs of women as linked to this transformation. This is the kind of approach that seems to be needed. But we need to explore and expand this second area.

For instance, looking at more sustainable and equitable alternatives to agribusiness, we can learn much from women farmers in relation to the land. Small-scale, organic cooperatives are favoured by most, and are better for communities and for the planet. Similarly, women tend to know best in relation to our own bodies and our own fertility. Given the

choice, most women, both North and South, actually decide to limit their families. This usually brings benefits to health and welfare, greater independence, educational and job prospects, and so on. So reproductive rights and their underpinning through family planning provision have always been fought for and have been core feminist demands. This is good for women (and men) and is good for our overstretched and overstressed planet.

There are, of course, problems with top-down provision. There may be a class or race agenda. In Britain in the 1930s birth control campaigners like Marie Stopes was a supporter of eugenics. But poor women especially came to her clinics because they offered access to contraception. In Cairo in 1994 at a UN conference on

Population and Development, women were split over programmes to limit birthrates in the poor South. But here too, provision was and is often welcomed, as long as it is neither coercive nor damaging to women's health. As with other reforms and aid, women have always had to negotiate our way around what is offered, trying to gain what we want by maximising our own input and control.

So, we need not ignore the issue of population growth or see it as irrelevant or uncomfortable.

Instead, women's real needs, interests, wisdom and empowerment need to be brought to the fore. Human numbers then tend to take care of themselves, coinciding with the interests of our planet.

## Notes on the international situation

30 November 2009, by **François Sabado**

### 1. The crisis now

The international situation remains marked by a comprehensive, multidimensional crisis -economic, social, food-related, and ecological - that is shaking the capitalist world. Despite the discourse on the "end of recession" or "exit from crisis", the reality of the world economy remains determined by major contradictions that lead to "depression" in the crisis, mass unemployment, a considerable increase in poverty (more than 1 billion people live under the poverty threshold) and an ever growing risk of ecological disaster.

#### 1.1. An "exit from crisis"?

From the analytical point of view, the immediate short-term developments of the lasting crisis experienced by globalized capitalism include a number of uncertainties. Certainly, the speed of the global economic crisis has slowed down. After one widespread recession (with negative

growth rates of -3 to -4 % in the United States and Europe and -1% to -1.5% globally) the IMF forecasts for 2010 indicate a "slight recovery." with a predicted growth rate of 3%. These guidelines reflect above all a developing recovery in Asia (+7 %), even if it is with a series of contradictions) which contrasts with the "soft" growth in the United States, around 1.5 %, and the very low growth of the euro zone, at 0.3 %.

In the US as in Europe, these "small recoveries" represent in fact a slowdown of the crisis. This is above all the result of a massive intervention by states which refloated the international banking system (and thus allowed the resumption of the expansion of the speculative bubble) and the effects of what are called "social stabilizers", i.e. all the public devices of assistance and social security, especially in Western Europe. It also relates to the provision of aid for the purchase of this or that product, such as cars.

This massive and partially coordinated intervention by states explains why and how the crisis has been thus far contained. This is the big difference between the current crisis and that of the 1930s.

#### 1.2. The crisis continues

But once the effects of these global public financial support mechanisms over the last 12 months are dissipated, the economy will be again faced with a series of short term and structural problems.

At the conjunctural level, states and governments are faced with the explosion of public debt, the banks not always knowing the extent of the "toxic products" in their accounts and facing problems with their equity. Thus, more toxic assets remain than those which have been depreciated. The combination of a new speculative spiral and the discovery of new toxic assets may cause a new stock market crash that will reverberate across the whole of the economic sphere. Finally,

unemployment and job insecurity, with all of their destructive social consequences, will increase and weigh on the relationship of social forces.

At the structural level, the situation remains paradoxical: it is characterised by an ideological crisis of the neoliberal system and by the continuation of the broad outlines of capitalist policies and the reproduction of the same contradictions. The depth of the crisis has led the dominant classes to deploy a new offensive against the living and working conditions of millions of workers.

### *1.3 The contradictions of the neo-liberal mode of accumulation deepen*

At the end of the 1970s a new mode of capitalist accumulation was put in place to restore a rate of profit which had fallen in the 1960s and 70s. On the basis of a series of workers' defeats, the share of wage earners in value added was compressed, the conditions of and rate of exploitation increased, privatisation of public services was generalised, the deregulation of social relations was imposed, public budgets were reduced and structural adjustment plans applied in developing countries. All of this fitted into the globalisation of the market and the constitution of a global market in labour power tendentially unified where workers were placed in competition with each other.

Profits revived but, as shown by all the statistics, not productive investment. These profits moved towards more profitable products, namely financial products. It was this movement that also caused the deindustrialisation of whole sectors and regions in North America and Europe and/or their relocation, especially to Asia, above all China, which became the "workshop of the world". So a generalised process of "financialization" of the world economy set in, which expanded the already existing "fictitious capital". These mechanisms at the same time enabled the establishment at the heart of the world economy, in the United States and Europe, of a whole series of public and private debt arrangements.

So the policy of public and private

debt for a time compensated for these distortions, until the explosion of the crisis. Household indebtedness maintained the level of consumption, despite the fall in wages. The debt of the advanced capitalist countries and in the first place that of the United States allowed them to live on credit, despite the contraction of their industrial base. Debt deferred generalised crisis, at least until 2007-08.

These are the arrangements that have collapsed, with a massive devaluation of assets or productive sectors - bankruptcy and restructuring of banks, redundancies, and closure of businesses. The entire development of the crisis and its mechanisms confirm once more that it is not only a financial or banking crisis. This is a global crisis of the capitalist system resulting from the crisis of all the mechanisms put in place to restore the rate of profit at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s.

### *1.4. A new offensive by capital: "just as before, or almost and perhaps worse."*

In times of crisis, the capital-labour conflict exacerbates. The dominant classes must contain the crisis while safeguarding the positions of capital and particularly financial capital. The system can no longer operate as before but the defence of capitalist interests pushes the governments to continue and deepen the same policies.

Admittedly, initiatives have been taken through the G20 declarations to "control" tax havens, "frame" the operation of the banking system, and "increase" the IMF funds used to rescue some countries from economic bankruptcy. The crisis has even caused a crisis of legitimacy of the system which has led here and there to statements or gestures on the need to "moralise" capitalism. But there is an abyss between speech and action. The banks have profited from the crisis and public aid to inflate their profits to the detriment of the production of credit, which was the purpose of the public aid. Moreover, investors are buying up assets of the same kind (financial products, raw materials, currencies linked to raw

materials), encouraging a new speculative spiral.

In fact, in this situation of crisis, the capitalist classes are looking for a new offensive against social and democratic rights to increase the rate of exploitation of labour and protect profits. The orientations of the governments of the developed capitalist countries confirm the choice of making workers and peoples pay for the crisis:

The debt explosion will be paid for by a tax increase and a reduction of public deficits. In both cases the victims will be the popular classes.

The restructuring of the big companies have resulted in millions of unemployed and an increase in job insecurity, strengthening all systems of flexibility. Women are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of the crisis. According to the ILO, 22 million women worldwide will lose their jobs in 2009. They are the first to be affected by the massive redundancies in the sectors of services, health or clothing. Dropping out from school, loss of employment, impoverishment, women are the first victims of the world recession. The crisis is used to reduce costs, increase gains in productivity, redefine work processes, and reshape markets. Of 206 listed European companies, 126 announced 146 redundancy plans between January 2007 and March 2009. Forecasts for the OECD countries envisage around 25 million unemployed for 2009 and 2010.

- The pressure on wages remains very strong. "Recovery plans" are above all reflected in aid to banks and investment, that is to companies, but not by wage increases. In addition, in some sectors or countries, there is a concerted policy to lower them, as in the civil service of the Baltic countries, Romania or Iceland.

- Privatisations are confirmed, except in certain cases - exceptions - such as the social security system in Argentina or the Japanese postal service.

More than one year after the beginning of the crisis, these guidelines settle the debate on the hypotheses of a revival of the economy

by Keynesian policies, i.e. policies of recovery of demand by increases in wages, the development of public services and social protection. The control of the British banks is far from the process of nationalization after 1945. There has been state intervention - a "neo-liberal statism" - to safeguard capitalist interests in the face of the crisis but no global neo-Keynesian policy which, under the current conditions and relationship of forces between the classes, is not the option of the dominant classes.

The objective of restoring profit rates after the crisis, in the relationship of social and political forces of 2009, pushes the captains of industry and the financial summits to increase the pressure on workers, to subject all production and the organisation of the economy to the search for ever more profits. To search always for more profitability for capital can only lead to a squeeze on wages, the explosion of job insecurity, the dismantling of public services, the commodification and financialization of the economy. This logic is inconsistent with the satisfaction of social needs. It is this contradiction which underpins our anti-capitalism. The rejection of this logic requires a struggle for a redistribution of wealth to the benefit of the popular classes but also a challenge to capitalist ownership and the replacement of the logic of profit by that of social needs.

### *1.5. The capitalist response to the ecological crisis*

It is also within this framework that it is necessary to tackle the ecological crisis. It is, in particular, the combination of the economic crisis and the ecological crisis which gives the current crisis a dimension of "crisis of civilization". Problems related to climate change also show a particular acuteness in the ecological crisis. All scientists' findings converge on the ecological urgency of reducing greenhouse effects by 50% to 80% by 2050 so as not to exceed the "danger" threshold fixed at a temperature rise of 1.5 degrees for the century. The "3 x 20 %" of the European Union up to 2020: -20% carbon, 20% energy efficiency and +20% renewable energies are below the requirements laid down by the Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Beyond this projects of "green capitalism" have a dual dimension: firstly, to have the ecological invoice - or the public deficits built up under the cover of "green taxes" - paid for by the popular classes by a system of taxes that bypasses the responsibilities of big companies while establishing new markets, in particular markets in rights to pollute. More substantially, the solution to the ecological crisis cannot be found within a capitalist framework. The profit motive can only lead to competition of each capital against the other. Any coordinated medium-and long-term action is faced comes up against the logic of the market. Energy efficiency does not require only a decrease in the consumption of energy, the reconversion of a series of industries, the substitution of fossil fuels by renewable fuels but a reorganization of the productive apparatus, a reorganization that can be done only by coordination and planning, thus in a system of public and social ownership and not in the context of private ownership of the main sectors of the economy.

The conjunction of the ecological and economic crises will aggravate the food crisis which strikes the planet and, in particular, Africa. Today 3 billion of people are not getting enough to eat; 2 billion suffer from malnutrition and 1 billion from hunger. The destruction of food cultivation by agro-exports, speculation on raw materials, the purchase of hundreds of thousands of hectares in Africa and Latin America by states like China, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea make it increasingly more difficult to gain access to food production and aggravate the conditions of life for millions of peasants and human beings of whom 75 percent are peasants and agricultural workers prevented from working. Far from resolving these vital problems, overcoming the current imbalances and reducing inequalities, the food crisis deepens.

To analyze this crisis as durable is not to fall into catastrophism. It should always be remembered that there are no situations without a way out for capitalism so long as there are no

social and political forces sufficiently powerful to change the system. Capitalism can continue to function but with an economic, social, ecological, cost which is increasingly unbearable. To understand this crisis as a "crisis of civilization" is taking into account the situation of a dying historic system.

## **2. A new world organization?**

This crisis is part a worldwide collapse. It has confirmed and specified the new relationship of forces between classes and states around the world. At the international scale, initiatives to reorganize the "world of crisis" have multiplied.

### *2.1. The decline of US hegemony: reality and limits?*

The major initiative is the redeployment of US power after the victory of Obama. It is even one of the reasons and functions of the election of Obama: to regain control in world policy, even if this is not without contradictions, related mainly to the economic crisis (health, industrial restructuring). Suddenly, the "inevitable decline" of US hegemony is put in context. The crisis has weakened the US position. In fact, this position was already weakened before the crisis, as a result of the reduction of the US industrial base and its indebtedness. But the US continues to maintain a dominant position in world relations:

a) on a political-military level, they retain a total hegemony, despite getting bogged down with Western troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. More than ever, NATO under US management constitutes the strong arm of Western powers to dominate the world. In Latin America after having suffered a setback in its constitution of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) the US administration has retaken the initiative, with the Trinidad Summit (a policy of opening to revive US markets on the continent) but also with the coup in Honduras and the redeployment of military bases in Colombia, which bear witness to its

desire for political-military hegemony on the American continent.

b) on the economic front, the size of the US market allows it to continue to occupy a significant share of world GDP (around 25%) even though it has fallen regularly for several years.

c) on the financial and monetary level, the dollar is still the dominant international currency. It has weakened and is becoming increasingly challenged by other currencies aiming to have an international status and gold as a "refuge value", but it remains the international currency of reference. The United States administration is before a contradiction: either it maintains the dollar at a high level, which requires in particular that the Chinese continue to hold Treasury bonds in dollars while US exports are penalized, or it organises a competitive devaluation of the dollar to make US industry more competitive and the dollar and dollar assets fall. But it should be noted that despite the weakening of the economic position of the United States in the world, the dollar is holding its own.

## *2.2. The role of China and the main emerging countries*

The United States retains a dominant position but what should be also noted is the rise in power of the economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China (the "BRIC"), and in particular the latter. China's share in world GDP continues to grow. Growth rates range from 6% when the rest of the world is in recession, more than 10% when the world economy experiences phases of expansion. China has not replaced the United States. The theses of "decoupling" between a China in continued expansion and imperialist centres in crisis have not held. China has suffered the consequences of the crisis but it has not collapsed. The role now held by the Chinese economy in the world will depend on its capacity to constitute an internal market, build a social security system, and stimulate demand with an increase in wages. If these conditions are not fulfilled, the Chinese dynamic will be slowed. Bureaucratic mechanisms, rampant corruption, overexploitation of migrant workers, all weigh negatively

on internal demand. At the global level, the United States and China (like the other US partners) are linked in a relationship of cooperation and competition, but at this stage cooperation takes precedence.

It is also within this multi-polar framework that we must address relations with Brazil which has become a new imperialist power. Already in the 1960s, the notion of "sub-imperialism" was evoked for Brazil, an imperialism but a secondary power subordinated to US imperialism. Second in relation to the strength of US imperialism certainly but not subordinate. The economic, financial, social, territorial, energetic and military power of Brazil makes it an associated partner but also a competitor and rival of US imperialism, particularly in Latin America. In this competition/association, the USA will compensate for their weak points in the global competition through the use of their political military hegemony.

## *2.3. Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine: centres of military tension in the world*

The stakes in these countries remain strategic ones of the first order for the US administration. It is here that US military leadership in the world is at stake. A loss in these sectors and the whole global relationship of forces collapses. This is why, beyond inter-imperialist contradictions in the Iraq war, all the Western powers have finally aligned themselves with US imperialism. The latest initiative in this direction is the reinstatement of the France in the NATO command. As a supplement to the G20, the Strasbourg summit of April 2009 illustrated this evolution. At the same time, the United States seek to neutralize Russia and China, by abandoning the Eastern Europe missile deployment projects.

Politics in this region is quite illustrative of the new US policy since the election of Obama. On the one hand, "open" initiatives, speeches, and postures. Here and there, reference is made to the contribution of Arab civilization to the world, "dialogue" with Iran is said to be on the agenda, pressure is put on the Israeli government to slow down Zionist

settlements in Palestinian territory. But in fact, the threats to Iran multiply, the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq drags on eternally, the imperialist war effort redoubles in Afghanistan, and the Netanyahu government in Israel is left to do as it wishes.

The reasons for the imperialist intervention are multiple: to control natural resources (oil in the first place), a geo-strategic presence in a region on the fringes of Russia, India and China. But the purpose of the conflict in this region is to preserve the ability of US imperialism to reaffirm its military hegemony. Also, the demands for withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan are elementary to respecting the rights of peoples and to strategically weaken the imperialist powers. It is also in the sense that we defend more than ever, in particular after the events in Gaza, the rights of the Palestinian people. the immediate cessation of the settlements policy, Israel's withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, the right of return of the Palestinians and a perspective that combines the "dismantling of the Zionist State and a political solution in which all the peoples of Palestine (Palestinian and Israeli Jewish) can live together in total equality of rights" (motion of the International Committee, February 2009). From this point of view we participate in the BDS ("boycott, disinvestment, sanctions") international solidarity campaign and in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Finally, the rejection of the imperialist threats against Iran must not lead to support for the regime of Ahmadinejad, but on the contrary to active solidarity with the millions of Iranians mobilizations for democracy and against the dictatorship of the regime. Here too, as in every conflict, our compass remains the defence of the interests and struggles of the oppressed and defence of their social and democratic rights.

## *2.4. A new phase of confrontations in Latin America*

This continent remains that of the most advanced social resistance to neoliberal policies and imperialist attacks. Recurrently, the continent is wracked by explosions and social

struggles as has just been illustrated by the crisis in Honduras where, despite the repression of the army, the country has for the first time in 50 years seen a wide popular movement of opposition to the putschists develop. The struggles are multi-faceted. Whether it is workers' strikes in Venezuela, Argentina, or Bolivia, anti-imperialist mass movements in Ecuador, or Venezuela, or indigenous movements in the Andean countries or Central America, the social and political resistance is there. The new dynamic of the indigenous question should be particularly stressed. These are hundreds, thousands of Indians who have entered into action to defend their lands, their natural resources, their way of life from the multinationals and the predator states. At the same time, with an emphasis on a certain balance between human beings and nature, they may constitute a reference point of struggle in defence of the "common good" and "better living." But faced with these events the dominant classes do not remain inert: they confront the social movements in Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, of Venezuela, either by co-option as exemplified in Brazil with the PT and also Argentina (even if it is in a more conflictual way) with Peronism, Uruguay with the Frente Amplio, the Chilean left of Bachelet, or the left in El Salvador.

This leads to three types of government and situation:

- The Governments of the right and ultra right in Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, Peru and right conveying the brutal opposition of sectors of the bourgeoisie in Bolivia, Venezuela, or Ecuador where they have not abandoned the prospect of overthrowing Chavez and Evo Morales. These sectors are today on the offensive supported by the military and political summits of US imperialism. The coup in Honduras and especially the installation of new US bases in Colombia are proof of it.

- The second type of Government, with all its shades, is exemplified by Brazil, Argentina, Nicaragua, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Chile. These are social liberal governments respecting the general criteria of neoliberal policies and a relationship of cooperation with

the big US neighbour even if it is in a conflictual manner as with Lula's Brazil. In this bloc we find Brazil which, strengthened by its size, its natural resources and the power of its economy, dominates. It must also be noted that, whereas in general social liberal experiences around the world end badly for social liberal parties who see their social and political base reduced, this has not quite been the case for Brazil under Lula, where the "Bolsa familia" policy gave the PT government a real popularity.

- The third type of Government, supported by Cuba, is exemplified by Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. We must indeed differentiate the dynamic of forces and events in each of the countries. These Governments have followed policies breaking partially with US imperialism, with a redistribution of income in favour of social programs and the poorest social strata, and support for social movements. We are at their side against US imperialism. We learn from the debates emerging from experiences around the concept of 21st century socialism to defend our proposals. But we should emphasise the specificities of each experience. If Chavez and Morales rely on mass movements with a stronger pressure of the social movements in Bolivia and more "Bonapartist" relations in Venezuela, recent events have shown an opposition between the indigenous movement of the CONAIE in Ecuador and the Correa government. The relationship between these Governments and the mass movement constitute a major test for the future of these experiences. But in the background there remains a crucial issue, the degree of rupture with capitalism, its logic of profitability, its relationship to finance, its system of ownership as well as the crisis which strikes at the foundations of the economy in these countries. From this point of view, these governments have not, to date, taken the opportunity of the crisis to advance substantially towards a break with capitalism and its "extractive productivist model."

### *2.5. Europe in deep crisis*

In the face of US resilience and the rise of BRIC Europe has seen a deterioration of its positions in the

world. The crisis has hit the economies of the old continent hard. Specific factors have made it even worse. The type of construction policy of the European Union combined with differing dynamics in its major economies - British finance, French trade deficits and German industrial exports - have led it to respond in a partial, fragmented way without real coordinated policies. The European treaties which have for years emphasised "free and undistorted competition" have favoured financialization processes to the detriment of industrial policies. Europe has undergone processes of de-industrialisation, especially in France. Unemployment is rocketing. At the same time the deficits and debt of the European countries has increased dangerously.

To the East, the economies of some countries strongly dependent on the international banking system have only been salvaged by international aid drip-fed by the IMF. The policies implemented - in Hungary, the Baltic countries and Romania, which stretch to the organisation of wage cuts for public servants - illustrate amply the depth of the crisis in these countries but also in their environment.

That is why the internal contradictions in Europe will sharpen. There may be protectionist temptations here and there, but this is not the fundamental choice of the European capitalist classes. They have chosen globalisation, but in this process, they have no common insertion as "European capitalism". On the contrary it is the interlinked interests between this national economy and that multinational that determine the basic guidelines. Global competition can thus magnify inter-European competition.

Finally, in this lasting situation of crisis, the economic offensive combines with a political offensive by the right. The recent European elections confirm this trend, with the exception of Greece and Sweden. Fascist or semi-fascist forces tend also to increase their pressure on national political situations.

It is in this same movement that authoritarian solutions focused in

particular on anti-immigrant policies gain strength. Globalization and the growth of trade, the impoverishment of the South by the powers of the North, ecological or food-related disasters cause massive transfers of population countries particularly from poor countries to rich ones. The crisis worsens all the phenomena of exploitation and oppression of immigrants. Racist movements make them scapegoats. This must lead the labour movement to respond by advancing a policy of defence of the rights of immigrants.

More generally, policies of criminalization of struggles and social movements or repressive systems are being put in place in the name of the "fight against terrorism" with files, listening systems and lists, without the slightest respect for democratic rights.

All these tensions, beyond even the cycles of social struggle, may lead to the explosion of political or institutional crises.

The project of a 'European constitution', adopted by the Lisbon Treaty aims within this framework to allow the European Union apparatus to play partially a strengthened absolutist role (stronger presidency, single international representation and so on), imposing centrally and without democratic control (even of a formal kind), a European policy on an international scale. Member states retain their institutions within this framework of formal democracy, more and more emptied of meaning faced with European decisions "framing" national policy on the basis of compromise between the major European imperialist powers. It is an unequal European Union (the 'big countries' and the "small", with the latter subjected) where the population is deprived of any parliamentary intervention, even formal, which is in the process of construction, as reflected still in the outcome of the second Irish referendum. Finally, faced with the plans of the European Union, the anti-capitalist left must defend an internationalist orientation based on defence of social and democratic rights, for a Europe in the service of the workers and peoples.

### **3. The evolution of the left and the workers' movement in Europe**

The 1929 crisis is often used as a reference to assess the extent of the current crisis. At the social and political level, the 1930s may also constitute a point of comparison with the present period. The social and political clashes are less brutal. Social shock absorbers mitigate the confrontations. Some have characterized the situation by the formula "the 1930s in slow motion". The differences between these historical periods are clear. But a race has nevertheless started between employees, social movements, the workers' movement and the populist, authoritarian, xenophobic right. There is a polarisation to the left and the right. There is no mechanical relationship between economic crisis and class struggle.

This crisis has emerged in a situation where the social and political relationship of forces has been worsening for more than a decade. Wage earners have experienced processes of restructuring which have individualized labour power and have weakened structurally the collective organization of workers. The traditional workers' movement has experienced an indisputable decline. The crisis will accentuate these processes of restructuring, while leading to new ones. Nevertheless, the points of support, in organisations and institutions, have been preserved for resistance to the crisis. In this first phase of the crisis, anxiety is widespread, the fear of losing one's job weighs on the mass combativity of workers, but they are not demoralized or beaten. New generations are emerging through the first strike movements. Resistance to the crisis has arisen even if only partial and unequal according to specific situations and relations of forces in different countries. But the social and political effects of the early stages of the crisis cannot reverse the

underlying trends in the situation. Defeats have been seen in some companies with hundreds or thousands of redundancies. In general, despite real social resistance in many cases, capitalist reorganization plans have been applied. And new and very harsh attacks are coming.

This situation is even more difficult inasmuch as the leaderships of the traditional workers' movement have a major responsibility for the demobilization or disorientation of entire sectors of wage earners. It is difficult for workers to see how to force back their employers and their government. The choice of the traditional trade union movement and social democratic apparatuses has been to go along with the policies of the dominant classes and the states in response to the crisis. There was a discussion about the volume and the dimensions of the recovery plans on this or that measure of reorganization of the banking system, but overall, European social democracy is implicated in the plans of the European Union. The PES manifesto is a good example. There has not even been, for example, a battle for a Keynesian reformist alternative. The crisis accelerates the institutionalization of the workers' bureaucracies - socially privileged layers in the workers' movement - in the capitalist system.

This aggravates the crisis of social democracy. The social liberal evolution of socialist parties had already undermined a substantial portion of their social base and popular politics. But the decline is getting worse. At the last European elections social democracy experienced a net loss. The last parliamentary elections in Germany and Portugal confirmed this trend. The SPD lost nearly 4.5 million voters between 2005 and 2009. The Portuguese Socialists lost 9.5% of their vote at the last parliamentary elections. We cannot exclude this or that "turn to the left" to contain these losses, but the main trend is rather further adaptation by the big apparatuses of the trade union movement and social democracy to the imperatives of capitalist crisis management. Thus, after the grand

coalition in Germany of the SPD with the CDU - CSU, in France the Socialist Party is preparing to build a coalition with the centre right. This movement is part of a broader process where increasingly voices are raised inside social democracy to transcend the "old socialist parties" and break with the remaining history of the workers' movement in these parties. This is the dynamic of the Italian left with the evolution of whole sectors of the former PCI towards building a US Democrat type of party.

In this process, the Green parties and environmentalists play an active role. Benefiting from people's legitimate concerns about the ecological crisis, their political role is growing, in particular in France and Germany. Their orientation generally fits into the perspective of a grand coalition of the traditional left, the centre and environmentalists.

This situation opens a space to the left of democracy in crisis. This is the meaning of the breakthrough of Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal and Die Linke in Germany at the last elections, and the weight of formations like the Red Green Alliance in Denmark, the Irish left through the movement for a 'no' to the Lisbon Treaty or the NPA in France.

The phenomenon is global but the radical left situation is specific in each country, particularly in the light of history, the relationship of forces and the type of electoral system. Substantial political differences also exist between parties which have opted for a break with the capitalist system, which defend clear independence from social democracy and those whose project involves the management of neoliberal capitalism and its institutions. A clear demarcation on refusal to participate in regional or national governments of a social liberal nature relates also to the vital need for a perspective independent of the old apparatuses of the traditional left so as to reorganize and rebuild the social movement. In all countries where the radical left has participated in a government with social democracy or the centre-left, it has been isolated by the social liberal left. The strength of attraction of the bourgeois institutions has been

stronger than all the proclamations against neoliberalism. This is the meaning of the discussion with the leadership of Die Linke in Germany.

The development of die Linke is a step forward for the German left, but the orientation taken by its leadership - both at the programmatic level (back to the "social state" and the "welfare state") and concerning parliamentary and governmental alliances with the SPD - constitutes a major danger in the reorganization of the German workers' movement. The construction of an anti-capitalist alternative left in Die Linke but also across the German social and political left remains one of the key issues in Europe.

Finally, the reality of this radical left in Europe more than ever requires a commitment to organising the anti-capitalist left, notably through the organization of conferences, debates and common campaigns.

## **4. An anti-capitalist programme**

The depth of the crisis gives a new urgency to anti-capitalist responses. "It isn't the workers and the peoples who should pay for the crisis, but the capitalists!" This is the cry that has arisen at all the protests against the effects of the capitalist crisis. What content can we give to this popular desire?

First an emergency social and ecological plan for the rejection of redundancies and suppression of jobs, a ban on dismissals through the maintenance of work contracts and income assured by the company, the employers' professional branches or the state in the event of partial or total unemployment, reduction of working hours without reduction of wages, increases in wages and purchasing power, as well as retirement benefits and pensions, a defence and a renewal of public services, a defence of the rights of women - rejection of all discrimination, a fight against violence against women, for the right to abortion for professional equality, a major policy of public works focused on ecological priorities (energy saving,

renewable energies, the fight against pollution, public transport, social housing, job creation in socially useful environmental activities).

The satisfaction of these claims requires a different distribution of wealth. If hundreds of billions could be released in a night, then the financial industrial and banking profits and the big fortunes can certainly be taxed to finance employment, wages, public services and social security. Tax havens that the United States and Europe have allowed to thrive in some states or principalities should be liquidated. Simple measures preventing fiscal dumping and homogenising high rates of taxation on corporate profits must be implemented.

But the crisis poses another question: who controls, who decides, who owns? This is the question of public and social appropriation. There is a need to establish a general law: free public services from the rules of competition. establish a public monopoly on strategic public services. To the private ownership of the key sectors of the economy we oppose public and social ownership of these sectors. Radical solutions must reorganise the banking system. The banking and financial sector must be unified and nationalized under popular control.

Finally the combination of the economic and ecological crisis leads to an imperative: change the logic, substitute social needs for profit and productivism. This requires the conversion of entire sectors of the economy to meet socio-ecological equilibria, like the cars, weapons or nuclear power sectors. The "common good" will be the objective of a balanced, eco-socialist, giving a centrality to democratic planning.

Some of these objectives appear unachievable in the current social relationship of forces. But the crisis puts radical solutions on the agenda that require a confrontation with the dominant classes. This struggle requires exceptional social and political mobilizations. The debates on the relations between partial struggles, movements as a whole and the general strike are back on the agenda. In this context,



revolutionaries must combine integration in the real mass movement, unity in action, proposals for struggle and overall socialist responses. The fight for partial reforms and projects of transformation of society pose the question of power. Social democratic leaders often criticize the radical left because it does not take responsibility and govern. To disprove this accusation,

the anti-capitalists must prove that they are working to create the conditions for a broad mass self-organised movement to emerge on the political scene and impose a popular government which applies a social, democratic and anti-capitalist programme. This perspective of a government breaking with capitalism requires not succumbing to

participation in social liberal governments with the socialist parties or the centre-left.

Finally, all these battles must turn around from a socialist, eco-socialist perspective presenting the broad outlines of an alternative project of society, a new mode of production and consumption, a new conception of democracy, a socialist democracy.

## Climate change and our tasks

30 November 2009, by Daniel Tanuro

In the last decades of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, coherent proposals for alternative energy systems based on the utilization of solar energy were swept aside by the laws of capitalist profitability or torpedoed under the pressure of the coal companies.

After 1945, in order to perpetuate their superprofits, the oil monopolies and the sectors dependent on oil suppressed many technical alternatives and imposed means of transport, consumption and town and country planning dictated only by the desire to sell an ever-increasing quantity of goods, in particular cars and other mass-produced individual consumer goods.

In the course of the last 40 years, in spite of an accumulation of increasingly convincing evidence, scientists' warnings were ignored by bourgeois governments and the media. On the contrary, they backed up the disinformation campaigns of capitalist lobbies, while at the same time, neoliberal globalization of production and exchanges was leading to explosive growth of greenhouse gas emissions.

Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, the causes of global warming are perfectly documented, the danger is known and recognized by the governments, the technical solutions exist and the gravity of the situation increases with each new report by the experts. But capitalism continues in

spite of everything to use mainly fossil fuels, including non conventional sources (heavy oils, bituminous sands and shale) as well as the enormous low-price coal reserves. Since the logic of accumulation constitutes its foundation, the system has launched into productivist gambles which imply dangerous technologies: development of nuclear power, genetic engineering aimed at increasing the harmful production of biofuels, "clean coal" with capture and storage of gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> in deep geological layers. For capital, renewable energy sources are just one new field for the accumulation of value, which explains why their implementation can take particularly destructive forms and comes as a complement to being supplied by fossil fuels, not as a replacement for them.

The only limit to capital is capital itself (Marx). The insane race of this system which accumulates wealth and overconsumption at one pole, poverty and scarcity at the other, threatens to precipitate a human and ecological catastrophe that is irreversible on a historical timescale, with irrevocable damage inflicted on ecosystems, in particular on biodiversity. Whereas the threshold of danger, considerably lower than +2°C compared to the preindustrial era, has already been crossed in many regions (island states, Andean countries, Arctic regions, semi-arid zones...) the plans that have been adopted or are being discussed

at the level of the imperialist powers announce a warming between +3.2 and +4.9°C, corresponding to a rise of the sea level of between 60 cm and 2.9 metres at equilibrium (without counting the dislocation of the icecaps). Not only will the Millennium Development Objectives, which are insufficient, not be reached, but in addition hundreds of millions of human beings are exposed to serious degradation of their living conditions. For the poorest among them, their very existence is threatened, due in particular to the risks of coastal flooding, tension over fresh water resources and the expected fall in agricultural productivity in tropical regions.

**2. The stabilization of the climate at the least dangerous level possible requires a drastic reduction in the consumption of energy and therefore of material production. At the same time, energy and other resources are necessary to ensure the right to development of the three billion men and women who live in conditions that are unworthy of their humanity and who are the first victims of global warming. The capitalist system is incapable of taking up these two challenges separately. To take them up simultaneously amounts for it to squaring the circle. Radical anti-capitalist measures are indispensable in order to**

**implement, independently of the costs, a world plan of transition towards an economical and efficient energy system, based exclusively on renewable sources, capable of satisfying the fundamental needs of humanity.**

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the stabilization of the climate at the least dangerous level possible requires world emissions of greenhouse gases to peak before 2015 and decrease by 50 to 85 per cent between now and 2050, compared to 2000. In name of the precaution principle, it is essential to adopt as a minimum the most drastic of these objectives. Indeed, climatic models do not incorporate, or do so very imperfectly, the phenomena known as "non-linear", in particular the dislocation of the Greenland and Antarctic icecaps and the release of methane from permanently frozen ground (permafrost). However, these phenomena, already perceptible, are likely to very strongly accelerate climate change and to considerably increase its negative effects in coming decades.

To these physical constraints must be added other constraints, of a social, political and technical nature:

In order to take into account the differentiated historical responsibilities of imperialist countries and other countries, the IPCC estimates that the first must reduce their emissions by between 25 and 40 per cent between now and 2020 and by between 80 and 95 per cent between now and 2050, compared to 1990, while the output curve of the second must drop by from 15 to 30 per cent compared to existing projections, in all regions in 2050 and in the majority of regions (except Africa) from 2020. Here too, the most drastic objectives must be adopted as a minimum, for the reasons indicated above.

Considering their decisive responsibility for global warming, the share of these objectives which concerns the developed nations must be realized by them using domestic measures, i.e. by reductions of their own emissions. These reductions can be replaced neither by purchases of

rights to pollute coming from supposedly "clean" investments in the developing countries or those in transition, nor by the planting of trees - which does not offer a structural solution, nor by the protection of existing land and forests - the safeguarding of land and forests, necessary in itself, must not allow the polluters to continue to pollute.

In the name of climate justice and in atonement for their ecological debt, imperialist countries must transfer to the countries dominated by imperialism the knowledge and the technologies that will enable them to develop while respecting the physical constraints of climate stabilization. They must also finance measures of adaptation to that part of climate change that is inevitable, of which the poor populations of poor countries, mainly women, are the main victims.

From the technical point of view, renewable sources make it amply possible to face up to the future needs of humanity. However, because of the need to change the energy system, the success of the transition over the next 40 years is conditional on an important reduction in the consumption of energy (50 per cent and more in the developed countries). This implies in its turn a significant reduction of material production, so that the key question is the following: it is necessary to produce less overall, while answering the legitimate demands of three billion human beings for whom many fundamental needs remain unsatisfied.

It is a total illusion to believe that this range of conditions could be respected by allotting to carbon a price which takes into account the cost of the damage from climate change. Value is a purely quantitative indicator expressing the quantity of abstract human labour put into motion at a given moment by the development of capital: it is by definition incapable of taking account of natural wealth, of taking account of the needs of future generations, of making the difference between useful or useless concrete labour from the human point of view and of taking into consideration the many parameters, both quantitative and qualitative, of climate stabilization. This inability is already

expressed in practice in the fact that the capitalist monopolies are exerting all their weight, successfully, to prevent the bill for global warming from being laid at their door, so that in the final analysis they determine the rhythms and the forms of the policies pursued, according to their own interests. On the social level, finally, the imposition of a world price for carbon would make the workers and the poor pay the bill for global warming, thus aggravating inequalities, between the North and the South but also within the societies of the North and the South.

Capital is unable to resolve the key question because it is structurally incapable of reducing overall material production while producing more for non-solvent needs. To combine the legitimate right to human development and the planned, democratic and rational implementation of a world programme of transition towards an economical and efficient energy system, based exclusively on renewable sources, independently of the cost, is only possible by resorting to radical anti-capitalist measures. These measures include in particular the expropriation of the credit and energy sectors; a massive reduction of working time (towards a half-day of work) with reduction of work rhythms, without loss of wages and with hiring of extra workers; significant taxing of capitalist profits; the greatest extent possible of re-localisation of production, in particular agricultural production, via support for peasant agriculture; public initiatives in the field of housing and transport, essential in order to change modes of consumption; the constitution of a world fund for adaptation, financed from the profits of the monopolies; public refinancing of research, an end to its subordination to industry and the free transfer of clean technologies towards the countries of the South; as well as mechanisms of democratic participation and control by the populations and by local government bodies, at all these different levels.

**3. The poisoned heritage of two hundred years of capitalist development based on fossil fuels, climate change concentrates the crisis of civilization due to the fact**

**that the potential of this system for social and ecological destruction now outweighs its ability to identify human needs and respond to them. The combination of the economic, climate and food crises in the framework of the capitalist law of population carries within it the threat of a major human catastrophe, and even of a descent into barbarism.**

The poisoned heritage of two hundred years of capitalist development, climate change constitutes the clearest demonstration of the global crisis of a system whose potential for social and ecological destruction now outweighs its ability to identify human needs and respond to them. The growth of the productive forces has become the growth of destructive forces, not only because more and more socially and ecologically destructive technologies have been deployed, but also, overall, because capitalist logic, by ruining the climate, is leading humanity towards a whole range of acute difficulties. The capitalist mode of production implies a specific law of population, expressing the permanent need for an "industrial reserve army". In the framework of this law and in the context of the historical exhaustion of late capitalism, the combination of the economic, climate and food crises carries within it the profound threat of a wave of "creative destruction" (Schumpeter) of unprecedented scope, implying not only the massive elimination of material productive forces and irreplaceable natural wealth, but also a major risk of physical destruction for hundreds of millions of human beings. This infernal logic is already at work in the convergence between the fractions of big capital invested in agribusiness, energy, cars and petrochemicals which, by rushing to get their hands on land and on the industrial exploitation of the biomass as an energy resource, are accelerating the ruin of small farmers and the rural exodus, threatening indigenous communities and dramatically increasing the number of sub-proletarians who are victims of chronic famine. For lack of a global alternative, the internal dynamics of the system will push ever more

strongly down the slippery slope of a global crisis which could be on a level of brutality and barbarism without any historical precedent.

**4. Climate change underlines the urgency of both a world socialist alternative and a radical break of the socialist project from productivism. The saturation of the carbon cycle and the exhaustion of non-renewable resources in fact mean that, unlike in the past, the emancipation of the workers is no longer conceivable without simultaneously taking into account the principal natural constraints.**

Opposition to capitalist growth, in itself, constitutes neither a project of society nor a strategy for broad social mobilization in favour of another society. The reduction in material production and consumption is immediately necessary for the stabilization of the climate because capitalism has led humanity too far into a dead end. But that does not in any way prejudice the future possibilities of development, once the climate system has been stabilized, on the one hand, and on the other hand it constitutes only one quantitative criterion of the necessary transition towards an economy without fossil carbon. If we do not want to be led towards antisocial or even reactionary conclusions, this quantitative criterion must be combined with qualitative criteria: in particular, redistribution of wealth, reduction of working time without loss of wages, development of the public sector. If these criteria are satisfied, and on condition that it targets useless or harmful productions, the reduction in material production will actually be synonymous with an increase in the wellbeing, the wealth and the quality of life of the vast majority of humanity, through investments in social sectors, a different kind of town and country planning, free access to vital services and the re-conquest of the free time necessary for self-activity, self-organization and democratic self-management on all levels.

The capitalist system is inseparable from the growth of material production and consumption, but this constitutes an effect, not a cause. It is

the production of value, as an abstract form of exchange values, which leads to the permanent tendency to unlimited accumulation of wealth at one pole, and causes at the same time the accumulation of poverty and destitution at the other. A climate policy which did not take into account this double reality would be doomed to failure. The crucial point and the lever of the anti-capitalist alternative thus remain basically those which the socialist project has defined: the mobilization of the exploited and oppressed against a system based on the race for profit, private ownership of the means of production, the production of commodities, competition and the wages system. But this crucial point and this lever are no longer enough to define the alternative. The saturation of the carbon cycle constitutes actually the most obvious and most global demonstration of the fact that, unlike in the past, the emancipation of the workers is no longer conceivable without taking into account the principal natural constraints: the limits of the stocks of non-renewable resources on a historical scale, the speed of replenishment of renewable resources, the laws of conversion of energy, the conditions of the functioning of ecosystems and biological cycles and their rhythms.

It is not enough to affirm that socialism must take ecological questions on board. The real challenge consists rather of creating the conditions so that the socialist project is compatible with the global ecology of the terrestrial super-ecosystem. Development cannot only be conceived of with the aim of satisfying real democratically determined human needs, but also according to its sustainability by the environment, and by furthermore accepting that the complexity, the unknown factors and the evolutionary character of the biosphere confer on this undertaking a degree of irreducible uncertainty. The concept of "human control over nature" must be abandoned. The only really possible socialism from now on is one that satisfies real human needs (disentangled from commercial alienation), democratically determined by the interested parties themselves, simultaneously taking care to carefully question ourselves as to the

environmental impact of these needs and the way in which they are satisfied.

To think in terms of the interpenetration of the social and the ecological implies first of all to go beyond the partitioned, utilitarian and linear vision of nature as the physical platform from which humanity operates, as the store from which it draws the resources that are necessary for the production of its social existence and as the dumping ground where it deposits the waste matter of this activity. In reality, nature is simultaneously the platform, the store, the dumping ground and the whole range of living processes which, thanks to the external supply of solar energy, make matter circulate between these poles, while constantly reorganising it. Waste and the way of disposing of it must therefore be compatible, both in quality and in quantity, with the capacities and the rhythms of recycling by the ecosystems, in order not to ruin the proper functioning of the biosphere. However, this proper functioning depends on the number and the diversity of the biological operators, as well as on the quality and complexity of the multiple chains of relations which link them, the balance of flows determining in the final analysis the supplying of humanity with resources.

To think in terms of the interpenetration of the social and the ecological implies secondly to learn the lessons from the reality that a mode of production is not defined only by its relations of production and property but also by its technological structures, which are modelled by its energy choices. Climate change shows this clearly: the energy sources used by a mode of production and the methods employed to convert energy in order to satisfy human needs (for food, heat, and light) are not socially neutral but have a marked class character. The capitalist energy system is centralized, anarchic, wasteful, inefficient, dead-labour intensive, based on non-renewable sources and characterised by a tendency towards overproduction of commodities. The socialist transformation of society requires its progressive destruction and its

replacement by a decentralized system, planned, economical, and efficient, living-labour intensive, based exclusively on renewable sources and directed towards the production of durable practical values, which can be recycled and reused. This transformation does not only concern the "production" of energy in a narrow sense but the entire industrial apparatus, agriculture, transport, leisure and town and country planning. The energy/climate challenge forces us to conceive of the socialist revolution not only as the destruction of the power of the bourgeois state, the creation of a proletarian state which starts to wither away as soon as it is established and progressive phasing-in of self-management by the masses, but also as the beginning of a process of destruction of the old capitalist productive apparatus and its replacement by an alternative apparatus, utilising different energy sources, different technologies and different structures in the service of democratically decided objectives. This extremely profound historical upheaval can start in one country or in a group of countries, but it can only take on its full character and be completed after the victory of the socialist revolution on a world scale, once the abolition of the principal inequalities of development have made it possible to satisfy the basic right of each human being to an existence worthy of the name. It postulates in fact the preliminary realization of energy autonomy, in particular the food autonomy of different countries. Far from being synonymous with the end of human development, it implies an important progress of science and technique as well as of the social power to democratically apply them, with the active participation of everyone, within the framework of a culture of "prudently taking care" of the biosphere, for which the contribution of indigenous communities will be invaluable.

Revolutionary Marxism considers that, once fundamental human needs have been satisfied, the qualitative development of humanity will become more important than the quantitative development. This conception is coherent with that of Marx, for whom

real wealth lies in free time, social relations and the comprehension of the world. The perspective of a communism using exclusively renewable energy sources, mainly solar, is situated in the continuity of this non-productivist thought, deepening it and drawing new conclusions in terms of demands, tasks and programme. This deepening justifies the use of the new concept of ecosocialism. Representing the concentrated expression of the common fight against the exploitation of human labour and the destruction of natural resources by capitalism, ecosocialism does not proceed from an idealistic and chimerical vision of the "harmony" that is to be established between humanity and nature, but from the materialist necessity of managing the exchanges of matter between society and the environment, while controlling consciously, collectively and democratically the tension between human needs and the proper functioning of the ecosystems.

## Our tasks

**5.1. Prepare the activists of the social movements so that they can aid the development of the consciousness of the masses and contribute to building a mass mobilization on climate.** The fight for the climate requires in priority the construction of relationships of social forces. Faced with the urgency of the question and with the criminal policies of capitalist governments, we work in all countries for the building of a powerful unitary mass movement, coordinated on a world scale. This movement must be conceived of as a grid of social resistances existing on different terrains, with convergent coordinated actions and periodic pluralist demonstrations, on a common minimal platform. Its goal must be to force governments to aim for at least the most radical reductions in emissions put forward by the IPCC, respecting the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" and of social and democratic rights as well as the right of everyone to a human existence worthy of the name. Mass mobilization in defence of the climate is a difficult task, due in particular to the double de-phasing, spatial and

temporal, between the phenomenon and its effects. A broad campaign of information on global warming and its impacts is necessary. It must be aimed in particular at the activist nuclei of the various social movements and the political formations of the left, because these nuclei play a decisive role in establishing the concrete link between the global climate threat and particular social problems, and in deducing from that strategies that make it possible to combine social struggles and the fight for the environment.

**5.2. Build a left current which links the fight for the climate to social justice.** The change that is necessary cannot be obtained without the mobilization and the active participation of the exploited and oppressed who make up the vast majority of the population. Capitalist climate policy makes this participation impossible because it is unacceptable on the social level. This policy in fact implies the reinforcement of imperialist domination and of capitalist competition and violence; therefore of exploitation, oppression, social inequality, competition between workers, violation of rights and private appropriation of resources. In particular, this policy does not provide any answer to the major challenge represented by the jobs, the wages and the social gains of the millions of workers employed in the sectors that emit large quantities of greenhouse gases. So it can only encounter legitimate social resistance. The big environmental NGOs try to radicalize the climatic objectives of governments while refusing to see that this radicalisation involves at the same time the accentuation of antisocial attacks. This is a dead end. We defend the need for a combined fight for the climate and for social justice. Within the broad movement, we work for the constitution of a left pole which links these two dimensions and which argues consistently against proposals based on market instruments, accumulation, neo-colonial domination and technological forward flight. This pole will seek to bring together elements of the trade-union, ecologist, global justice, feminist and third-worldist lefts, the "decreasing" left, the organizations of the radical left, critical scientists, etc.

**5.3. Conduct the ideological fight against green neo-Malthusianism, in defence of the poor and of women's rights.** By its nature as a global problem and by the extent of the catastrophes which it is likely to cause, global warming favours the development of a whole series of ideological currents which, under cover of radical ecology, try to rehabilitate the theses of Malthus by packaging them in an apocalyptic discourse with strong religious accents. These currents find an echo at the highest level in certain sections of the ruling classes, where the disappearance of a few hundred million human beings is easier to imagine than the disappearance of capitalism. Because of this, they represent a potentially serious threat to the poor, particularly to women. The fight against these currents represents an important task, which our organizations must assume, as such and in liaison with the women's movement. The population level is obviously one parameter of the evolution of the climate, but we have to categorically combat the false idea that population growth is a cause of climate change. The demographic transition is largely underway in the developing countries, and is progressing more quickly than had been envisaged. It is desirable that it continues, but that will be a result of social progress, the development of social security systems, the information that women dispose of and their right to control their own fertility (including the right to abortion in correct conditions). This is obviously a long-term policy. Short of resorting to barbaric methods, no policy of population control makes it possible to respond to climatic urgency.

**5.4. Introduce the question of the climate into the platforms and the struggles of the social movements.** In the perspective of a broad mobilization rooted in existing struggles, we act so that the defence of the climate becomes a major concern of the social movements and that it finds a concrete expression in their platforms of demands, on all terrains. For example:

- the fight for peace: the production and the use of arms constitute an

unacceptable folly in relation to climate change... which is itself a possible cause of additional conflicts;

- the fight against poverty, for the right to development and social protection: the ability to adapt to climate change is directly proportional to the level of resources and development. Social inequality increases vulnerability and handicaps energy change;
- the fight of women: adaptation to climate change reinforces the importance and the urgency of the specific demands of women for equal rights, for society to take responsibility for the care and protection of children, against the double working day, for the right to abortion and contraception;
- the fight for employment: to radically reduce the consumption of energy, to reorganise the territory and the cities, to take care of biodiversity, to develop public transport and to substitute renewable sources for fossil fuels offers a gigantic reserve of quality employment;
- the fight for access to land, water and natural resources and for an organic peasant agriculture: rural communities which practice a labour-intensive organic agriculture know how to increase the organic matter content of land and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture;
- the fight against globalization and the liberalization of agricultural markets: a cause of the ruin of rural populations, famine, rural exodus and/or the plundering of ecosystems, the liberalization of these markets is also a major source of emissions, direct (transport of products for export) and indirect;
- the fight for the right of asylum: faced with the increase in the number of environmental, and in particular climatic, refugees, freedom of circulation is essential and constitutes the only response worthy of humanity;
- the fight of indigenous communities for their rights: by their knowledge and their mode of exploitation of ecosystems, in particular forests, these communities are the most capable of preserving and developing carbon sinks;
- the fight against the flexibility and the precarisation of work, against the lengthening of working time: work

schedules that are cut and made flexible and capitalist campaigns in favour of the increased mobility of the labour force workers to use cars. "Just in time" production is a major source of emissions of greenhouse gases in the transport sector. The reduction of working time is a necessary condition for the development on a mass scale of alternative patterns of consumption and leisure;

- the fight against privatizations, for a public sector of quality in the fields of transport, energy and water. Only a free public transport sector of quality can reconcile the right of everyone to mobility and the reduction of emissions. The liberalization of electrical production complicates the introduction into the network of intermittent renewable sources. Only a public enterprise not working for profit can take up the challenge that consists of suppressing within two or three decades the totality of emissions in the housing sector.

**5.5. Make demands on the climate an axis of the trade-union left, in the perspective of an anti-capitalist struggle going beyond the redistribution of wealth.** The leaderships of the big international trade-union confederations accompany capitalist climatic policies in exchange for the possibility of them negotiating certain of their modalities. This orientation is concretized in the proposal of a "Green Deal" based on the illusion that green technologies will make it possible to absorb unemployment and give the impulse to a new long wave of prosperity and capitalist expansion. The trade-union bureaucracies accept the requirements of productivism and capitalist profitability as well as the instruments of the dominant climate policy: government aid to "green" companies, "ecological taxation", Clean Development Mechanism, the market in emission rights, even support for nuclear energy and biofuels. This policy is likely to make the trade union movement co-responsible for catastrophes. It sows division among workers on an international level, and between sectors within the different countries. Considering the importance of the climatic and energy challenge, it is decisive for the trade-union left to

make it an element of its fight for a change of course. This combat is difficult because it does not involve "economic revival" but the reduction of energy consumption, the suppression of productions that are useless or harmful, the reconversion of workers in these sectors, etc. There are considerable obstacles to this combat, due to the way workers are tied to the capitalist mode of production, on which they depend for their daily existence. To take up the challenge, the trade-union left must get away from a cramped vision centred on the redistribution of wealth, in order to contest the very conception of wealth and the way in which wealth is produced, i.e. the very foundations of the mode of production. This approach raises the importance of demands such as the reduction of working time (with a lowering of work rhythms, without loss of wages and with proportional hiring of new workers), the extension of the public sector, free access to basic services and workers' control (over work rhythms, production, energy, etc.)

**5.6. The massive transfer of clean technologies towards the countries dominated by imperialism and the financing of adaptation to the effects of climate change in these countries require a sharing of assets and knowledge on a world scale, therefore substantial taxation of capitalist profits.** The rescue of the climate requires a sharing of assets and knowledge on a world scale. It must thus be related to:

- the cancellation of the debt of the third world and restitution to the people of the assets that the dictators of countries of the South have placed in Western banks;
- lifting of bank secrecy, suppression of tax havens, taxing of inheritances, a tax on speculative movements, etc;
- a substantial increase in the budgets of the imperialist countries that are allocated to government aid to development;
- the creation, in addition to this aid, of a single world fund for the adaptation of the developing countries to the inevitable effects of climate change and for the transfer of clean technologies towards the public sector of these countries, without financial conditions;

- the resources for this fund should come from taxing the profits and the excessive superprofits of the economic sectors most responsible for climate change (in particular the oil sector, coal, cars and electrical production);
- suppression of the system of patents in health and in technologies that make it possible to produce essential consumer goods and services (transport, light industry, water and energy, communications) so that all the populations of the planet can have access to basic goods;
- a system of financial compensation for the countries of the South which give up exploiting their fossil fuel resources.

**5.7. The emissions of the countries dominated by imperialism will not be able to diminish by at least 30 per cent compared to projections unless the capitalist model of development is called into question.** The contribution of the countries dominated by imperialism to the stabilization of the climate at the least dangerous level possible can only be achieved by an endogenous development, responding to the needs of the great mass of the population, therefore linked to land reform in favour of peasant agriculture and to a reorientation of production towards the domestic market. To reconcile the right to human development with the stabilization of the climate thus requires taking measures against the local ruling classes, who use the right to development as a pretext to try and refuse any obstacle to the burning of fossil fuels, who plunder natural resources, appropriate the forests for themselves, act as intermediaries for the sale of carbon credits, produce biofuels and export agricultural food products or industrial products at low prices for the markets of the developed countries. To prevent them being used to fuel this socially and ecologically harmful model, the funds and the technological means that are placed at the disposal of the countries of the South must be placed under the democratic control of the populations and their social movements.

**5.8. Oppose technological forward flight and incorporate all the great ecological challenges into a really sustainable perspective of development.** The history of

capitalism is littered with environmental crises that were “solved” without a global ecological vision, by the implementation of partial technological answers subordinated to the demands of profitability, whose harmful environmental effects appeared later. To solve the climate/energy crisis while following this same method of the sorcerer’s apprentice is likely to have even more dangerous consequences, in particular in three fields: the increased recourse to nuclear power and genetically modified organisms and the geological storage of CO<sub>2</sub> in the framework of a new wave of exploitation of coal. To oppose these capitalist responses is one of the most important tasks. They should be denounced as symbols of the madness of unbridled capitalist growth, as the absurd attempt of the system to jump over its own head in order to maintain in spite of everything the accumulation that generates profit. In a more general way, the climatic challenge brings together all the environmental questions. The response must thus integrate all the great ecological challenges, in particular: (i) the defence of the tropical forest, respecting the rights of the indigenous communities which live off its resources (carbon sinks); (ii) the defence of biodiversity; (iii) rational and public management of water resources; (iv) the fight against the poisoning of the biosphere by the several hundred thousand molecules resulting from petrochemicals, which do not exist in nature and thus in some cases cannot be broken up by its reducing agents; (v) the elimination of the gases that destroy stratospheric ozone and their replacement by compounds which do not have other dangerous ecological impacts; (vi) the fight against atmospheric pollution and its consequences for human health (asthma, cardiovascular diseases,) and for the ecosystems (acidification, tropospheric ozone).

**5.9. Denounce the gulf between the capitalist plans and the diagnosis of the situation by scientists. Establish links with critical scientists. Pose the questions of intellectual property rights and the social role of research. The**

claim by governments which are trying to make us believe that their capitalist and liberal climate policies are founded on “science” must be fought vigorously. To do this, we must denounce the gulf that separates the objectives of governments from the conclusions that the precaution principle makes it necessary to draw from the reports of the IPCC. This denunciation implies assimilating the essence of the scientific expertise while criticizing the dominant ideological and social presuppositions which are conveyed by a large majority of the experts. The left must establish relations with scientists, invite them to communicate their expertise to the social movements, challenge them on their general political positions, on the basis of their own scientific expertise, push them to speak out on the contradiction between the global rational solutions which the fight against global warming requires, on the one hand, and on the other hand the extreme compartmentalisation of science in the service of partial capitalist rationality. Considering the place occupied by scientific expertise in the development of policies, it is of considerable importance to establish relations between the social movements and critical and humanistic researchers. Within this framework, we develop a more general point of view on the role of science and research in the fight for the stabilization of the climate in a framework of social justice. We do not refuse technological solutions, nor the concepts of development and progress. We argue on the contrary for scientific research and technique to be freed from the influence of capital so that their potential can be placed massively and quickly at the service of progress in energy efficiency, rational management of resources and the sustainable development of renewable energy sources. We demand massive public refinancing of research, an end to the contracts which tie universities to industry and to finance capital, the democratic definition of research priorities in the context of the transition, in a framework of social justice, towards a society without fossil fuels.

**5.10. Fight against the attempts to make individuals feel guilty, but**

**assert the need for energy sobriety as far as socially possible.** The discourses of governments aimed at making people feel guilty, which place responsibility for global warming on the behaviour of individuals, seek to conjure away social inequality, to hide the responsibility of capitalism, seek to divert attention from the profound structural changes that are necessary and pave the way for unjust measures such as the “carbon tax”. It is an illusion to believe that the climate could be saved by a movement of “cultural contagion” against overconsumption, whereas more than half of humanity lives in a situation of chronic underconsumption. But it is also an illusion to gamble on hypothetical revolutionary scientific breakthroughs in order not to put in question individual overconsumption and practices which result from it. Instead of counterposing actions in the sphere of consumption to structural changes in the sphere of production, the first must be conceived of as a means of making people aware of the need for the second. Alternative social practices, democratic campaigns and mobilizations, even those which only involve a minority, which contest productivism and consumerism, can also play a positive role in the formation of the collective consciousness that structural changes are necessary, in the sphere of production, and that these changes will be accompanied by a higher quality of life.

**5.11. Develop a practice of popular aid in the event of a catastrophe.** Climate change considerably increases the risks of catastrophes, affecting more particularly the workers and the poor, in particular in the developing countries. In the face of this threat, we must prepare to intervene with the social movements on two different terrains: the terrain of demands, consisting of placing states and governments before their responsibilities; and the terrain of direct, popular and interdependent aid, taken in charge by the local populations and their organizations with the assistance of networks of activists on a world level. The experience gained in natural disasters shows in fact that these popular aid initiatives are faster, more directly

directed towards the poor and their real needs and are less expensive. Moreover, they favour the

development of a different kind of social relations and of contestation of

the established order.

(version 10/11/2009)

# What's Behind the Left Bloc's Success?

30 November 2009, by **Ralph Blake**

Portugal's left Bloc have achieved a major breakthrough in the last five months. They polled nearly 11% and 10% respectively in the recent European and parliamentary legislative elections in June and September of this year. For a party that is firmly established outside of left social democracy this is a major achievement. How did it happen?

Their success is owed to a combination of objective and subjective factors. The objective factors are rooted in Portugal's twentieth century history while the subjective factors are linked to how the Left Bloc was formed and how they operate and engage with people in Portugal. The left in Britain and particularly in England can learn from the development and practice of the Left Bloc as they to seek to make a major breakthrough.

## Portugal's Situation

Portugal was ruled by a right wing military dictatorship for over 30 years. The primary resistance to it during this period was the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP). The dictatorship was overthrown in 1974 by a military coup organised by the young officers who had been conscripted to fight in imperialist wars in Africa. This coup evolved over a period of eighteen months into a revolutionary movement involving millions of people. They seized land and workers and peoples councils where set up all over Portugal. A situation of dual power developed between this new form of revolutionary democracy and a counter posed capitalist democracy.

Only a failed left wing counter military coup finally drove the revolution in the direction of a capitalist democracy.

The PCP despite their role in facilitating the emergence of the new capitalist democracy remained popular and gained up to 20% of the popular vote in a series of elections in the years after the revolution. They also, controlled the major trade union confederation.

At the same time a number of Trotskyist and Maoist and other revolutionary groups emerged from the revolution as a diversity of ideas and solutions exploded during the eighteen month revolutionary period after the 1974 coup. However, they were fragmented and small and lived in the shadow of the large PCP.

The PCP was however very bureaucratic and set out to control all the social movements. They were also, Western Europe's most Stalinist communist party. For example they backed the coup against former Soviet leader Gorbachev.

In addition to these factors Portugal is and remains one of the poorest countries in Western Europe. It also, had/has the influence of a right wing Catholic Church which supported the dictatorship and has had a strong role in forming reactionary social attitudes on women and homosexuality. Finally Portugal because of its colonial past has a multicultural population.

## Building the Revolutionary

## Party

The Revolutionary Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Revolucionário, PSR) the Portuguese section of the Fourth International had in an open and democratic way tried to build a party using the classical methods that we have seen attempted in Britain by several organisations.

The PSR's success was modest - never gaining more than 2% in elections despite them having a "correct programme" which was clearly presented to the Portuguese population and having the "right" line on most of the key issues which arose in Portugal. They turned to other currents on the left in an attempt to create a wider party that could attract the thousands of activists that were involved in the wider political and social campaigns.

## The Origins of Left Bloc

The Left Bloc was formed by three currents that had emerged from the revolution. These groups were : the People's Democratic Union (União Democrática Popular, UDP) a pro-Albanian Maoist group (Portugal has a large peasant population); the Revolutionary Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Revolucionário, PSR) the Portuguese section of the Fourth International ; and Politics XXI (Política XXI, PXXI) a group of ex-Communist party thinkers. The Left Bloc's real success was attracting initially hundreds and now thousands of independent activists from the political movements.



Discussions on the formation of the Left Bloc began in mid-1998. The PSR, UDP and Politics XXI took the first steps to reaching a basic political agreement and setting the basis for the new movement, without rushing into a fusion, without dissolving the existing organisations and without requiring unity in all areas of activity.

The presence from the beginning of independents who supported the project was a crucial aspect of the Bloc and gave it a much broader appeal than that of a simple electoral alliance of the three organisations.

At the same time a political and organisational agreement between the organisations committed them to make the Bloc a space for the convergence of positions and practices, not an area for political disputes, thereby enabling rapid progress in building the structures needed for the electoral and political campaigns that followed.

A key to the success of this coming together of the different left tendencies was a desire to build a movement/party that could play a key role in changing society. This meant putting aside all political and personal ambitions. It required a maturity driven by the desire to build a socialist society and accepting that no one party or individual had all the answers. It also, was a realisation that there are many paths to being an activist and militant and these are shaped by each individual's objective and subjective conditions.

The Left Bloc has become increasingly popular of the last ten years, especially among youth, with imaginative campaigns and dynamic proposals, the majority of its support comes from colleges, cities and educated youth or adults from the countryside, gathering both urban educated communities and dynamic labor unions, together with defenders of human rights and women's rights, the rights of immigrants and minorities (they are especially involved in supporting a strongly multicultural society), and also many ecologists. At this point the Bloc is by some seen as an alternative and

refreshing "new" left political party to the older and more established Portuguese Communist Party and the centre left Socialist Party. It is a diverse entity formed by people with multiple backgrounds.

The Bloc proposed Portugal's first law on domestic violence, which was passed in parliament through the support of the Portuguese Communist Party and the Socialist Party, and other important laws on civil rights and guarantees, including the protection of citizens from racism, xenophobia and discrimination, gay marriage laws, laws for the protection of workers, legalisation of drugs and anti-bullfighting laws. They have also campaigned for free legal safe abortion laws, allowing women to decide what they want to do with their bodies.

Hundreds of trade union representatives, at a factory level and at national level, appealed for a vote for the Bloc in September 2009's elections. In Portugal they still have workers' commissions (a remnant of the 1974 revolution) that are directly elected in each workplace. In Portugal's biggest workplace, Ford-Volkswagen in Setubal, the Bloc's supporters are the majority.

As example of the Bloc's innovative campaigning style they created a board game and circulated among young people. If the dice fell on a social problem you had to move back, if it fell on one of the Left Bloc's proposals you could move forward and win. It was a big hit.

## **Collective Revolving Leadership**

The Left Bloc operates a policy of having a revolving collectivist leadership.

This is to avoid a situation where the party depends on one or a few individuals. When the Bloc first had members of the Portuguese parliament it revolved the representatives every 5 months. The

National committee of 80 people meets every two months. It is elected in proportion to the voting on the major resolutions at the annual conference.

Women must have minimum of 30-40 percent of all positions in the party. This goes right down to the election to the NC based on support for resolutions

## **Lessons for Britain**

Britain has not in last 35 years lived under military dictatorship or had eighteen months of a revolutionary situation. But its labour movement and to a lesser extent its political movements have been dominated by one party - the Labour Party - like the Communist Party has in Portugal. In both countries there has been disillusionment with this control. In Portugal it was the creation of unified, democratic and open force that has persuaded people to join it and vote for it. This has happened in Britain in Scotland with the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) in the period 1999 to 2003. Sadly the split in the party has fragmented the left in Scotland and confused its supporters and electoral base. But the SSP has learnt the lessons at the root of the split and is slowly rebuilding itself as a credible left alternative to the new Labour and the Scottish Nationalist Party.

The SSP shows the potential for attracting independent socialist and activists to a new socialist project if the project has open and democratic a structure and can campaign in a popular way without diluting its politics. That is the task facing socialists in England.

It is time as the left Bloc did in Portugal to put personal and particular party ambitions aside. The most severe capitalist crisis is since the 1930s depression offers socialists a unique opportunity to build anti-capitalist left parties outside of social democracy. History will not look kindly upon us if we fail not for want of trying but because of the petty self interest of individuals and political groups.

# Convert the ailing car industry!

30 November 2009, by **Lars Henriksson**

In the Swedish auto industry the proportions between fan and shit was especially problematic. The crisis involved two of the world's smallest mass producers, both owned by troubled US corporations, and both producing large, fuel consuming semi-luxury cars. In a country of 9 million it was like having two bankrupt car companies and their chain of sub contractors plus two crisis-hit truck companies in London.

The auto crisis of course became a big political issue in Sweden and still is. As elsewhere in the world there were two principle lines of argument in the mainstream discussion about what should be done.

One line of argument supported "creative destruction" on the basis that the market had made its verdict and some of the corporations had been sentenced to death. The market should not be tampered with as that would only make things worse. A green variant on this was "Cars are damaging the climate. We don't need them or the companies that make them. It's good if the auto industry goes away."

The other main line of argument advocated support for the industry. The government, it was said, must subsidise the companies to help them through these troubled times so that they can be ready to grow again when things get back to normal. There should be loans, the scrapping of incentives, tax breaks and so on. In Sweden this has been the line of Social Democracy, the industry itself, many analysts and the unions. The leaders of my union made their "contribution" by signing a contract that temporarily reduced members' pay and working time.

Both these approaches to the crisis are disastrous. The fundamental assumption behind the "support-the-industry" position is false. There will

not be any "back to normal", at least not an endlessly expanding production of cars.

Road transport is responsible for about 20 % of greenhouse gas emissions in the EU, transport being the sector where emissions are increasing the fastest.

Even without the need to stop climate change the time of the car is running out. The production of oil is going to peak in the near future and this cheap energy will no longer be available. In fact a transport system based on mass auto transit is not an option at all. And the industry's answer - the green car, fuel efficient, running on renewable fuels - is an illusion.

It is true that the average CO2 emission per kilometer from new cars is going down but while the period 1995-2002 saw a 13% average decrease in fuel consumption for new cars in the EU countries there was a rise in total fuel consumption by 7% because of traffic increases.[1]

Agrofuel is no solution. For example in forest-rich Sweden, DME synthetic diesel made from wood is presented as the future. However, just to replace the consumption of oil by the present number of cars on the road with DME would take a total yearly yield of six billion hectares of forest.

Other types of alternative agrofuels proposed to replace the oil we burn, like ethanol, demand too much arable land and water. Besides, producing ethanol from corn, or diesel from soy, directly conflicts with the production of food for the poorest people of the world.

What about the electrical car or the hydrogen engine? Neither hydrogen nor electricity is a source of energy. Rather they are bearers of energy that require an energy input of some kind. Today two thirds of the world's

electricity is produced in coal fueled power plants.

All this means that the volume of transport, and especially of road transport, has to be adapted to a level that is sustainable in the long term. And that would be the end of the auto industry as we know it.

Finally, the economic crisis that is far from over will reshape the auto industry dramatically.

The argument that says uncompetitive auto production should be allowed to go to the wall is actually the worst from a social, practical and political point of view.

In Sweden industries have come and gone. In the 60s when the textile industry moved out, and in the 70s and 80s when the same thing happened to the shipyards, other sectors grew. These included the auto industry and especially public services. This "structural change" was the official policy of the unions and the Social Democratic Party.

Today, however, no other industries are on the rise and the public sector is facing cutbacks. In an auto-dependent economy like that of Sweden this will mean disaster.

Secondly, an industry like the car industry, is not a bunch of machines and buildings. Most of all it is an organisation of people. So when humanity is facing its toughest challenge so far - to change an economy and production that has been built on fossil energy for 250 years - we need all the resources we can use to do this. It would be a completely irresponsible waste to destroy an industrial complex that has been built and developed over almost a century.

The car industry has an expertise in logistics, production engineering, designing for production, and quality

control that could be applied to any kind of production. And efficient mass production is exactly what we need if we want to replace the fossil economy. It makes complicated technical devices cheap and should be applied to production of wind turbines and other equipment for renewable energy production, of trams, trains and other vehicles and systems for a sustainable transport system.

Auto workers are also used to change and conversion. In the last decades new models have been introduced at an absurd speed with the result that retooling, rebuilding and retraining, have become part of everyday life.

There are historical precedents for converting industries. In the months after the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese the US government prohibited the production of private cars and ordered the auto industry to change over to war production. Ford and the other producers obeyed (and earned many a good dollar) by applying their knowledge of mass production to tanks and bombers. The same thing happened in Britain.

To sum up: the auto industry is a fantastic and versatile operation that is not tied to making cars. It could play an important role in converting our societies into sustainable, carbon dioxide neutral, societies.

But ultimately the climate question is not about technology. It's about politics, that is, class struggle. And that is where the workers of the threatened industry come in.

And this is where we, the workers of the threatened auto industry come in. We must unite and fight for our jobs but it's a very hard fight and almost impossible to win so we have to turn to society at large for support and intervention.

We have to argue that the corporate leaders who now are begging the state for help have forfeited their right to run the auto industry. The state should not subsidise their rule and continued destructive production but instead should nationalise the industry and convert it to create safe jobs and a

production that can help us get out of the fossil economy. This would be a platform for a broad social alliance, both to save both the jobs and the planet.

Is it possible to build this alliance - to put forward demands for alternative production on the shop floor and upwards? If so, how?

The first step is to build workers' self-confidence by learning to fight collectively for anything at all. If we just talk about these grand schemes without engaging in everyday fights we will be seen as windbags building castles in the air.

A second step could be to produce concrete plans on how to convert different sectors.

In 1980 we had a referendum over nuclear power in Sweden and one of the most important things the environmental movement did was to put forward an Alternative Energy Plan showing in detail how nuclear power could be abolished and replaced with renewable energy. This was a very important tool in the campaign, in educating activists and giving people in the movement self confidence.

In May this year, environmentalists, citizen groups, researchers and union representatives from various European countries (including Bob Crow of the RMT in Britain) met in Cologne Germany to discuss a sustainable transportation system. The conference issued the Cologne Declaration against rail privatisation and for sustainable transport. A concrete plan, RailEurope2025 was put forward to transform European transport in 15 years in order to cut the CO2 emissions by 75%, thus cutting the total emissions by half. This kind of plan could be used by unions and other movements to build political pressure.

The third most important step would be to connect such alternative plans to the concrete work places, to production on a grass root level, as was attempted in the 70s in Britain at Lucas Aerospace. Even though that

fight was defeated it had repercussions trough out the world, and still has.

In the late 70's there was a crisis in Sweden in shipbuilding, steel, and the last remnants of the textile industry. For a period "alternative production" became a hopeful buzzword, in quite broad layers. But almost all attempts to save jobs under this banner failed because to almost everyone "alternative production" meant "other profitable products".

The way we can use the idea of "alternative production" is to point out that we want to use our skills and can use it to produce socially useful an necessary products, regardless of whether they are profitable in the capitalist sense or not. This was the strength of the Lucas Plan.

Another appealing aspect of the Lucas experience was that is showed what can happen when workers step outside the daily treadmill. In the late 18th century Thomas Paine summed this up as follows:

Revolutions create genius and talent; but these events do no more than bring them forward. There is existing in man, a mass of sense lying in a dormant state, and which, unless something excites it to action, will descend with him, in that condition, to the grave.[2]

This year's Campaign against Climate Change trade union conference decided to form a committee to start the work for a plan for conversion, based on local participation. This is a way forward.

## Notes

1 Achieving Sustainable Mobility: Everyday and Leisure-time Travel in the EU. S. 170 Erling Holden. Ashgate Publishing Ltd 2007

2 Rights of Man, II, 1792

*This article is an extract from a speech at the Climate and Capitalism conference organised by Green Left and Socialist Resistance in London on 12 September 2009.*

# The World Social Forum, a sustainable model?

29 November 2009, by **Pierre Rousset**

The question that is raised is not primarily one of numbers: success does not depend (or does not only depend) on the number of participants, it is political: what is the point of the forums? The answer seemed obvious in the early 2000s, but that is not the case today.

In the past there was a lively interrelation between the Forum process, large anti-globalisation mobilisations, social struggles and international campaigns - a synergy that reached its peak with the mobilising and popularising role which the European forums (Florence, Italy) and global (Porto Alegre, Brazil) played in preparing the anti-war day of March 2003. The expansion of the WSF was phenomenal: in only a few years it had taken shape in Europe and Latin America, then in Asia, North America and Africa. It rooted itself in the national and local forums. The network and the Assembly of Social Movements played a dynamic role. The manifold expansion was driven by a dynamic combination of expansion and radicalisation. In the framework of the forums questions were raised which the traditional labour movement had not yet been able to answer. 1

Today - with some exceptions - the Forum process is largely disconnected from struggles and international campaigns. Other frameworks have been formed to address the climate crisis or the so-called financial crisis, without functional articulation with the WSF. In Malmö (Sweden) in 2008, a large and dynamic anti-globalisation demonstration took place at the time of the ESF, but with no synergy between the two events. In Europe, the ESF has not been able to play again the role of giving momentum that it had against the Bolkestein directive.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the process retains its vitality in North

America, but it has come to a standstill in Asia and has hardly been able to redefine itself in Europe. Even if the Assembly of the Social Movements still adopts policies whose content is important (Belém), the network is experiencing a protracted crisis of functioning.

Some new features have been tried out in recent years to ensure a more efficient process: meetings of thematic assemblies in the forums, the definition of "axes" around which the initiatives are grouped, proposals for the "clustering" of workshops to increase exchanges between constituents and improve the visibility of the programme, the call for "strategic" reflection, etc.. But interesting as these experiments are, a politics which has become out of date cannot be addressed solely by dealing with the operating procedures of the WSF. 3

The Forum process continues to provide the principal "common" space to a wide range of movements at a global level and in many countries. But for all that in what sense does the WSF provide a "sustainable model"? It has resisted the violent ideological offensive that followed the attacks of September 11 2001, which is not insignificant. But will it resist the impact of the capitalist crisis? Whether it succeeds or not, are there lessons from this experience that should be retained for the future?

The Forum process is not simply passing through a "downturn". It is threatened by a combination of factors: a strong tendency to institutionalisation, "neutralisation" of activist groups, political differences, questioning of functioning by "dynamic consensus" ...

## The WSF, seen from above

The global process of the Social Forum is led by an international council (IC), originally formed by self-cooptation, and then imperfectly expanded by co-option. Given the nature of the movement, it was difficult to elect it on a representative basis or to operate on a global scale in the form of an open assembly. But this mode of structuring was always subject to a separation between the "summit" and the grassroots of the WSF. The main measure designed to prevent this danger has been the limitation of the powers of the council: mainly it decides the date and place of the global forums and organises the framework (the commissions).

## The political significance of the debate within the IC on the rhythms

The WSF began by meeting annually. The question of the rhythm of meetings was rapidly posed by proliferation of regional or thematic forums. Far from being narrowly "organisational", this was a political question which concerns the relationship between the WSF and the social mobilisations. Thus Via Campesina was one of the first networks to demand that the global forums meet only every three years, if not every two years alternating with the regional forums. If too frequent they take up the time and financial resources of militants at the expense of preparing struggles, supporting national organisations and developing campaigns. From being a support they

can become a brake on the activity of movements engaged in the process. 4

Of course, the FSM forums are not merely international conferences. Through the number of participants, the involvement of the movements and the continuity of the "process" they constitute a form of resistance to capitalist globalisation. But - also of course - they cannot substitute for the daily struggles taking place elsewhere.

The proposals of the Via Campesina and other movements aimed at preserving the dialectical link between forums and struggles. The argument made good sense, but it has not been understood by all. The decision in this area was blocked until the International Council of Parma (Italy, October 2006). A report was produced on the finances of the WSF, which noted that almost all the organisations surveyed wanted the global Forum to stop meeting annually. It became very difficult to ignore this demand. It was decided that in 2008 there would be a global day of action that would not be labelled "WSF".<sup>5</sup> Although belated, the resolution of Parma recognised in fact that the global Forum should not necessarily meet every year and it opened itself up to organisations that still remained outside the established process.

Unfortunately, the decision of Parma has progressively unravelled. In the end the global day of January 2008 has again become an annual initiative of the World Social Forum. This day (or week) was a relative success, which reflected the commitment of the movements involved in the FSM to the continuation of the process. But the betrayal of the spirit and letter of the resolution of October 2006 signified that the needs of the militant movements that mobilised at the same time both within and outside the WSF were not taken into account by the IC - even though it is they who first and foremost give the WSF the character of a social forum, in touch with the struggles of the most exploited. The enlargement process was not thought through "from below" but rather "from above". Who in reality wished to maintain a frenetic pace for the forums? Individuals and organisations for which the intensification of the

"process" did not pose problems, either because the FSM had become their principal place of political recognition policy (individuals, small groups) or because they had at their disposal a budget and an apparatus of fulltimers which enabled them to take part without difficulty ("top level" union structures, large NGOs, funding agencies, church movements ...), without this necessarily implying a real commitment to build momentum.

The much vaunted functioning by consensus came to a dead end and was replaced by a unilateral war of attrition conducted by an "bloc of interests" at the top.

## Parties and churches

Political parties have not been admitted as "co-sponsors" of the WSF process (a decision which to me seems reasonable). However, for those parties involved in real life in the same mobilisations as the movements, the modalities of their presence in the forums has been defined according to the country (which also seems reasonable). The distinction is important: we are discussing here movements which equally take on a responsibility in the organisation of the forums and the representation of the process within the IC.

There have been extensive debates on the role of parties - but never on that of the (Christian) churches and their various organisations. However, they are not "social movements", even in the wide definition of the IC of the WSF. Although Caritas is registered as an NGO, its statutes specify that it is under the direct authority of the Vatican (a religious hierarchy and a... State!). The issue was raised at the International Council of Parma, taking account of rather alarming information on the weight of the churches in the preparation of the WSF in Nairobi. The World March of Women was concerned about the consequences this might have on the issue of women's rights or sexual preferences ... the Indian representatives recalled how they had carefully protected the Mumbai Forum from the religious conflicts that are

rife in their country. However, the debate had barely begun when it was cut short: because organisations like the World Council of Churches and Caritas were members of the IC, the presence of their counterparts in the national committees could not be challenged.

The fears expressed in Parma were unfortunately justified to the extent that a formal declaration was signed by many movements to protest about how the rights of women and homosexuals were attacked within the forum by religious currents - that is to say, even within our own space of liberty.<sup>6</sup> Despite this and some other very serious problems posed by Nairobi, there has been virtually no critical discussion on the critical assessment of this experience at the IC of the WSF that followed in Berlin.

"The churches have always been there, so ...". This is also true of the parties, which did not prevent their status being discussed. We can bet that if non-Christian religions (Muslim, Hindu ...) asked to be members of the IC there would be a debate! If the (Christian) churches "are there" it is because the forum was born in Brazil and the Brazilian organizers wanted it. The involvement of religious organisations in unitary popular mobilisations varies according to the country (even more than the links between parties and movements). I do not prejudge what would be the conclusion of an international discussion on their place in the process nor deny the progressive commitment of some of them. But which religious organisations are we talking about?

We are no longer in the 1970s, with the currents of liberation theology in Latin America confronting their religious hierarchies, advancing political agendas clearly anchored on the left (except, generally, on issues such as reproductive rights or sexual preference), even joining the armed struggle like the Christians for National Liberation in the Philippines, apostles of the theology of struggle. Some orders and individuals are still involved in resistance. But the movements of which we speak here are not in open rupture with their hierarchies - and these latter are

rarely progressive! They are at best in an ambiguous relationship of autonomy-dependence vis-à-vis the church hierarchy. Many Protestant churches are very reactionary, as is the very reactionary Pope and his policy of asserting Catholicism, moral order and anti-atheism.

I do not question the participation in the forums of movements "defined as religious" engaged in mobilisations against the war or for social rights. But the co-opting of church organizations within the IC, which is obliged to organise the "non-religious" space (to quote the Charter of the WSF) of the forums and ensure their "social" character seems very problematic.

## **The centre of gravity of the IC**

The composition of the IC is now less "monocoloured" (whites from Latin America and Europe) than at the beginning. But the weight of the "hierarchical" organisations has continued to grow. We can mention, in addition to religious organisations, major NGOs and funding agencies which are not what they were in the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> The current mechanisms for controlling and allocating funds gives them significant power over grassroots organisations on the ground. A social movement is not a sub-contractor, a service provider or a consultancy - it pursues activities that require continuity. Funding by "projects" represents a totally different logic which places local organisations in a situation of permanent insecurity, and therefore of dependence.

Union representation has also changed. A number of national and international union leaderships have only entered into the WSF process reluctantly. They did not appreciate its radicalism, its unusual diversity and spontaneity. Their integration was a victory for the anti-globalisation movement. But with the weakening of its dynamism the bureaucratic union leaderships have taken over the initiative. They now outweigh the class struggle unions within the IC of the WSF.

## **The WSF seen from below**

Seen from below, the view is much more diverse than from above. Indeed, the annual forums reflect the political situation and the dynamic movements of the host country and region, as does the quality of the preparation ensured by the national organising committee.

## **Mumbai, Nairobi and Belém**

The comparison of the three forums of Mumbai (2004), Nairobi (2007) and Belém (2009) illuminates this point. All have common features, starting with the large number of participants and the many militant meetings that these "spaces" enabled. All three illustrate the process of global expansion, from its original countries in Latin America and southern Europe to Asia and West Africa (Bamako, 2006) and East Africa (Nairobi).

More than any other global forum that at Mumbai has earned the name of social forum, because the movements made the space theirs, the collective participation was so great and the most oppressed were so visible. Meeting in a hostile city, without benefit of government support, with much more rigorously selected sources of international funding that was customary in the WSF. It was on an organisational level totally independent. Its success was made possible by the involvement of a wide range of organisations that often do not work together and by a long period of preparation which enabled trade unions and popular associations to come from every corner of this country-continent. <sup>8</sup>

We can say that the forum in Nairobi was in many ways the antithesis of that of Mumbai. The most institutionalised "entities" (including the churches) dominated the process. It was closely linked to state authorities. The organisation was partly run by large companies. The space was not designed for the poorest (entry costs, expensive food, little free clean water...). The market

that we fight was omnipresent. The forum certainly provided a rare opportunity for African movements to meet - and for them to meet with international movements. But it represented a real political backward step.<sup>9</sup>

After Nairobi, the Belém forum appeared as a rebirth of the process.<sup>10</sup> The very strong Brazilian participation showed that it met a need. It raised the question of the immense problem of the fate of the Amazon rainforest. The link between ecological and social issues was more central than had been usual in the previous forums. The rights of indigenous peoples were brilliantly affirmed. It was the opportunity for fundamental debates for the Latin American left around the competing orientations of the governments of Lula and Chavez. However, Belém was far from being a replica of Mumbai. The weight of state financing was great and the presence of government authorities obvious. But the dynamism of the regional (Amazonia) and Latin-American movements fuelled the forum with a real militant political content.

The future of the WSF depends in part on the country where it meets, on how national and regional movements are involved, and on the political issues that are raised. In North America and the Middle East, for example, issues like the war and the impact of the global capitalist crisis arise with greater force today than in Brazil. The social forums are built "from below" more than "from above".

## **Contrasting political evolutions of the social movement**

Certain global political events affect the dynamic of anti-globalisation. As long as the blows were struck from the outside - after September 11 2001, repression in Gothenburg (Sweden) and Genoa (Italy) - the radicalism of the movement has maintained itself on an international scale. But two major political turning points have

undermined it from within.

The WSF activists were first divided in the key countries on the issue of social-liberal governments of the left or the centre-left. This was particularly the case in Italy vis-à-vis that of Prodi and the participation in government of the Party of Communist Refoundation. But it is also true for Brazil (Lula), South Africa (the ANC in power), and in West Bengal, an important Indian state ruled by the CPI-M.

The obvious failure of the Italian experience (return to power of Berlusconi, electoral defeat of the PRC) and the explosion of the financial crisis have not succeeded in restoring the dynamic unity of before. In part, this reflects the continuing weakened state of the social movement, but it also reveals that the differences we face are more profound than temporary disagreements about the policy of the "lesser evil" and support for Prodi against the Berlusconi right.

Anti-liberalism has split under the pressure of the financial crisis, one wing of the movement "globalising" its alternatives, another, in contrast, moderating its ambitions. For example, Peter Wahl, co-founder of ATTAC in Germany and member of the NGO Weed says that we can only choose between different varieties of capitalism. He places his hopes in the reformist sectors of the elites and calls on civil society to influence them so that the capitalism of tomorrow is fairer socially and more sustainable environmentally. He relies on a somewhat expanded G20, a G23, and the UN to lead the reform.<sup>11</sup>

Another example. France experienced a significant wave of radical mobilisations (sequestration of senior executives ...) during the first half of 2009, ranging from universities to car factories, to the point that the elites were concerned about a Greek-style social explosion or a new May 68. It was possible, it was necessary, to take initiatives to facilitate the convergence of these struggles. The fear of it getting out of control, however, pushed the trade union confederations to work (a fact without precedent in France for a long time) to organise ... a nationwide day of action

every two months! After an undeniable initial success, participation in these repeated days obviously decreased. The desire for trade union unity was used to channel and defuse the movement. The government understood well that it needed to do nothing except wait for the lack of perspectives to demobilise the movement.

The French anti-globalisation movement should have supported the struggles, assisted their synergy. But it was paralysed. A violent controversy arose between the CGT trade union branches in the car factories in struggle and their federation leadership, accused of inaction ... However, it is that same leadership which is represented in the executive committee of the Social Forums (CIFS) not the workers.

Certainly we cannot simply counterpose the "base" to the "summit" to judge the choice of the federation leadership.<sup>12</sup> But to put it bluntly, left or union realpolitik of often disguises processes of "neutralisation", of adaptation and social co-option. It must be noted that faced with the crisis the union bureaucracies and other more or less institutionalised movements put on the brakes of politicisation and militant developments. The crisis reinforces their fear of radicalism.

The brief period of unanimous anti-globalisation has closed. How in these conditions can we continue to build the broadest unity for struggle? The answer is not simple - and certainly not identical across countries or regions. It is even less simple because the "spaces" for discussion are sterilised and constrained.

From top to bottom - in the International Council as in many meetings of the anti-globalisation movement - many things are discussed, but not how to build struggles, even though that should be a major concern and that we need, in this area in particular, to exchange analyses and experiences! The IC of the WSF even gives itself the luxury of organising a "strategic" reflection where political disagreements are glossed over. An amazing depoliticisation of strategy ... without

debate, a dynamic process (the formation of a consensus) is replaced by an insidiously authoritarian way of functioning.

One can understand the development of the calls for a response after the capitalist crisis. One of the most radical is also one of the first: that of Beijing.<sup>13</sup> Certain statements follow this line, like that of the assembly of movements at Belém<sup>14</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> But in most cases they are bland, whereas one was entitled to expect a deepening of the initial momentum.

## Legacy and future

Is the WSF useful for the struggle? That was and that remains the key issue. The best of statements (and there are good ones!) are useless if they are not translated into mobilisations. The birth of the WSF represented a positive break vis-à-vis the routinised international conferences of NGOs. But the more it disconnects from the social struggles the more it in its turn becomes institutionalised. A process very advanced at the level of the international council, but still partially offset by the dynamism of the movements which participate in some of the forums. The experience of the forums is still usually rewarding for the (new) participants. But the WSF process is extremely costly in terms of financial resources and the energies of militants. These costs become unjustifiable if the struggles do not derive sufficient benefit from them.

Whatever becomes of the WSF, it expressed a historical experience whose positive lessons should not be forgotten. It opened a space of convergences where the whole range of resistance to the commodification of the world could be found. It aided the synergy of struggles when the labour movement or the political-military organisations were no longer playing the centralising role that they did in the last century. It has given shape to anti-globalisation, combining old solidarities (North-South ...) with new forms of solidarity ("horizontal"), restoring colour to an internationalism that had lost its lustre.

The experience of the forums can thus help to overcome some strategic impasses. How, for example, improve the relationship of forces when massive strikes have not proved sufficient to permanently block the neoliberal counter-reforms? The space of convergences (including at the local level) allows us to envisage territorial mobilisation: the simultaneous action of an entire population in and outside the workplace (which goes well beyond the solidarity of people with a strike by employees). The "territorial strike" has been tried in many countries of the Third World, but in few countries of the "first world". But it is not for nothing that "All together" (tous ensemble) became so popular a banner at the time of globalisation. The experience of the forums, a permanent crucible of multilateral solidarity, provides food for thought and concrete reflection on such questions, for the future.

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# Chavez calls for Fifth International

26 November 2009, by **François Sabado**

Indeed, leaders or parties who pose the question of an International do not grow on trees. That is the first merit of Chavez's call.

All the more so as this call is accompanied by a declaration which denounces the systemic character of the capitalist crisis, beyond its financial and banking dimensions, and

reaffirms the perspective of a socialism of the 21st century. It calls for an urgent mobilization against the new imperialist offensive in Latin America, by the US administration and



the Latin American Right.

On the basis of this call, a broad world anti-imperialist front can be established, to mark its solidarity with the struggle of the peoples for their social and political rights, to oppose the new US bases in Colombia, to support, in particular, the mobilization of the people of Honduras against the new dictatorial regime.

In the trial of strength in which the imperialists are confronted with the struggles of the peoples, such a world front would constitute an important instrument to fight the power of the ruling classes, not only in Latin America but in the whole world.

We are ready, as we have been since the beginning, in solidarity with the Cuban revolution, the Bolivarian revolution, with the experiences in Bolivia and Ecuador, to fully commit ourselves to the common fight against the imperialist attacks imperialists and to take our full place in this world anti-imperialist front.

It is also within this framework that the process of construction of a new International would be posed. Chavez calls for the establishment of a Socialist Fifth International. That puts back on the agenda the discussion about a new International. Chavez situates the building of the Fifth International in continuity with the Fourth. We have already declared on many occasions: what do labels matter, if there is convergence over the content. But the constitution of a new International implies a whole process around a programme, policies, and an organization, which must be carried out on the basis of a broad discussion with all the protagonists.

There is, indeed, a new historical period, where divergences between various revolutionary currents can be surmounted on the basis of "a common understanding of events and tasks". From this point of view, it is not a question of discussing the historical balance sheets of different currents, but it is decisive to learn

together the lessons from Stalinism and social democracy, so that the tragedies and the errors of the past are not repeated.

Each party, each organization, each current and each militant must contribute to this debate. As for the Fourth International, it has already formulated, on many occasions, its proposals:

\* An anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist programme of emergency demands, which starts from the demands and the social needs of the popular classes, proposes a new distribution of wealth, public and social appropriation of the key sectors of the economy and leads on to the revolutionary transformation of society.

\* Unity of action of all the organizations, currents and militants against the attacks of the governments and the capitalist classes.

\* Independence of the social movements, associations and trade-union organizations with respect to parties and states.

\* Solidarity with all struggles of peoples against all the imperialist powers.

\* The fight against oppressions and the defence of the rights of women, homosexuals, young people and immigrants.

\* The fight for governments of the workers and popular classes which satisfy the principal social and ecological demands and base themselves on the mobilization of the population and its control over the principal sectors of the economy. This perspective implies not participating in governments which manage the state and the capitalist economy along with the parties of the centre-left or social democracy.

\* The central character of the self-emancipation and self-organization of peoples, in the perspective of overthrowing capitalism.

\* An ecosocialist project which combines both the satisfaction of social needs and the respect and balance of our ecosystem. In this sense, we have much to learn much from the indigenous peoples of South America and their relationship to the land.

\* Socialist democracy as a project of society: self-management of the economy, democracy and pluralism of parties and social movements.

These are some themes for discussion in order to advance along the road of bringing together all anti-capitalists on an international level. They are the first ideas that we will defend in the process of constitution of a new International.

Lastly, Chavez's call for a Fifth International also constitutes a point of support when it poses the question of a new International, independently of the Second (Socialist) International of which organizations like the social democratic parties, the Mexican PRI and the Brazilian PT are members. But it is also necessary to clarify a question in the construction of a new International, that of the difference between state policies and the development of a political project. One thing is to conclude economic and commercial agreements with states which have anti-imperialist governments, to conclude such agreements with other states, including some which have reactionary regimes, or to oppose attacks of imperialism against certain countries. It is quite another thing to give political support to regimes like those of the Chinese Communist Party or the Islamic Republic of Iran... The project of the Fifth International cannot in any way at all be associated with these regimes.

Once again, this call creates the conditions for a new international discussion, indissociable from solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution. It is in this spirit that the Fourth international, its organizations and its militants, will answer "Present"!

# West looks on as repression escalates

23 November 2009, by **Fred Leplat**

Now over 285,000 Tamils who lived in the North of the island are interned - allegedly to be screened for links with the LTTE - in what are nothing less than concentration camps.

Despite its criticism of the Sri Lankan government's conduct in the war Britain has allocated £4.8million to assist in the "resettlement" of those interned. This resettlement may mean that Tamils are dispersed over the island and not allowed to return to their homes.

Since the establishment of the camps 60,000 Tamils have been freed. Amnesty International has called for the immediate release of all the prisoners and warned of a major public health disaster waiting to happen, especially with the approaching monsoon season.

## No access to camps

The fact that the Sri Lankan government denies the conditions in the camps and refuses access to NGOs such as the Red Cross, can only raise the question of what is happening there. These camps must be closed immediately, and the Tamils allowed to go back to their homes and administer the aid themselves.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa has used the argument that this war was part of Bush and Blair's "war against terror" to act with as much impunity as possible. But the terror unleashed on the Tamils was too much even for the US, well known for supporting other wars such as that conducted by Israel against Gaza in which war crimes were committed.

The conduct of the Sri Lankan army was so appalling that a US State Department report published in October states "incidents that

occurred during the final months of the conflict between the government and the LTTE might constitute violations of international humanitarian law or crimes against humanity". This report also condemns the LTTE for the forcible recruitment of children to serve as soldiers and its indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

The government has called this report "unsubstantiated and devoid of corroborative evidence", but the head of the army has nevertheless gone to the US to discuss human rights violations. It has also expelled James Elder, a senior UNICEF official, for speaking out against the treatment of Tamil civilians. In February this year Gordon Brown tried to placate public opinion in Britain about the viciousness of the army assault by appointing Des Browne as a "special envoy" to Sri Lanka. But President Mahinda Rajapaksa rejected this special envoy as "intrusive". Up until the present crisis, Britain and the USA were some of Mahinda Rajapaksa's best friends and the top two recipients of Sri Lanka's exports. The President has visited twice Britain in recent years and shaken hands with both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown at Downing Street. During the last 10 years, more than £48million worth of British arms were sold to Sri Lanka, including £14million since 2006 when the Sri Lankan government unilaterally broke the ceasefire with the LTTE which had been brokered by the Norwegians in 2002.

## Back to business

The snub to Brown's "special envoy" is only a temporary diplomatic row and normal relations with imperialist countries and their agencies are being resumed. In May, an US\$12.9billion request for an emergency loan from the IMF was turned down, but in October Sri Lanka received an emergency IMF credit of

US\$2.6billion. This was just a few weeks after Mahinda Rajapaksa increased the military budget by 20% to a record US\$1.6billion. Even after the war was declared over, Sri Lanka continues with its military drive by launching a recruitment campaign for 100,000 soldiers. The actions of successive governments in Sri Lanka are reminiscent of Zionist governments in Israel in their treatment of Palestinians. The racist mood of the Sinhala majority in the island absolves the government from any inhibitions. It feels confident to continue discrimination against Tamils with impunity and attacks against those campaigning for national and democratic rights. The end of the war has been used by President Mahinda to eliminate the LTTE and prevent a renewal of the fight for national rights by Tamils which successive pogroms since independence have failed to quell. The government organised celebrations for its military victory in the 26-year civil war as a green light to step up the persecution of Tamils but also of all those who speak up of democratic rights in Sri Lanka. Amnesty International produced a report in June documenting how over 20 years successive Sri Lankan governments have tolerated serious human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, killings and torture. Over 10,000 people are held without trial, some for over a decade, under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

## Journalists under attack

Journalists critical of the government, even if they are no friends of the LTTE, are regularly threatened and often assassinated, like Lasantha Wickrematunge, editor of the Sunday Leader. More than 12 journalists have been killed since 2006. Others face long prison sentences, such as the

Tamil journalist J S Tissainayagam whose case has been taken up by PEN, the human rights organisation defending persecuted writers. On the 31 August 2009 J S Tissainayagam was sentenced to 20 years' hard labour under the PTA, for "causing communal disharmony" in articles published in 2006 in North-Eastern Monthly. He was convicted on the basis of his confession under torture. Socialists, such as those of the NSSP (Nava Sama Samaja Party), who have campaigned against the government are also being targeted. The refusal of governments since independence to reach a just political solution with the Tamils has driven many of them to embrace a military solution, including acts of terror, as being the only way to achieve an independent state free from discrimination. In the long run a military victory was impossible against the superior forces of the Sri Lanka army.

The nationalism of the LTTE prevented it from seeking political allies from the working class and peasants in other communities of the island who were also suffering from the economic consequences of neo-liberalism over the last thirty years. The military victory of the Sri Lanka government in May against the LTTE does not resolve the political problems

that led to this 26-year civil war and the struggle for the right of self-determination for the Tamil people continues. In Britain, a broad-based solidarity campaign like the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, is needed that would call for a boycott, disinvestment and sanctions against the brutal regime in Sri Lanka and for the punishment of those responsible for war crimes and abuses of human rights.

## Backstory

The racism endured by the Tamils is a legacy of the British Empire which established its rule by entrenching communalist divisions. Tamils and Sinhalese have lived on the island for centuries together and do have some differences in language and religion. When independence was won in 1948, the British Governor General's constitution offered the sizeable Tamil minority no protection. Sinhalese nationalists have regularly launched pogroms, such as in 1958, 1977 and 1983, when Tamils protested against discrimination. Thousands were killed and tens of thousands fled abroad. The actions of the Sri Lanka government against the Tamils can only be described as ethnic cleansing if not genocide. "Genocide" is defined by the UN as any act "committed with

the intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group". This word can adequately describe the massacres of the Tamil people earlier this year, and the continued imprisonment of 285,000 in concentration camps.

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# Three main parties agree to savage the working class

**23 November 2009, by Alan Thornett**

There was complete unity between the three parties on this central point - the working class must pay the price for the crisis - despite the obvious fact that the crisis was created by the bankers and the debt is largely owed to the bankers.

Vote Lib Dem, said Nick Clegg, and we will make savage cuts in public spending.

Vote for us, said New Labour, and we will impose four years of austerity to repay the debt - though we won't start until 2011!

Vote Tory, said George Osborne, and we will launch a massive onslaught on you (ie the working class) from the moment we come to office.

Osborne went on to spell out an initial £7 billion of cuts the Tories would make immediately if they had the

chance out of the £100 billion they say will be necessary if they win the election. Vote for us, he said, and we will freeze the pay and cut jobs of public sector workers and make you wait longer for your pensions. If you are out of work vote for us and we will cut your benefits - if we don't stop them altogether.

It was like asking for turkeys to vote for Christmas.

## 'Toryism with a human face'

At the Tory Party conference this was a part of a wider shift to the right after several years of bogus 'Toryism with a human face'.

Cameron's speech was a sustained attack on regulation and collective solutions, in the tradition of Thatcher and Reagan - when it is patently clear that it has been the deregulations of the market championed by them which created the crisis in the first place. It echoed Reagan's mantra that "governments are not the solution but the problem".

This fits in well with the right-wing populist and anti-semitic allies the Tories have chosen in the European Parliament having found the main centre-right grouping too moderate.

Making such openly provocative statements of this kind also reflects a high degree of confidence on the part of the ruling class as to the response to the crisis from the workers movement. Only time will tell whether such confidence is justified.

However, the real problem was never one of too much government but of too little government - alongside the bankrupt policies that successive governments chose to pursue. In fact it is patently clear that it is only governments, and the resources they control, which can address the crisis.

Despite all-party unity on making the working class pay for the crisis, there are now significant differences between Labour and the Tories. Tory policy has opened up the first significant ideological divide between the Tories and New Labour since the latter was founded.

Labour has adopted a neo-Keynesian policy of monetary and fiscal stimuli to bolster the economy which has been emulated by most governments across the world. The Tories, on the other hand, along with the US Republican right, have argued for leaving it all to market forces.

Had the Tories been in office now and applied this policy the result would

have been a collapse of the banking system, a much deeper recession and unemployment twice or three times its current rate.

Not that new Labour policy has been adequate, far from it. But their failure was the failure to spend enough money to stimulate the economy not too much. And they have failed to spend it on the right things. What they needed was a crash programme to change the economy over to renewable energy, tackle climate change, and create jobs - something they have consistently resisted.

They rightly nationalised many of the banks but it was out of practical necessity not political conviction. As a result, having pumped money into them, they have refused to exercise even minimal governmental control over them (let alone popular or workers control) and they intend to hand them back to the private sector as soon as possible.

The remarkable thing about the Tories and their policy of massive and immediate cuts is that they have emerged from the conference season with their big lead in the opinion polls intact, and still look by far the most likely winner in the general election next year.

Apparently they calculated that they were able to announce their real intentions because promising a series of very unpopular measures would make them look like an honest and serious party in the wake of the MPs expenses scandal and would get them votes!

That such a proposition could even be contemplated is testimony to the disastrous trivialisation of politics that has taken place under New Labour. We have seen the removal of the ideological divide as all three main parties moved to occupy the same conservative political ground. The result has been the growth of personality politics and a right-wing political discourse dominating the 24-hour media.

This has been compounded by the decline of the unions at both industrial and political level and the failure of the unions to be a significant factor as

the impact of the crisis has hit home.

All this has meant that although the Labour response to the crisis was better than that of the Tories, this has been obscured by a slick Tory media operation, gross media bias, and an astonishing inability of Brown and new Labour ministers to put their own case across. As a result the emergence of the new ideological divide has not been understood by most of the electorate.

The adoption of neo-Keynesian measures by new Labour does not mean that they have retreated from the social liberalism of the last fifteen years. What we have seen has been the adoption, out of practical necessity, of Keynesian financial measures by a neo-liberal party and neo-liberal politicians. It does not signify a shift to the left.

## Labour's lack of answer

This is why Brown and Co have no answer to a resurgent Tory Party. They rule out as a first principle any radical policies which would re-energise their base. Big sections of the electorate would be galvanized by policies such as much higher levels of spending to save jobs, taxing the rich at much higher levels, a green energy revolution, making the bankers and the rich pay for the crisis, banning huge bonuses for bankers, or nationalising bankrupt industries on a permanent basis under democratic control.

In fact the only policy they have come up with since the conference is to sell off more public assets, from the Tote to the Dartford river crossing.

Brown's conference speech evaded major electoral reform for Westminster, something which would be a big vote-winner in itself. The best he could come up with was the so-called Alternative Vote system for Westminster, which would not, crucially, produce a proportional Parliament and would leave the corrupt two party system in place.

Brown's biggest problem, however, is

the crisis. His policy is based on the assumption that by the time of the election the economy will be on the way up, fiscal stimulus can be discontinued and he can start to claw back the debt. If this does not happen, and all the signs are that it is very unlikely, it will be back to the drawing board.

The advantage Cameron has is that the media now want a Tory government at all costs and are relentlessly in pursuing this aim. The Sun claims to have switched to the Tories but they have been rabidly pro-Tory for several years. The BBC now comes across increasingly as more sympathetic to the Tory party.

But what does New Labour expect? Their big mistake was to have made reliance on the media a point of principle in the first place. They decided that it was not active members that they needed to win elections but media support and media-based election campaigns. Now they are paying the price.

This was clear during the MPs expenses scandal, which has done serious damage to an already ailing political system. Whilst MPs of all three main parties were involved in scandals and corruption the media made sure that Labour paid the highest price. It was not just because they were the governing party, it was because the media had a project to make it happen.

This was evident in recent developments around the Legg Report which dominated Parliament from its

very first day back. Of course MPs deserve all they get for the expenses scandal, but the controversy reflects far deeper problems of democracy and accountability in the functioning of Parliament and the political system. The decision of Sir Thomas Legg to make his main target cleaning and gardening bills - by retrospective caps - is completely incomprehensible.

It had the advantage for the media, however, of putting Brown in the spotlight since the one issue which had come up with him was cleaning and gardening expenses. The duck houses and the moats, the house flipping, the bogus mortgage claims and capital gains tax evasion - far more serious issues but ones which effect Cameron and Osborne - went off the radar.

All this more than wiped out the feeble effects of the Labour Party conference at a stroke.

Of course one can rightly ask why Brown has to claim extra for his cleaning bills and not pay them from his normal salary. But the idea that submitting a cleaning bill rates the same as evading capital gains tax on profit from a house which had been paid for and improved at public expense is ridiculous.

All this creates an incredibly volatile run-up to the general election and an election in which almost anything could happen. It certainly creates an open general election, with large numbers of votes deflecting from the main parties to be won. It is this

situation which makes a united left challenge so important - though it is hard to be optimistic that the left collectively will rise to this occasion.

## BNP threat

It is a dangerous situation since if the left does not fill this space there are those on the far right, in the form of the BNP and UKIP, who will be more than willing to do so.

Nick Griffin may have performed badly on Question Time and looked like the lumpen fascist that he is but that does not mean that his appearance will not in the end benefit the far right. He was still able to tap into a seam of racism to which the other parties on the panel had no answer. In fact their only answer was to boast about how many people they are keeping out and how many they are sending back.

The appearance of Griffin has given the BNP massive publicity and a degree of respectability on which it can build. It is time for a step-change in anti-fascist activity along the lines of the tactics recently deployed against the English Defense League in Harrow and in Birmingham. We should be for mass mobilisations against the fascists, against state bans and for no platform in the media. We should stand in solidarity with all those who seek to mobilise on the streets against racism and fascism.

*This article is published in the November issue of Socialist Resistance*

# A life in the heart of the struggle

9 November 2009, by **Duncan Chapel, Liam Mac Uaid**



**Chris Harman**

<http://foroanticapitalista.blogspot.com>

A convinced revolutionary socialist all his adult life, Harman had played a key role in founding *Socialist Worker* and editing it until 2004. Harman was an internationalist from the start. That was reflected in myriad ways, from his participation in the Vietnam Solidarity

Campaign in the late 1960s to the symbolic location of his death: Cairo.

Harman was a polymath, gifted as an author, speaker, editor, leader and economist. His book *The Lost Revolution: Germany 1918 to 1923* is a

powerful tool for revolutionary socialists. His greatest work, *A Peoples' History of the World*, is invaluable. He was also outstanding as an activist and leader of the SWP and its forerunner, the International Socialists. Harman played a major role in helping the organisation develop its political direction and in explaining its choices to a radical audience. His famous 1990-91 debate with Ernest Mandel on the bureaucratic Stalinist dictatorships in *Quatrième Internationale* was translated into English and is still in print as *The Fallacies of State Capitalism*. His analysis of the SWP split from Respect was valued even by those who opposed the SWP's decision: it was translated by Inprecor and published in *Respect: Documents of the Crisis* as the clearest exposition of the SWP's

viewpoint.

Harman took his role as an SWP leader seriously, but that did not stop him from having a transparent and comradely working relationship with socialists outside the SWP. Last month he was an active participant in the [IIRE's economists seminar](#), in which most participants were Fourth Internationalists. While there, he spoke at a public meeting sponsored by *Grenzeloos*, the magazine of the Fourth International in The Netherlands.

As one of our comrades, Clement, put it on hearing the news: "Harman was for me the person from which I discovered Marxism, and which showed and revealed that revolutionary engagement was

compatible with highly demanding scientific investigation for understanding and changing the world." Harman's openness, his books and articles, his work in the struggle and the contribution he made to developing the socialist consciousness of tens of thousands of people are a fitting monument to his revolutionary life.

*Socialist Resistance editorial board,*

November 7 2009.

P.S. This tribute is in Spanish at [Foro Anticapitalista](#). Photos of Chris and others at the economists seminar are online at <http://bit.ly/2oFMZv> while the speeches by Chris, Claudio Katz and Michel Husson are available as audio files at <http://bit.ly/4fmACP>.

## Dedicated socialist, workers' defender and respected Intellectual

9 November 2009, by **Bertil Videt**



### Chris Harman

Photo: IIRE.org

A towering figure of the left in Europe, Harman was a pillar of the British revolutionary, anti-capitalist organisation, the Socialist Workers Party, and editor of the journal International Socialism. In 1999, he published his monumental work *A People's History of the World*, which represented the first attempt to provide a single bottom-up account of the development of human civilisation.

Chris Harman was dedicated to socialist politics, a defender of worker's struggles and a highly respected intellectual of the international left. His famous 1992 debate with Ernest Mandel, founder of the IIRE, on the bureaucratic Stalinist dictatorships in *Quatrième Internationale* was translated into English and is still in print as [The Fallacies of State Capitalism](#).

His death was especially shocking for those of us who spent time with him in October, here at the IIRE in Amsterdam, when he participated in our first international Seminar on the

Economic Crisis. During the seminar, Harman took part in a public meeting on the same theme, together with economists Claudio Katz from Argentina and Michel Husson from France. The talks from this public meeting can be downloaded as [mp3 files here](#).

The IIRE extends its warm condolences to the family, friends and comrades of Chris Harman.

*The International Institute for Research and Educations published this statement on 9 November.*

## Students occupy universities; mass

# demonstrations and broad solidarity throughout the country

**6 November 2009, by The international press working group, Occupied University of Vienna**



On October 22, students' dissatisfaction turned into savage protest. At noon several hundred students from the Academy of Fine Arts (which was occupied the day before) and the University of Vienna gathered to make known their desperate situation. In a spontaneous action they squatted in Austria's largest auditorium in the main university building. The news of the occupation spread rapidly and soon students from several other departments joined.

What started as a spontaneous act of protest, within the course of just a week, evolved into massive student protests throughout all major Austrian university cities. The University of Vienna, for example, has been constantly occupied by several thousand people. Self-organised action groups have built an efficient infrastructure that includes a public kitchen, first aid and legal consulting. In addition to that 100 work groups have been formed, whose main subject is the discussion of strategy and demands.

On October 28, seven days after the initial occupation, Vienna witnessed one of the largest education-related rallies in Austrian history, with 40,000 people taking part. The following day, in Graz, Austria's second-largest city, a demonstration with several thousand

people took place.

The students have presented a broad catalogue of demands to government and university policy makers. Demands include the democratisation of all aspects of university life, a massive increase in funding, free and equal admission for all with the necessary qualifications and the implementation of accessible/barrier-free studying for those with special needs. The students are also calling for a ``50% women'' clause for all positions in university administration and the education system.

Along with various organisations and groups from all corners of Austrian society and the world, many university professors and administrative staff have demonstrated their solidarity with the protesting students. This and the incredible power and hope that has developed, encourage the movement to persist and grow until the students' demands are met.

The movement that has formed in the wake of the protests is opening up free social spaces, practising grassroots democracy and invigorating university life with self-organised lectures, workshops and task groups. Students are getting involved in an unprecedented fashion and are receiving great public support for their concerns.

Leading figures from politics, culture and society at large consider the protest movement as a seismograph for problems that reach far beyond the

education system. So far, more than 350 university lecturers and researchers have declared solidarity with the occupying students and many actively participate in the protests. The highly precarious working conditions that university staff increasingly face, including short-term contracts and little job security, has a detrimental effect on the quality of research and teaching.

After the widening of the protests and the numerous declarations of solidarity from all over the world, the Austrian government finally reacted. The minister of science and research Johannes Hahn promised 34 million euro from the ministry's reserve budget. The protesters believe this gesture is not in the least adequate to effectively solve the range of structural problems.

Furthermore, there is criticism that the minister still has not approached the protesters to discuss their demands in detail.

On November 5, the protest movement is planning a nationwide day of action in order to strengthen their demands and further encourage public debate about the Austrian education system.

Contact the students of the Occupied University of Vienna at [internationalpress.unsereuni@gmail.com](mailto:internationalpress.unsereuni@gmail.com), tel.: +43 699 1920 3371 and at <http://www.unsereuni.at>

*Nov 3 2009*

# The impact of the world economic crisis in Latin America

6 November 2009, by **Claudio Katz**



The crisis has produced in Latin America a generalized collapse of the stock markets and capital out-flights that reduced credit. Commodities depreciation induces recession, unemployment expands, and the cycle of unequal growth, which dominated in the past five years, ends. Moreover, the expectation of a disconnection has been diluted. And the protection of three economic shields in some countries -like substantial reserves, low debt or fiscal surplus - is already not enough. Some economists estimate that the fiscal situation in Latin America looks better than in Eastern Europe. They also estimate also that exports reduction will be easier to digest than in Africa. But the main problem in these evaluations is their ephemeral character. They appear and disappear from journalistic stories with amazing speed. One day, it has Latin America out of the storm, but the next day it has it in the center of the storm.

In my opinion, Latin America receives three effects of the global crisis. Firstly, a global over-accumulation crisis, that was generated by the concentration of fictitious capital in the financial sphere. Given the reduced scope of personal debts in the region, this effect does not translate for now in banks affected by bad loans. However, the crack has created a necessity for liquidity in the central economies, which produces considerable funds withdrawals. In particular, foreign banks transfer resources from Latin America to their central offices.

Latin America supports, secondly, over-production of goods, which characterizes the current crisis. This

surplus was generated by the model of global competition based on reducing wages that was generalized by neo-liberalism. This disequilibrium effect is verified particularly in the most globalized branches of the regional industry. The automobile sector suffers, for instance, the same surplus of goods that hits the metropolitan economies.

But the biggest threat to the region comes from the decline in prices of raw materials. This collapse reverses the growth of the last five years, which was supported by a significant improvement in the terms of trade. In the last two months the economic situation in Latin America has seen a financial relief. There is also some commercial relief due to the recovery of the prices of commodities, especially food. However, no meaningful conclusions can be drawn yet from these cyclical movements.

This is the text of a talk given at the Socialism 2009 event in Chicago, July 2009.

## Social impact

But the central problem is the devastating social impact of the crisis. The World Bank predicts that there will be six million new poor in Latin America due to stagnation of the economies, particularly hitting workers in the formal market and the middle class. The situation is more dramatic in Mexico, the Latin American country most affected by the crisis. Mexico faces the collapse of the market which absorbs 90% of its exports, in a context of explosive return of migrants, social tragedies and organized crime. It was also beaten by the swine flu and the subsequent collapse of tourism. The old romance with NAFTA has become a nightmare. Very serious is also the situation of the small Central

American countries attached to the inflow of remittances.

Many economists argue that Latin America can also withstand the hurricane if it adopts proper Keynesian policies. These initiatives are already being implemented, especially in the three major economies of the region, to improve liquidity, expand the public credit and subsidizing the industry. But the true intention of these measures is to rescue the local capitalists with the resources needed by the helpless public.

These guidelines rely on a positive reaction of the powerful. They assume that the flow of government money induce capitalists to maintain the level of activity. But they forget that this decision depends on the questionable preservation of profitability. The plans also seek to support consumption, but without measures of income redistribution.

In that moment the discussions on the adequacy and effectiveness of these measures have won the news. But, in fact, viability depends on the magnitude of the crisis rather than the wisdom of the remedies. Monetary and fiscal anti-cyclical policies have an impact within certain limits. Demand may revive or halt the fall in output in a recessionary environment, but they have little influence on a big depression.

There is a great difference between Latin America and the central economies. United States, West Europe and Japan have the resources to try to limit the crisis. They can rehearse reactivations with the support of the Treasury and print Dollars, Euros and Yens. But Latin America has not these resources. We have weak money at international level. Another example of these



differences. In the crisis the central economies increase the fiscal deficit, while our region remains attached to surplus rules. In summary at economic level, the crisis increases all the traditional problems of Latin American economy.

#### Political effect

In all the Latin American countries there is a great coincidence in the negatives consequences of the economic storm. But some analysts believe that the current adversity will have positive effects if it repeats what happened in the 30s. They recall that the inter-war debacle created auspicious conditions to the development of the subsequent processes of industrialization.

But they forget that the initial impact of the Great Depression was a painful depreciation of commodities. Import substitution appeared only later, as a result of protectionism and the world war. And it was implemented in a region that was able to stay out of this conflagration. Today any reproduction of the post-war framework collides with the absence of inter-war confrontation, and also with the increased internationalization of the economy.

The important thing is to see that an economic collapse in the center of capitalism does not necessarily extend the range of action in the periphery. The crisis of the 70s showed that the contrary can happen. Initially, that shock coincided with a favorable framework for the Third World. But this course was abruptly closed in the 80s with the neo-liberal offensive. The brief easing of international inequality has been replaced by a new phase of global polarization, which lasted until the end of the twentieth century. This background illustrates how limited and fragile can be a period of autonomy in the periphery.

One the central point for the future of Latin America is the crisis in the United State's domination. These crisis stems from political extra-regional military failures in Middle East and anti-imperialist rebellions in the area. U.S. domination has been very affected at economic level by the failure and the stagnation of Free

Trade Agreements.

Moreover, much of the South American governments have taken away from its old subordination to the North, as a result of major political and social upheavals. For example during the last year the United States was sidelined in negotiations to amend the Colombia's military incursion in Ecuadorian territory and the failed right wing coup in Bolivia. It had to suffer further the expulsion of the two ambassadors in Bolivia and Venezuela.

In my opinion, Obama's policies for Latin America can be explained as a consequence of two processes: the crisis of extreme neo-liberalism that prevailed during the 80s and 90s and popular resistance between 2000 and 2005. For these reasons we see today a change in attitude and a shift in rhetoric of Obama, compared to Bush.

The best fact that illustrates this new context is the decision adopted by the Organization of American States to drop the restrictions that prevented Cuba from being part of that organization. -This decision means a political victory for Cuba. The leaders of that country have correctly argued that they do not want to go back to an organization that always served the interests of imperialism. Nevertheless, the incident illustrates the end of the political isolation that the revolution suffered during the 1990s.

Some analysts estimate that context will force United States to ease its control over Latin America. But in reality, Obama has no plans to implement significant changes in the Latin American region. He will withdraw the prisoners in Guantanamo, but not return the enclave to Cuba. He will get some permission to travel to the island, but without lifting the embargo. He will seek diplomatic approaches to Cuba, but he will avoid acknowledging the imperial defeat. And it is not clear if he will continue to cover the state terrorism in Colombia and the political harassment of Bolivia and Venezuela. Surely Obama will pick a combination of carrot and stick, with more diplomatic incidence than brazen brutality. But he will maintain the imperial policy based on the Monroe Doctrine. And we can see the

continuity of this policies in the revival of IV fleet under the pretext of drug trafficking or terrorism, the great military power of the Southern Command in Miami, the military bases of Colombia, in Peru and a novel hypothesis of military intervention in Mexico.

For some analysts, all these facts are regrettable legacies of the past. They believe that Latin America will benefit from structural and inevitable decline of the United States imperialism. I don't share this opinion. The U.S. military still has no rival in sight and is accepted by its competitors. This lack of European or Asian military replacement is particularly crucial. American supremacy is going through a crisis whose end is unknown. It is not written anywhere that will end with the rise of an opponent or recycling one's own leadership. It is impossible to determine, for now, if the U.S. is going through a limited or permanent setback.

It is true that in Latin America the USA power lost some economic gravitation in the last decade compared to his European competitors. But the European Union does not aspire to replace his rival and has been limited to testing their Free trade agreements modelled to FTAA. It is also true that the U.S. has had to tolerate the first commercial foray of China, but these presences threaten less than Europe the traditional American domination. In conclusion, for the moment no data is corroborating the argument of resignation of the United States primacy in Latin America.

#### Right and Center-Left

More important for the immediate future is the political strategy of Latin America's right. I think that the conservatives and neo-liberals prepare a counter-offensive in all the countries. They are trying to seize the financial crisis to regain the offensive. With the excuse of attracting foreign investment they propose fiscal adjustment policies. They also say that during this difficult situation it becomes even more necessary to make sacrifices in favor of the capitalists.

We can see many signs of this right-wing offensive, especially through the media that encourages conservative responses of middle classes. The examples of this campaign are the attempts by the Colombian government to stay in power indefinitely, the right recover in the electoral area in Chile or Mexico, the political victories of agro-business in Argentina and the pressures to the new president of Paraguay to resign.

But some analysts exaggerate this tendency. They estimate that the entire political context has become negative. Until now, the right has lost major battles in South America. The coup in Bolivia, failed, the Colombian military attack to Ecuador failed and the attempt to consummate any trial of regional separatism failed.

I think that is difficult to restore the context of unanimity and pure domination of the right that we saw in the 90s. This right-wing campaign has very doubtful chances of success because in a lot of countries the people recall the devastating consequences of Neo-liberal policies of the 1990s. The outcome of recent elections indicates a contradictory context. The new government in Panama was recovered by the right, but in El Salvador the significant electoral victory was for the Farabundo Martí front. Even Honduras, a country traditionally aligned with the United States, has now developed a very independent foreign policy.

A political fact that is equally important is the conservative regression of the center-left. The most striking example of this conservative turn is Lula in Brazil, who came to government after a long process of accumulation of workers organization since 1980s around the Workers' Party. Lula's government has demobilized, depoliticized the people, blocked all social struggles and sustained previous governments' capitalist policies without any significant variation. Lula has favored specially agro-business. He ratified the expulsion of small subsistence farmers to benefit exporters and landowners. This has generated a deep disappointment and criticism from the Movement of Landless

People.

However some analyst in the left propose to support the center-left hoping they will provide in the future some improvements for the people and contribute to growing people's power. But they experience shows that they are wrong. Center-left governments clearly represent interests of the ruling classes and reproduce capitalism.

However some of them say that those kinds of governments will favor multipolar scenarios. They believe that Latin America could take advantage of this change in the geopolitical context, to adopt more autonomous policies. I think that a period of greater dispersion capitalist forces on the planet is certainly a possibility. But it is crucial to stress that by itself it would not benefit popular majorities. Rather it will strengthen the local ruling classes associated with the hegemonic powers. A possible incorporation of new partners in a multipolar scenario would renew oppression and obstruct popular emancipation.

In South America, Brazil is the great candidate to lead this oppressive multi-polarity, because despite the low growth in recent years, Brazilian transnational corporations have been consolidated throughout the region. The main project of these companies - sustained by government funding- is a set of planned highways and waterways. They act with aggressive business diplomacy and that policy has led to numerous conflicts with Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay.

It is important also to remember that Brazil led occupation forces that replaced the Marines in Haiti. It ensures that there is a neo-liberal policy, which exacerbates the tragedy of hunger, poverty and emigration, using police methods. These actions have facilitated the entry of Brazilian firms in the Caribbean. Lula repeated the policy developed by Spain in the 90's, to favor the Spanish companies in Latin America. Brazil subordinates even the continuity of MERCOSUR to its leadership.

In many negotiations of global commerce, Brazil abandoned their

allies to seek a compromise with developed countries. To be the leader of the South American bloc, Brazil needs to politically neutralize Venezuela and resolve trade disputes with Argentina. In this strategy of the dominant classes, Brazil seeks to fill the spaces created by the crisis of U.S. domination, but without colliding with the first power.

In my opinion in its new role Brazil is playing a dominant sub-imperialist role. The notion of sub-imperialism helps to overcome the simple center-periphery pattern and indicates the variety of relationships in the world market. It indicates the existence of intermediate formations, which some thinkers have theorized with the notion of semi-periphery.

Lula in Brazil is the most important example of the conservative regression of the center-left. But we can see the same way in others South American governments, like Michel Bachelet in Chile or Cristina Kirchner in Argentina. They acted together with the United States in the preparation of the last meeting of the Group of 20 in London.

They sustained the economic agenda imposed by the United States to hold the dollar and provide funding for the bailout of U.S. banks with resources of the rest of the world. Theirs politics bloc the possibilities of a debate over a collective response to the crisis, that is being developed at the United Nations.

But above all, the center left governments sustain the IMF as the institution that should be responsible of the financial reorganization of the world. They do so with the illusion of reforming the agency, when the only possible progressive politics is to close the IMF and build another institution from scratch.

I think that there is a social underling transformation in the dominants classes that explain all this political regression, especially in Brazil and Argentina. This change was a transformation of the old national bourgeoisie -promoters of the domestic market- in local bourgeoisie, who prioritize export and partnership with transnational corporations. This

multinational turn of the dominant classes has been consolidated in the last two decades. It is a mistake to see South America like a neo-colonial region similar for example to several regions in Africa. And it is incorrect to see the main local ruling classes as a puppet of the empire. They act as groups with own interests and strategies, in a framework that differs substantially from the old semi-colonial status.

#### Radical nationalist governments

But in the left it is important to see another change. In my opinion, the most interesting political shift in Latin America is the consolidation of radical nationalist governments, in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, particularly in the electoral field. They won fifteen elections in Venezuela, three in Bolivia, and five in Ecuador.

These governments differ from center-left administrations (Tabaré, Cristina, Lula, Bachelet) at three levels: they use popular mobilization, conflict with imperialism and the ruling classes and seek measures of income redistribution. In Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela there have been devoted important democratic advances through new constitutions, adopted after strong electoral disputes against the right. In Bolivia, for example, the church was separated from the state and foreign military bases were prohibited. Governments of these three countries is trying reformist economic policies, based in public investment and the improvement of purchasing power.

One keys aspect of these measures are Venezuela's nationalizations that try to go towards the industrialization of the economy, in the absence of a national bourgeoisie. It is important that Chavez calls to the mobilization of workers in order to exercise worker control of the nationalized enterprises. But the radical nationalist governments face major dilemmas. They maintain popular support, but some concessions to capital tend to produce fatigue. For example in Bolivia, the speed of social transformation in the agriculture is very slow. It was chosen to incorporate several demands to the Constitution of the oligarchy

(especially the non-retroactivity of the limits on land ownership). In Venezuela the social inequality is recycled and the corruption was recreates. In Ecuador there has been tension between the government and the indigenous movement.

But I think that the global crisis opens an opportunity to overcome the wear with new impulses, reinforcing a regional political-axis with Cuba and revitalizing the Bolivarian Alternative for the America (ALBA). This association introduced early solidarity exchange, reaffirmed anti-imperialist actions and raised social reforms.

It is time to overcome these difficulties radicalizing nationalist processes. The priority of course is to neutralize the right and prevent the return of the Conservatives. But it is also essential to avoid a freeze on social transformations, which stabilizes the layer of oppressors germinating within the popular processes. We have to avoid involution of the popular political processes such as what happened in Mexico after the revolution. I think that the radicalizing nationalist processes are the most progressive perspective for these countries, but it will be a very diverse and contradictory process. We have to understand this complexity and avoid the sectarian posture. This position ignores the differences between Lula and Chavez, dismisses progresses of radical nationalism, abstains from participating in elections and above all does not define a viable path for building socialism. I believe that the best way for the development of the left is the convergence of socialism with revolutionary nationalism that led to the triumph of the Cuban revolution. We have a strong tradition of Latin American Marxism that explains the theoretical foundations of this convergence based on the life and experiences of thinkers and activists such as the Cuban Mella, the Peruvian Mariategui and the Argentine Che Guevara.

#### Social struggle

Finally it is very important to underline the importance of the social struggle. The future of our region depends on this battle. In any coming scenario people will suffer harsh

blows if they fail to strengthen their resistance to capital. This conclusion is the main lesson of the financial collapses the region suffered during the past decade. These debacles led revolts that allowed accumulating some significant political and social experiences.

Uprisings in Bolivia reversed a long rightist cycle, demoted several neo-liberal presidents in Ecuador, raised a marked polarization in Venezuela and led to the historic uprising of 2001 in Argentina. They also generalized the battle against privatization, for nationalization of natural resources and for democratizing political life.

The oppressed of Latin America are aware of the dramatic rescue of the capitalists and must be prepared to confront the aggression that accompanies the new social relief of bankers. The conjuncture is showing a lower intensity of popular resistance, compared to the big stage of popular uprisings that occurred between 2000 and 2005. But there was a significant rise in Guadeloupe and Martinique in the Caribbean and we have seen in the last week the struggle of indigene in Peru.

But the popular resistance needs a program of social measures to confront with the economic collapse. It is important to know that in the last months some social movements, political organizations and the radical economists discuss alternative proposals, at several meetings in Caracas, Buenos Aires and Belem. These programs reject the regulation and state control measures that socialize capitalists' losses. Call for mobilization to monitor how public resources are used. The proposals that have been outlined prioritize the maintenance of employment, the prohibition of dismissal, the distribution of working hours without affecting wages and the nationalization of factories closing or firing workers.

These measures are necessary against government complicity with employers cutting jobs. State brokering negotiations to reduce wages in exchange for preserving employment, is another face of the ongoing social outrage. Three measures under

discussion are particularly acute. First, the nationalization without compensation, of any kind of financial system. The objective of this measure is to ensure control of credit in the current explosive situation. The rescue of the bankers should be replaced by the expropriation of their property. States must recover the cost of keeping the banks in operation, absorbing the properties of its shareholders and directors. Ecuador's new Constitution, which prohibits the state to take private debts, provides a basis for this action.

The second vital step is the suspension, revision or cancellation of the external and internal debts. While the crisis clears billionaire liabilities in the central economies, Latin America continues to pay. The terms of systemic risk in use in the U.S. for recalculating the amount and timing of obligations, is not implemented in the region.

It is time to follow the path that began Ecuador, to implement a comprehensive audit aimed at determining the actual liabilities of the fraud. If implemented in a consistent manner, that suspension of payment of unlawful debt will have a huge impact on the region. It will replace repeated default by a sovereign decision to

place creditors in the dock.

The third measure imposed by the crisis is the nationalization of oil, gas and mining. This would preserve the resources that Latin America needs to protect from the global tremor. This road has already been initiated by Venezuela and Bolivia. But nationalizations are taken with much hesitation and using erroneous indemnity payments. In the middle of falling prices of raw materials such outlays can be fatal. For example, the payment of compensations to the owners of the nationalized enterprises has been so far very negative, until now has had a cost of 15,000 million dollars.

In conclusion, I think that the global crisis changes the general perception about what drastic measures usually are. In the midst of a collapse that has cracked the neo-liberal ideology, no one is scared by calling to nationalize or suspend debt payments. It is time to take advantage of this to protect the population of Latin America, by making blunt decisions.

Socialism

Final conclusion. Latin America played a leading role in the resistance against neo-liberalism, but the current crisis

poses another challenge: to take an advanced role in the battle against capitalism. This system is responsible for the current disaster and its continuity requires further suffering of people. Only one way of eradicating exploitation, waste and inequality will counteract poverty and unemployment. This path requires anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist action. The answer will be effective if it facilitates a transition to socialism, as opposed to all projects to regulate capitalism. Statism in vogue tends to recreate the crisis, after arduous rescues borne by the population.

Only a socialist perspective will enable an economy to the service needs of the people with democratic forms of planning to reduce (and subsequently removed) the traumatic upheavals of the capitalist cycle. The future of socialism will not save any connection with the failed experiences of bureaucratic totalitarianism of the twentieth century. It will launch collective self-management that is needed to forge an egalitarian society. Finally I would like to say congratulations again for this conference. In this kind of activities we began to work together, Latin American and North American peoples, in our common battle for socialism.

## What to do about Religious Fundamentalism?

2 November 2009, by **Farooq Tariq**



"Let's deal with the ISI [Pakistani Intelligence Agency] and the Pakistan military and let's go recruit these mujahideen. Here is a very strong argument which is... it wasn't a bad investment to end the Soviet Union but let's be careful with what we sow... because we will harvest," Hillary Clinton, 23 April 2009.

Once again Pakistan has become the

focus of world attention. Every day there is news about the latest suicide attack or military operations, with killings, injuries and displaced communities. Lately schools were ordered closed for over a week. Even children talk about death and suicidal attacks.

With over 125 police checkpoints in Islamabad, it has become a fortress city. Lahore and other large cities suffer the same fate: there are police road blockades everywhere. After each terrorist attack authorities issue

another security high alert and set up additional barriers. How ironic that, until recently, officials and the media described these "terrorists" as Mujahidin fighting for an Islamic world.

Under immense pressure by Obama administration, the Pakistan government has launched a series of military operations in various parts of the country. This has led to an unprecedented wave of killings, with hundreds of thousands more forced to leave their home for temporary

shelter.

Pushed out of Afghanistan after 9/11, religious fanatics from different nationalities have found refuge in Pakistan. They have two aims: to make Pakistan more Islamic and to teach the government a lesson for its close relationship with American imperialism. However the price is paid by ordinary people.

Religious fanatics are new fascists. They believe in the physical elimination of their political opponents. Although they may appear to be anti-imperialist, they are not a progressive force. Instead they are an extreme right-wing force that wants to turn back the clock of the history.

## The religion of the state

Pakistan is also known as Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Religion is part and parcel of the state. The constitutions and the judiciary are all beleaguered with Islamic demagoguery. Most of the educational syllabus is also colored with Islamic ideology; even scientific explanations somehow manage to drag in religion.

Religion has become a way of life. Every donation to charity ends up in coffers of the religious institutions. Life without religion is unthinkable.

Although the only rationale for the Pakistani state is to be a place for Muslims, it was to be a secular Muslim state. When the state was formed in 1947 the population was not fundamentalist. But as time went on Pakistan adopted an Islamic ideology that today gives these fanatics a more favorable ground for the promotion of their dream of an Islamic country.

At the end of the 1970s, with the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, Washington decided it needed to develop an indigenous counter force. In order to fight "communism" in Afghanistan, Washington worked closely with Pakistan's military dictator, General Zia Ul Haque, and the Pakistani intelligence, the Inter-Services intelligence (ISI). There are dozens of books explaining the rise of

Taliban and Mujahedeen under the direct guidance of the Americans, but the ISI had no reason to cut off the funding after the Soviet retreat in 1987. If the Americans were no longer interested in these guerillas, the ISI found these jihadis useful in its conflict with India over Kashmir.

Second, there are many religious political parties in Pakistan. Jamaati islami and Jamiat Ulmai Islam, along with other Sunni and Wahabi political parties, are all for an Islamic revolution. They also give a political support to the religious fanatics of Taliban and Alqaida.

## Hillary Clinton admits American role

Even Hillary Clinton, the US foreign secretary, acknowledged Washington's responsibility in promoting the religious fanatics. Here is her admission to a US Congressional sub-committee on April 23, 2009, that the Americans had effectively created the current disastrous situation in Afghanistan:

"It was President Reagan in partnership with Congress led by Democrats who said you know what it sounds like a pretty good idea. let's deal with the ISI [Pakistani intelligence agency] and the Pakistan military and let's go recruit these mujahideen. Here is a very strong argument which is. it wasn't a bad investment to end the Soviet Union but let's be careful with what we sow. because we will harvest."

However, it is not only Americans that are harvesting what they have sown. Numerous Pakistani governments were ready to do whatever the Americans wanted them out of sheer financial greed. Since 1978 the different governments have all been a close US allies. This includes 20 years of military dictatorship under Zia (1977-1988) and General Musharraf (1999-2008). These various governments enabled the religious fanatics to establish religious educational institutions that have

changed the country's religious culture.

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## The Madrasas' tactics

One of the main strategies used by the religious fanatics to bring jihad to the youth of Pakistan was through opening religious schools (madrasas). They mushroomed under the General Zia ul Haque dictatorship. At present, there are religious schools throughout Pakistan. Of the more than 15,000 registered madrasas, about half are in the Punjab. Experts estimate the numbers are higher: when the state tried to count them in 2005, a fifth of the area in the province refused to register.

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The madrasas found a place among the working people as they were marketed as offering a free education with religious teachings. In fact, failure of the government to provide adequate resources for free public education paved the way for the progress of the madrasas. Pakistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. The government spends less than 3 percent on education. Only about half of Pakistanis can read and write, far below the proportion to countries with a similar per-capita income, such as Vietnam. According to UNESCO, one out of three school-age Pakistani children does not attend school; of those who do attend, a third drop out by the fifth grade. The enrollment of girls is among the lowest in the world, lagging behind Ethiopia and Yemen.

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Though madrasas make up only about 7 percent of primary schools in Pakistan, their influence are amplified by the inadequacy of public education and the innate religiosity of the countryside, where two-thirds of the population lives. These madrasas are the real breeding grounds for religious fundamentalism.

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More than 15,000 registered religious seminaries in the country cater to more than 1.5 million students and over 55,000 teachers. Before 2002, according to the Religious Affairs

Ministry, the number of registered madrasas in Pakistan were not more than 6,000. After 9/11, the religious fanatics who left Afghanistan came to Pakistan and with the help of the two provincial governments of religious alliance MMA, North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan; they were able to quickly establish more madrasas. By 2007 there were around 13,000 registered seminaries across the country. At this time General Musharaf was a partner in the so-called "Alliance against terrorism." He was manipulating both the fanatics and the imperialists.

By March 2009, the number of registered madrasas in Pakistan reached 15,725.

## The growth of religious fanatics

The partnership of religious fanatics with American and the Pakistani intelligence agencies went unchecked until 9/11. Then the whole scenario shifted. The Mujahedeen was labeled terrorist and America wanted a military solution to the growth of religious fundamentalism.

The growth of religious fundamentalism was not only the result of the American and Pakistani intelligence agencies but also the complete failure of the civilian and military governments to solve any of the basic problems of the working class and its allies. Successive regimes have been unable to end the grip of feudalism, the absolute exploitive nature of Pakistani capitalists and their humiliating treatment of workers and farmers, the repression of smaller nationalities and exploitation of natural resources they possessed.

The ruling class has failed miserably to bring about democratic norms. That is why whenever the civilian government was overthrown by a military dictatorship, the vast majority of the masses did not offer any resistance to dictatorship.

## Establishing Islamic courts

The present civil government of the Pakistan Peoples Party has been contradictory in dealing with religious fanatics. In the Swat area, they have gone from peace talks to agreements with the fanatics to establish Islamic courts. The religious forces were decisively defeated during the general elections of 2008. Where in the 2002 general elections they received 15 percent of the vote, in 2008 they got less than three percent.

Just after the 2008 general elections, when the masses had rejected the religious forces, instead of a mass mobilization to end religious fundamentalism, the present regime opted for negotiations. This gave the fanatics an incentive to go further: they demanded Sharia laws in the Malakand division. This was accepted and an agreement signed. It was real boost for the religious fundamentalists who then went further in their attempt to control more areas and therefore giving an impression that they were not far from Islamabad.

In a panic, the regime, with full support of the Americans, went for a full military operation in the Malakand division in June 2009. The result was over 3.5 million internally displaced people and over 5000 killings. The present government boasted a military victory over the fundamentalists and then asked people to go back home. But this was not the army's military victory but a temporary retreat of the fanatics. Able to save their infrastructure, the fanatics did what Afghan Taliban did during the October 2001 military attack. That too was a military retreat, only to re-emerge later.

The celebration of a military victory over the religious fanatics had not last even one month before the fanatics were able to attack the military's general headquarters, the famous GHQ, along with several police training centers in different parts of the country during the month of October 2009. This month was seen as the bloodiest with killings on both sides.

Saying there was no other option, many liberals in Pakistan have supported the military actions against the religious fanatics. But no military solution can eliminate the religious fundamentalists. It has been the case of Afghanistan and so it will be in Pakistan. It can only push them back to other areas. The religious fundamentalists have used the tactics of urban terrorism. An urban terrorism cannot be eliminated by invading areas considered to be under fundamentalists' control. Military actions in Malakand division and now in Waziristan have pushed the fanatics to other parts of Pakistan.

## The fallacy of short-term and long-term strategies

Military solution has been presented as an immediate step to the ultimate solution to fight against fundamentalism. It is like the old Stalinist theory of minimum and maximum goals. "Demand minimum to get the maximum" was the philosophy. It was known as minimum and maximum stage of revolution. In social circles, this is been presented short-term and long-term strategies. For them, military solution is a short-term strategy while the long-term strategy requires reforms and more development. But this is all false; it will not solve anything. This is just an excuse to please American imperialism.

There is no in between the short-term and long-term strategies. If the fight against religious fanatics has to go forward, it must begin with a revolutionary programme. It had to start with the political will to separate religion from the state. It has to deal with the question of the nature of Pakistani state. Religion cannot become the basis of a nation. Pakistan's two nation theories were torn apart by the events of the '60s and '70s when Bangladesh came into existence. Now a more severe crisis is erupting in Baluchistan over similar

lines. There is strong movement developing that calls for the independence of Baluchistan.

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## A whole package

There has to be a concrete programme to fight religious fundamentalism. It has to combine an immediate dealing with the suicidal attacks and curbing the activities of the fascist forces from their strongholds along with an overall plan of action in economic, political and social fields. This should include the nationalization of religious madrasas and retraining of teachers. It should include an immediate increase in workers' wages in both the private and public sector to at least 12,000 Rupees a month.

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All discriminatory laws must go and all citizens of Pakistan should enjoy equal constitutional status. At present there are several laws that make religious minorities second-rate citizens. The government should be committed to

fully back local resistance to the religious fanatic. Civil society organizations in the stronghold of the religious fundamentalists should be given full backing by the state so that they can function. The state must help to strengthen and sustain the local defense committees to fight the religious fanatics.

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All trade union rights must be restored in all the public and private sector with full freedom of speech and gatherings. The present civilian seeks military solutions. Most of the discriminatory laws are still intact, including the blasphemy laws. The government has no plan to do away with these discriminatory laws promulgated under military dictatorships so the organizations of civil society must demand governmental action to restore rights.

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The forces of religious fundamentalism organize on an international basis. A fight against them has to be organized at that same

level. The Americans' "war on terror" is fueling more religious fundamentalism. It is seen as a war on Muslims. The occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan by the imperialist forces is providing the religious fanatics a political justification for their terrorist activities.

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Clearly occupation must end. The campaign to end the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and no support to the fanatics can be the basis for a united action of progressive forces internationally. The campaign against religious fundamentalism must be part and parcel of an anti-globalization campaign by all progressive forces.

We must oppose both occupation and religious fundamentalism.

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No support to one against the other. The fight between the religious fundamentalism and the imperialists is a fight between bulls. There is not much to gain in siding with one against the other, but to end the fight and open the space to create an alternative way of living.

# Pakistani women are worst hit by climate change

2 November 2009, by **Bushra Khaliq**



The PM has alarmed the countrymen by disclosing that Pakistan is the 12th most vulnerable country in the world, to environmental degradation, would cost five per cent of the GDP every year.

Very few Pakistanis took such warnings serious. There is no media uproar, no popular movement and no political clamoring over the issue. Sad! The majority of the Pakistani policy makers have no time to think about the horrifying picture of the future, caused by the worsening climatic conditions. The country is

busy fighting US-led war on terrorism and now almost trapped in a complex political quagmire where it has found itself fighting a war with itself. Therefore, very little time planners find to apprise the people of Pakistan on the repercussions of adverse climatic effects.

The climate experts in the country are hinting at severe water scarcity saying that water supply, already a serious concern in many parts of the country, will decline dramatically, affecting food production. Export industries such as, agriculture, textile products and fisheries will also be affected, while coastal areas risk being inundated, flooding the homes of millions of people living in low-lying

areas.

Pakistan's north eastern parts already experienced droughts in 1999 and 2000 are one such example that caused sharp declines in water tables and dried up wetlands, severely degrading ecosystems. Although Pakistan contributes least to global warming-one 35th of the world's average of carbon dioxide emissions-temperatures in the country's coastal areas have risen since the early 1900s from 0.6 to 1 degree centigrade. Precipitation has decreased 10 to 15 per cent in the coastal belt and hyper arid plains over the last 40 years while there is an increase in summer and winter rains in northern Pakistan.

Although Pakistan produces minimal chlorofluorocarbons and a little sulphur dioxide emissions, thus making a negligible contribution to ozone depletion and acid rain, it will suffer disproportionately from climate change and other global environmental problems. Health of millions would also be affected with diarrhoeal diseases associated with floods and drought becoming more prevalent. Intensifying rural poverty is likely to increase internal migration as well as migration to other countries. Given the enormity of the impact, adaptation and mitigation measures are critically important.

Pakistan's eco system has suffered greatly due to climatic change; one such example is that of Keti Bandar; one of the richest port in the region of the coastal belt of Pakistan that lost privileges of being at some point in time. The former port facilities bordered both shores of the Indus River delta but have become submerged as a result of coastal erosion, leaving only a thin, 2km long isthmus by way of a land bridge to the mainland

There was a time when it was known to be an area thriving on mangroves ecosystem, rich with agriculture and boasting a busy seaport. Now the landscape is barren and thatched houses dotted on mudflats. Water logging and salinity is its major problem and the intruding sea has almost eaten up the villages. Thousands of peasant families and fisher folk community already had to migrate to other areas in search of livelihood.

So grave is the situation now in the same region that cyclones often visit the coastline and their intensity has increased many times more. Poor peasant and fisher folk communities always hit hard by these cyclones. The blame relies on the fact that the community residing in Keti Bandar is threatened with global climatic change. The coastal area is said to be most vulnerable to climate change with rising sea surface temperatures and atmospheric water vapor causing an increase in cyclone intensity and rainfall.

When it comes to climate change

population does matter, particularly for countries like Pakistan with an annual growth rate of 2.69 percent, will be the sixth most populous country. As poor families struggle to survive, environmental degradation is going to be more pervasive. Long-term sustainable development goals are disregarded in favor of immediate subsistence needs, leaving vulnerable communities specially women at the mercy of climate. Increased use of wood for fuel, abusive use of land and water resources, in the form of overgrazing, over fishing, depletion of fresh water and desertification- are common in rural areas of Pakistan.

There seems to be no stopping the runaway population growth here in Pakistan because birth control is often portrayed as anti-people. The country's political and religious leaders who could make a difference are to blame. They have ignored the explosive population growth completely. Birth control is a taboo topic in Pakistan. In our culture, the larger the number of children, the stronger the family feels. Poverty does not seem to matter. The mullahs (clerics) may not like it.

The rural population has been kept illiterate in Pakistan. "Instead of building schools we built armies. The feudal landowners saw to it that the rural population is kept away from schooling. Mullahs declare girls' education to be un-Islamic. The reality is that even where women want to practice birth spacing they face difficulty in accessing the family planning services. They meet with a non-supportive environment at home, and encounter misconceptions and misinformation about the use of family planning.

At regional level, according to experts, by 2050, the Indian subcontinent will have to support 350 million Pakistanis; 1.65 billion Indians; 40 million Nepalese; 300 million Bangladeshis and 30 million Sri Lankan. The total will be about 2.4 billion people. This was the total population of the whole earth around 1950. The strain on resources in the region will be tremendous, and consequences catastrophic. By then the glaciers in the Himalayas will be gone, the monsoons will be erratic, sometimes

too much or too little rain; new uncontrollable diseases will have emerged. It will come overnight. We will wake up, and find that all we had yesterday (food, water, electricity) are gone.

This horrific picture is, no doubt, a matter of concern for the entire population living in this part of world, but matter of urgency for the marginalized sections especially women who will obviously worst and first hit of the climate bomb. Need of the hour is to highlight the gravity of the issue with focus on demanding security to the rights of the poor and marginalized sections in the future policy planning with regard to Climate Change .

In developing countries like Pakistan, women are already suffering disproportionately; as a consequence of climate change. Local environmentalists estimate that 70 per cent of the poor, who are far more vulnerable to environmental damage, are women. Therefore, women are more likely to be the unseen victims of resource wars and violence as a result of climate change. We witnessed this phenomenon in years 1999 and 2000 when thousands of poor families had to flee from drought-hit areas of Balochistan, the most backward province of Pakistan. Women and children were seen the most suffered sections.

Like other poor countries, climate change is harder on women in Pakistan as well, where mothers have to stay in areas hit by drought, deforestation or crop failure. Many destructive activities against the environment disproportionately affect them, because most women in Pakistan are dependent on primary natural resources: land, forests, and waters. In case of droughts they are immediately affected, and usually women and children can't run away. Men can trek and go looking for greener pastures in other areas and sometimes in other countries ... but for women, they're usually left on site to face the consequences. When there is deforestation, when there is drought, when there is crop failure, it is the women and children who are the most adversely affected.



While women are the main providers of food in Pakistan, they face barriers to the ownership and access to land. 67 percent of women are engaged in agriculture related activities but only 1 per cent own land. When hit by the negative impact of climate change, women lose at the same time their livelihood means and their capacity to cope after a disaster. As a result of climate change, domestic chores such as collecting water and firewood become more burdensome and time consuming. As girls commonly assist their mothers in performing these tasks, there is less time left for school or any other economic activity.

The recent data shows that due to climate change major crops yield in Pakistan has declined by 30% (Lead, 2008). Experts are of the opinion that Climate Change is enhancing the susceptibility of agriculture zones to floods, drought and storms. It is pertinent to mention that the agriculture is the single largest sector in Pakistan's economy, contributing 21 per cent to the GDP and employing 43 per cent of the workforce (Lead, 2008) of which female are in majority.

There is a common perception that "it is men who are the farmers".

Contrary to this perception, women in Pakistan produce 60-80 percent of food consumed in the house (IUCN, 2007). In Pakistan, especially in the mountainous regions, men out-migrate for livelihood opportunities (from 50% to 63% of the households) (WB, 2005) and it is the women who looks after the family's agriculture piece of land along with many other responsibilities. It is interesting to note how much work female household members contribute outside their homes, but their work is generally less visible and attracts less public recognition. The rise in temperature is going to affect the farming communities in Pakistan as a whole, but will have severe impacts on individuals/households specially women, who are socially, politically and economically more vulnerable.

Important to mention here is that Pakistan was one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1994 and has also endorsed other related protocols (Kyoto and Montreal) but its Climate Change policy is still in the making. Experts are of the opinion that not much in terms of gender should be expected from the forthcoming national policy on Climate change, as

responsive policies can only result when they come out of forums that have equal gender representation along with the necessary sensitivity.

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is a new mechanism of the Government of Pakistan (GOP) which is trying to address the disaster vulnerabilities of the communities living in hazardous regions by keeping the gender sensitivities in mind. Since NDMA is a new mechanism not much can be said about its programs at this point, but if women are not involved in developing and monitoring important policies and legislations, gender issues will go unnoticed.

In nutshell climate change could hamper the achievement of many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including those on poverty eradication, child mortality, malaria, and other diseases, and environmental sustainability. Much of this damage would come in the form of severe economic shocks. In addition, the impacts of climate change will exacerbate existing social and environmental problems and lead to migration within and across national borders of Pakistan.

## "Small" oversights and "big" lies

2 November 2009, by **Éric Toussaint**



### Resistance in Honduras

This hostility is only matched by an embarrassed, complicit silence with regard to those involved in the putsch in Honduras or the repression enacted by the Peruvian army against the indigenous populations of the Amazon.

In order to demonstrate this statement, here are a few recent facts:

1) On 5 June 2009, the Peruvian army massacred over 50 Amazonian Indians

who were protesting against the land concessions made by Alan Garcia's government for foreign, mainly European transnational companies. The repression aroused no disapproval among the major global media groups. [1] These groups gave almost exclusive priority to the protests occurring in Iran. Not only did the press fail to condemn the repression in Peru; it did not even bother to cover the story. And yet in Peru, so great was public discontent that the government had to announce the repeal of the presidential decree which the Amazonian Indians had

fought against.

Once again, media coverage of the government's backtracking was almost non-existent. We must ask ourselves the following question: if a Venezuelan or Ecuadorian army or police intervention had caused the deaths of dozens of Amazonian Indians, what kind of media coverage would such events have received?

2) When the constitutionally elected president Manuel Zelaya was ousted by the military on 28 June, the overwhelming majority of media groups declared, in total contradiction

of the truth, that the soldiers were reacting to Zelaya's attempt to modify the constitution, thus ensuring he could remain in power. Several other media groups added that he was following the example of Hugo Chavez, who is presented as an authoritarian populist leader. In fact, Manuel Zelaya was proposing to the Honduran citizens that they vote in favour of the organization of general elections for a Constituent Assembly, which would have represented real democratic progress being made in this country. This is well explained by Cécile Lamarque and Jérôme Duval on their return from a CADTM mission in Honduras: "The coup d'Etat was carried out on the same day Manuel Zelaya had organized a non-binding "consultation" asking the Hondurans whether or not they wanted to convene a National Constituent Assembly, after the elections which were due to take place on the 29 November 2009. The question went like this: "Do you agree that at the next general elections of 2009, a fourth ballot box be installed so as to allow for the people to express their point of view on the convocation of a national Constituent Assembly? YES or NO?" If this consultation had resulted in the majority voting "yes", the president would have issued a decree of approval before Congress so that, on 29 November, the Hondurans would formally make known their decision on the convocation of a Constituent Assembly through this "fourth ballot box" (the first three ballot boxes would be for the election of a president, deputies and mayors, respectively). In order to give an air of legality to the coup, Congress and the Supreme Court, associated with the putsch, deemed the ballot box to be illegal and asserted that president Zelaya had "violated the Constitution" by trying to modify it "so as to set his sights on serving a new mandate", in the manner of an "apprentice Chavist dictator". And yet, Manuel Zelaya, through this consultation with the people, was not seeking to renew his presidential mandate of four years which cannot be renewed. Zelaya would therefore be unable to be a candidate for his own succession." [2]

Whilst the popular movements opposing those involved in the Putsch increased, with protests and strikes in

July, August and September, the big media names only dedicated a couple of lines to these events. On the rare occasions when the leading daily newspapers dedicated a feature article to the situation in Honduras, they adopted a policy of slander against the constitutionally elected president by presenting the military's actions as a democratic military coup. This is the case with The Wall Street Journal, which in its editorial on 1 July 2009 wrote, "the military coup d'Etat which took place in Honduras on June 28th and which led to the exile of the president of this central American country, Manuel Zelaya, is strangely democratic." The editorial adds, "the legislative and judicial authorities will remain intact" following military action. On its part, perhaps in a more subtle manner, the famous French newspaper Le Monde participated in a smear campaign against Manuel Zelaya. Here is one example. On 12 September 2009, Jean-Michel Caroit, the paper's special correspondent in Honduras, quoted the words of a French expatriate living in the country and then associated these words with the systematically repeated lie regarding Zelaya's supposedly sinister intentions, " "For the Hondurans, Zelaya's return is unacceptable as that would mean there would be twenty years of a Chavez-style dictatorship," states Marianne Cadario in reference to the Venezuelan president who - as his ally Manuel Zelaya tried to do (underlined by me) - modified the Constitution in order for him to be allowed to be re-elected. Marianne Cadario, a Frenchwoman who has lived in Honduras for over thirty years states that she is "very shocked by the reaction of the international community who condemned the putsch." [3] The tone of newspapers like Le Monde and Libération began to change at the end of September after those involved in the putsch began to increase their repressive measures. The tone became more critical of those involved in the putsch. Having said this, the daily newspaper Libération deserves a prize for its use of euphemisms. In fact on 28 September 2009 (3 months to the day after the coup) the title "The Scent of Dictatorship" (underlined by me) of a paragraph explaining how the government involved in the putsch had

declared, "the banning of "any public unauthorized meeting," the arrest of "anyone putting their lives or anyone else's in danger" "evacuation" of areas where there are protesters and those who interfere with "any broadcasting of programmes by any media that endanger public order." [4]

3) At the beginning of August 2009, the Venezuelan authorities' intention to question the right of 34 radio and television channels made the headlines in the international press: "It is further proof of the almost total disappearance of the right to expression and criticism in this authoritarian country." The way in which the major news publications treat the subject of the media in Venezuela is one of unilateral hostility, despite the fact that 90% of the Venezuelan media is privately owned, a large number of which actively support disinformation campaigns. Globovisión, one of the main privately-owned TV channels, actively participated in the military coup d'Etat against Chavez on 11 April 2002. A documentary made by Globovisión made its way around the world on 11 April 2002 and the days following the military coup. It was actually a set-up, designed to distort the truth. One can see people posing as Chavez supporters on a bridge, firing their guns in an unidentifiable direction. The voice-over of the Globovisión journalist states that the Chavez supporters are about to kill opposition protesters who were protesting peacefully in the streets below the bridge. The Venezuelan prosecution has been able to reconstruct the exact chain of events, having analysed the reports and photographs made by certain individuals on the day of 11 April. In fact the pro-Chavez militants, who, according to Globovisión, were shooting at protesters, were actually responding to gunfire coming from an armoured vehicle of the metropolitan police, allied to the putsch. The opposition protesters were no longer in the streets when those guns were fired. Several sources can prove without a doubt that the assassination of the anti-Chavez protesters was used as a set-up so as to attribute these crimes to Chavez, thus justifying their coup. On 11 April 2008, the Venezuelan viewers were able to see

again the images of the press conference given by the military involved in the putsch at a time when no protester had been killed yet. And yet the military announced at that time that they were taking power following the murders carried out by the Chavez supporters. This clearly supports the theory that these murders were planned deliberately so as to be able to justify their seditious plan.

In the days following the putsch, on 12 and 13 April 2002, when hundreds of thousands of unarmed citizens surrounded the barracks of the putschists to demand the return of Hugo Chavez, then in prison, Globovisión failed to broadcast any coverage of these protests, explaining that the country was back to normal and that Hugo Chavez had tendered his resignation and was on his way to Cuba. During the last hours of the putsch, this channel broadcast only cartoons and variety shows. [5] Globovisión in fact connived with the putschists on several critical occasions, a fact which led the parents of victims and injured survivors' associations to demand the channel's conviction. Up to now the Chavist government has refused this demand in order to prevent further escalation of the international smear campaign being waged against him. Several human rights associations are dissatisfied with the passive attitude of the Venezuelan authorities in this matter.

More recently, Globovisión has been sympathetic towards the authors of the 28 June putsch in Honduras. Several programme presenters at Globovisión have supported the putsch from the very beginning, at the same time accusing the Chavez government of interference in condemning it. For example, Guillermo Zuloaga, the president of Globovisión, stated on 17 July that "the government of Micheletti complies with the Constitution, and we would like,

indeed we would be delighted, if here in Venezuela, the Constitution was respected in the same way that it is in Honduras", thus making clear his support for the putschist government.

Globovisión has never been prohibited from broadcasting. What major European or North-American media has even mentioned this fact? What major European or North-American media has ever informed the public that the overwhelming majority of Venezuelan media are controlled by the private sector? Or that they account for over 90% of the viewing audience? Or that they are extremely aggressive towards the government, presenting it as a dictatorship, or that some of them played an active part in ousting a constitutionally elected president, and have continued to broadcast freely for seven years? Can one imagine General de Gaulle failing to take repressive measures against a newspaper, radio or TV station that was seen to actively support an OAS coup during the Algerian war? Would it not be considered normal for the Spanish government to take measures against the media that actively supported - in real time - Colonel Tejero when he burst into the Cortes [6] with a group of military putschists and held (up) at gunpoint the MPs who were there? If Manuel Zelaya were restored to office as constitutional president, would he and his government not be in their right to demand accountability and take measures against the Honduran media owners who deliberately supported the putschists by systematically deforming the truth and covering up the many human rights violations committed by the military?

4) Arms spending. When you read the European or North American papers, you have the distinct impression that Venezuela is indulging in huge arms expenditures (particularly by way of Russia), which poses a serious threat in the region. Yet according to the CIA [7] the situation is quite different:

the Venezuelan military budget ranks 6th in the region, after the budgets of Brazil, Argentina, Chile (far less populated than Venezuela and regarded as a model), Colombia and Mexico. In relative terms, taking the GDP of each country, the Venezuelan military budget comes 9th in Latin America! Is any of this published in the leading news publications?

On another front, in August 2009 we read in the papers that Sweden took Venezuela to task after the Colombian government once again denounced its neighbour for supplying arms to the FARC guerilla. Sweden had in fact informed Colombia that SAAB missiles found in a FARC camp had been supplied by Venezuela. But for those who read Hugo Chavez' detailed response it became clear that the missiles in question had been stolen from a Venezuelan harbour in 1995, four years before Chavez became president.

Conclusion: One needs to be aware of the one-sided manner in which the leading media report the news, and adopt a highly critical approach when appraising it. The discrediting of Hugo Chavez, Rafael Correa and Evo Morales is so excessive that it poses the risk of numbing international public opinion in the event of another coup d'Etat, or of lulling the public into approving aggressive measures taken by a government such as the US. Among the many insidious and unfounded accusations, we can read in the Spanish papers (for example in El Pais) that Rafael Correa's election campaign was financed by the FARC. We can also read that the Venezuelan authorities do nothing to fight drug trafficking. In the case of the Honduran president Manuel Zelaya, the discredit heaped on him is intended to prevent international opinion mobilizing in favour of his return to power as head of State.

Translated by Francesca Denley and Judith Harris

# Ahmed Rashid's War

1 November 2009, by Tariq Ali



Ahmed Rashid is worried

This last is a slight exaggeration. The main people who consult Rashid, apart from Robert Silvers at the New York Review of Books, are US policy-makers in favor of a continuous occupation of Afghanistan. Rashid provides them with many a spurious argument to send more troops and wipe out the Pashtuns opposing the occupation. Within Afghanistan, Rashid's principal backer and friend is Hamid Karzai who has now managed to antagonize even the tamest US liberals such as Peter Galbraith, recently sacked as a UN honcho in Kabul because he suggested that Karzai had rigged the elections. Rashid the journalist has no time for people who suggest that Karzai is a corrupt rogue, whose family is now the richest in the country, or that he manipulates US public opinion with the aid of PR companies, friends in Washington and, of course, Ahmed Rashid himself.

Back to the Rachman blog:

"So it was worrying to find Ahmed in a distinctly depressed mood. The last time I saw him was back in April at the Nato summit in Strasbourg, when he was feeling a bit cheerier. He had been impressed by the Obama administration's decision to put more troops into Afghanistan, and cheered by the Pakistani military's apparent willingness to take on the Pakistani Taliban in the Swat valley. But now, he is seriously worried that the Americans are having cold feet and will step back - and that Pakistan itself will be destabilized by a resurgence of the Afghan Taliban."

Its astonishing to me why neither Snow nor Rachman, both intelligent journalists, did not question Rashid on what are the real problems

confronting Pakistan and whether killing people is the only solution? Rashid is committed to the current corrupt regime led by Asif Zardari who together with his cronies and henchmen does the bidding of the US Embassy in Islamabad without questioning any instruction.

The US Viceroy in Pakistan, Anne Patterson (earlier posting: Colombia) can be disarmingly frank. Earlier this year, she offered a mid-term assessment to a visiting Euro-intelligence chief. While Musharraf had been unreliable, saying one thing in Washington and doing its opposite back home, Zardari was perfect: "He does everything we ask."

What is disturbing here is not Patterson's candor, but her total lack of judgment. Zardari may be a willing creature of Washington, but the intense hatred for him in Pakistan is not confined to his political opponents. He is despised principally because of his venality. He has carried on from where he left off as minister of investment in his late wife's second government. Within weeks of occupying President's House, his minions were ringing the country's top businessmen, demanding a share of their profits.

Take the case of Mr X, who owns one of the country's largest banks. He got a call. Apparently the president wanted to know why his bank had sacked a PPP member soon after Benazir Bhutto's fall in the late 1990s. X said he would find out and let them know. It emerged that the sacked clerk had been caught with his fingers literally in the till. President's House was informed. The explanation was rejected. The banker was told that the clerk had been victimized for political reasons. The man had to be reinstated and his salary over the last 18 years paid in full together with the interest due. The PPP had also to be compensated and would expect a

cheque (the sum was specified) soon. Where the president leads, his retainers follow. Many members of the cabinet and their progeny are busy milking businessmen and foreign companies.

"If they can do it, so can we' is a widely expressed view in Karachi, the country's largest city. Muggings, burglaries, murders, many of them part of protection rackets linked to politicians, have made it the Naples of the East. A complete failure by the venal Pakistan elite to educate and provide a social safety net for its citizens makes it easier for religious extremists who remain a tiny minority but gain ground because of the war in neighboring Afghanistan. Rachman writes:

"Personally, I have been having cold feet myself and wondering whether the West should pull out of a losing battle in Afghanistan. But Rashid paints a hair-raising picture of what would happen if the US stepped away. He foresees a renewed civil war in Afghanistan, with the Afghan Taliban backed by the Pakistani army, battling it out with the forces of Karzai and the Northern Alliance, backed by Iran. Taking a step further back, the Chinese would be standing in the Afghan-Pakistani-Talib corner, while the Indians backed the other side. The Pakistanis meanwhile would find themselves suffering from the Taliban blowback, caused by the very Afghan war they were sponsoring. It doesn't sound great. But how long is Nato prepared to stay in the ring?"

I'm glad that Rachman has been getting cold feet. He's not alone. The picture Rashid paints is deliberately alarmist and based largely on fantasy; throwing in China is crude but designed to appeal to the revanchists in the Pentagon. Rashid does need help. How can the West cure poor Ahmed's depression? He would recover rapidly if the US remained

permanently in Afghanistan and took over Pakistan as well but that would require half-a-million US troops and the killing of a million or more Af-Paks. It's a heavy price to pay for making Rashid feel better. A simpler route might be to get Zardari to give him a big job, failing which, he could move to the UN since Galbraith's job is vacant. I remember Rashid in the old days being extremely sceptical when, after attending a conference in the Soviet Union in 1985, I told him that Gorbachev was going to pull out all Russian troops within a few years. He found that, too, difficult to believe and was, no doubt, equally depressed.

Some of us have been arguing for many years that more troops and more Afghan deaths is totally counter-productive. An exit strategy that involves Iran, Russia and China as well as Pakistan and a national coalition in Afghanistan is the only medium-term solution. Washington has been negotiating privately with the Pashtun resistance and the neo-Taliban have made it clear that once a NATO withdrawal began they would work with other groups and participate in a national government.

Meanwhile the war continues and Afghans and NATO soldiers continue to die. All one can offer them is

Kipling's advice to British soldiers (including Winston Churchill) who were battling the Pashtuns in the late 19th century:

When you're wounded and left on Afghanistan's plains,  
And the women come to cut out what remains,  
Just roll to your rifle, and blow out your brains.  
And go to your God like a soldier.

*Tariq Ali's latest book, The Protocols of the Elders of Sodom and other Essays, has just been published by Verso. This article first appeared at Counterpunch.*

# Climate Change - a contribution to the debate

1 November 2009, by **Michael Löwy**



The rainforest burns

The notes which follow are divided into two parts: 1) some criticisms and reservations on certain points, conceived as a kind of amendment to the document; 2) some remarks on ecosocialism, starting from questions that are suggested but not developed in the report (which could not, obviously, cover everything without becoming too long). So this is simply a contribution to the debate.

## I. Critical comments

1. It seems to me that the formula "2100" or "the end of the century" [8] must be replaced by "over the next few decades".

The most recent forecasts of scientists - not yet taken on board by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which, as the report

indicates, always gets there late - envisage large-scale disasters over the next few decades if we continue with "business as usual". That has obvious political consequences: who is going to worry about what will happen in 2100? Admittedly, certain philosophers - such as Hans Jonas - have raised the question of "our duties towards the generations not yet born", but that does not interest many people. The question is very different when it concerns our own generation...

That also applies to the formula "quasi-total abandonment of the use of fossil fuels, to be effected in less than a century": to be replaced by "over the next few decades".

2. Carbon capture: the report mentions the limited character of storage capacities, but it seems to consider it as an "acceptable transitional measure" [9].

I think that it is necessary to be more reserved on this subject. The process is far from being developed, there are very few convincing examples, we do

not yet have real security guarantees (the assurance that CO2 will not escape again into the atmosphere). Moreover, on the pretext of a future "clean coal", we continue to use coal-fired power stations and to build new ones, which is, according to James Hansen, the recipe for a disaster in the near future. I think that we must associate ourselves with what Hansen proposes: while waiting for the technique of carbon capture to be really established - in ten years? - it is necessary to stop building coal-fired power stations and gradually abolish the existing ones.

3. The movement against climate change must demand that governments respect "the most careful conclusions of the IPCC" [10].

This formula is too vague: what does "careful" mean? It is better to speak about the higher range of the proposals of the IPCC, i.e. 40 per cent between now and 2020 and 85 per cent between now and 2050. It is necessary to avoid the formula, which appears sometimes in the report, "reduction of between 25 and 40 per

cent" between now and 2020. An appeal of ecological NGOs (Greenpeace, etc.) to Sarkozy speaks of a minimum of 40 per cent between now and 2020. We cannot demand less! Personally, I think that 40 per cent is too little and that it should be strongly suggested that it is a minimum, in reality very insufficient... The same thing applies to 2050: we should no longer write "reduction of between 50 and 85 per cent", but immediately insist on the higher level: 85 per cent.

4. Marx's error: according to the report, he "did not understand that the transition from wood to coal meant the abandonment of a renewable energy of flux in favour of an exhaustible energy of stock". First of all, I have some reservations about the term "renewable" being applied to wood used as a source of energy: that could quickly lead to the destruction of the last forests! As for fossil energies: admittedly, they are "exhaustible", but this argument seems to me to be out of date. There is still coal for 200 years and well before that, global warming will have caused a catastrophe without precedent.

The error of Marx and especially of Engels (cf. Antiduhring) was to believe that the revolution must simply "suppress the relations of production which have become obstacles (or chains) preventing the free development of the productive forces created by capitalism", as if these forces were neutral. It seems to me that we could take as a starting point the observations made by Marx about the Paris Commune: the workers cannot take possession of the capitalist state apparatus and put it at their service.

They are forced "to smash it" and to replace it by a form of political power that is radically different, democratic and non-state. The same idea applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the productive apparatus, which far from being "neutral" carries in its structure the stamp of a development which favours the accumulation of capital and the unlimited expansion of the market, thus leading to ecological catastrophe.

5. According to the report, we will be able to really begin the enormous

changes necessary "only after the victory of the socialist revolution on a world level". It seems to me that, according to the logic of the permanent revolution, it is necessary to begin the changes that are necessary on the level of one or several countries, knowing that we will be able to complete the process only on the scale of the entire planet.

6. The draft says this about the rise in ocean levels: "the vast majority of the hundreds of millions of human beings threatened by the rise in the level of the oceans live in China (30 million), India (30 million), Bangladesh (15-20 million)..." etc. I do not question these figures, but I ask myself the following question: won't the sea level also go up in the seaboard cities of the West, i.e. in Amsterdam, Venice, Antwerp, Copenhagen, New York, etc? This is a question which has a political dimension: it is fine to ask for solidarity from the inhabitants of the countries of the North with the suffering of Bangladesh, but we should show them that they are threatened with the same dangers.

## **II. On ecosocialism: a contribution to the debate**

The ecosocialist project implies the establishment of democratic planning of the economy which takes into account the preservation of the environment and, in particular, prevents a catastrophic disruption of the climate. It is thanks to such planning that we will be able to make a revolution in the energy system, leading to the replacement of the current resources (especially fossil energy), which are responsible for climate change and the poisoning of the environment, by renewable energy resources: water, wind and sun.

The necessary prerequisite for this democratic and ecological planning is public control of the means of production: decision-making on matters of public interest concerning technological investment and change must be removed from the banks and the capitalist companies, if we want these decisions to serve the common good of society and the safeguarding of the environment.

The whole of society will be free to

democratically choose what kinds of production should be prioritised - according to social and ecological criteria - and the level of the resources which must be invested in alternative energies, in education, health and culture. The prices of the goods themselves would no longer be determined by the laws of supply and demand, but would as far as possible be fixed according to social, political and ecological criteria. This planning will have among its objectives the guarantee of full employment, thanks to the reduction of the working day. This condition is essential not only to fulfil the requirements of social justice, but also to make sure of the support of the working class, without which the process of structural ecological transformation of the productive forces cannot be carried out.

Far from being "despotic" as such, democratic planning is the exercise of the freedom of decision of the whole of society. This is a necessary exercise for society to free itself from the alienating and reifying "economic laws" and "iron cages" within capitalist and bureaucratic structures. Democratic planning, associated with the reduction of working time, would be a considerable progress of humanity towards what Marx called "the realm of freedom": the increase in free time is in fact a condition for the participation of workers in democratic discussion and the running of the economy and society.

The kind of system of democratic planning that is envisaged by ecosocialists relates to the principal economic choices - in particular those concerning the dangers of global warming - and not the administration of local restaurants, grocery shops, bakeries, small stores and artisanal enterprises and services. In the same way, it is important to stress that planning is not in contradiction with the self-management of workers in their units of production. Whereas the decision to transform, for example, a car factory into a unit for the production of engines for wind farms would be taken by the whole of society, the organization and the internal functioning of the factory would be managed democratically by the workers themselves.

We have had lengthy discussions about the "centralized" or "decentralized" character of planning, but the important thing remains the democratic control of the plan on all levels, local, regional, national, continental and, let us hope, planetary, since ecological themes such as global warming are issues that concern the whole world and can only be dealt with on this level. This proposal could be called "global democratic planning". It has nothing to do with what is generally designated as "central planning", because the economic and social decisions are not made by an unspecified "centre" but democratically decided by the populations concerned.

Ecosocialist planning must be based on democratic and pluralist debate, at every level of decision. Organized in the form of parties, platforms or any other kind of political movement, the delegates of the planning organizations would be elected and the various proposals would be presented to all those whom they concern. In other words, representative democracy must be enriched - and improved - by the direct democracy which makes it possible for people to directly choose - at the local, national and, finally, international level - between various proposals. The whole population would then discuss questions such as free public transport, a special tax paid by car owners to subsidize public transport, the subsidizing of solar energy, the reduction of working time to 30, 25 or even fewer hours a week, even if that involves a reduction of production. The democratic character of planning does not make it incompatible with the participation of experts whose role is not to decide, but to present their arguments - often different, even opposing - during the democratic process of decision-making.

A question arises: what guarantee do we have that people will make the right choices, those which protect the environment, even if the price to be paid is to change some of their consumption habits? Such a "guarantee" does not exist, only the reasonable prospect that the rationality of democratic decisions will

triumph once the fetishism of consumer goods has been abolished. It is certain that people will make mistakes by making bad choices, but don't the experts themselves make mistakes? It is impossible to conceive of the construction of a new society without the majority of people attaining a high level of socialist and ecological consciousness as a result of their struggles, their self-education and their social experience.

Some ecologists consider that the only alternative to productivism is to stop growth as a whole, or to replace it by negative growth - called in France "decreasing". To do this, it would be necessary to drastically reduce the excessive level of consumption of the population and to give up individual houses, central heating and washing machines, among other things, in order to lower the consumption of energy by half.

The "decreasers" have the merit of having put forward a radical critique of productivism and consumerism. But the concept of "decreasing" is related to a purely quantitative conception of "growth" and of the development of the productive forces. It would be better to think about a qualitative transformation of development. That means two different but complementary approaches:

1. Not only the reduction but the suppression of entire economic sectors, in order to put a stop to the monstrous waste of resources which is caused by capitalism - a system based on the large-scale production of useless and/or harmful products. The arms industry is a good example, as are all these "products" manufactured in the capitalist system (with their programmed obsolescence) which have no other use than to create profits for the big companies. The question is not "excessive consumption" in the abstract, but rather the type of consumption which is dominant at present, and whose principal characteristics are: conspicuous consumption, massive waste, obsessive accumulation of goods and the compulsive acquisition of pseudo innovations imposed by "fashion". A new society would direct production towards the satisfaction of genuine needs, starting with those that we could describe as "biblical" -

water, food, clothing and housing - but including essential services: health, education, culture and transport. We could thus speak about "selective decreasing".

2. In addition, it would be necessary to ensure the "selective growth" of certain branches of production or services that are neglected by capitalism: solar energy, organic farming (family or co-operative), public transport, etc.

It is obvious that the countries where essential needs are far from being satisfied, i.e. the countries of the southern hemisphere, will have to "develop" much more - to build railways, hospitals, sewers and other infrastructures - than the industrialized countries, but that should be compatible with a system of production based on renewable energies and thus not harmful to the environment.

These countries will need to produce large quantities of food for their populations, which are already affected by famine. But, as the peasant movements organized on the international level by the Via Campesina network have been arguing for years, this is an objective that it is much easier to attain via peasant organic farming organized through family units, co-operatives or collective farms, than by the destructive and antisocial methods of the agribusiness industry whose principle is the intensive use of pesticides, chemical substances and genetically modified organisms. The odious present system of debt and imperialist exploitation of the resources of the South by the industrialized capitalist countries would give way to an upsurge in the technical and economic support of the North to the South.

There would be no need at all - as certain puritan and ascetic ecologists seem to believe - to reduce, in absolute terms, the standard of living of the European and North American populations. It would simply be necessary for these populations to get rid of useless products, those which do not satisfy any real need and whose obsessive consumption is supported by the capitalist system. While reducing

their consumption, they would redefine the concept of standard of living to make way for a lifestyle which would actually be much richer.

How to distinguish genuine needs from artificial, false or simulated needs? The advertising industry - which exerts its influence on needs by mental manipulation - has penetrated every sphere of human life in modern capitalist societies. Everything is fashioned according to its rules, not only food and clothing, but also fields as varied as sport, culture, religion and politics. Advertising has invaded our streets, our letter-boxes, our television screens, our newspapers and our landscapes in an insidious, permanent and aggressive way.

This sector contributes directly to conspicuous and compulsive spending habits. Moreover, it involves a phenomenal waste of oil, electricity, working time, paper and chemical substances, among other raw materials - all of this paid for by the consumers. It is a branch of "production" which is not only useless from the human point of view, but which is also in contradiction with real social needs.

Whereas advertising is an essential dimension of a capitalist market economy, there would be no place for it in a society of transition towards socialism. It would be replaced by information on products and services, provided by consumers' associations. The criterion for distinguishing a genuine need from an artificial need would be its permanence after the suppression of advertising. It is clear

that for a certain time old spending patterns will persist, because nobody has the right to tell people what they need. The change in models of consumption is a historical process and an educational challenge.

Certain products, such as the individual car, raise more complex problems. Individual cars are a public nuisance. On a world scale, they kill or mutilate hundreds of thousands of people every year. They pollute the air of the big cities - with very harmful consequences for the health of children and the elderly - and they contribute considerably to climate change.

However, the car satisfies real needs under the present conditions of capitalism. In a process of transition towards ecosocialism, public transport would be readily available and free - above ground and underground -, while there would be protected lanes for pedestrians and cyclists. Consequently, the individual car would play a much less important role than it does in bourgeois society, where it has become a fetish product promoted by insistent and aggressive advertising. In this transition towards a new society, it will be much easier to reduce in a Draconian fashion the transport of goods by road - which is responsible for tragic accidents and the too high level of pollution - and to replace it by transporting goods by rail or by transporting lorries by rail: only the absurd logic of capitalist "competitiveness" explains the development of road transport.

To these proposals, the pessimists will answer: yes, but individuals are motivated by infinite aspirations and

desires which must be controlled, analyzed, driven back and even repressed if necessary. Democracy could then undergo certain restrictions. However, ecosocialism is founded on a reasonable assumption, already supported by Marx: the predominance of "being" over "having" in a society without social classes or capitalist alienation, i.e. the primacy of free time over the desire to have innumerable objects: personal fulfilment by means of real activities - cultural, sporting, playful, scientific, erotic, artistic and political. Commodity fetishism encourages compulsive buying through the ideology and the advertising that are proper to the capitalist system. Nothing proves that this is part of "eternal human nature".

That does not mean, especially for the transitional period, that conflicts will be non-existent: between the needs of environmental protection and social needs, between the obligations concerning ecology and the need to develop basic infrastructures, in particular in the poor countries, between popular consumption habits and the lack of resources. A society without social classes is not a society without contradictions or conflicts. These are inevitable: it will be the role of democratic planning, in an ecosocialist perspective freed from the constraints of capital and profit, to resolve them thanks to open and pluralist discussions leading society itself to make the decisions. Such a democracy, common and participatory, is the only means, not to avoid making errors, but to correct them by the social community itself.

## When the climate change centre cannot hold

1 November 2009, by **Patrick Bond**



The recent Bangkok negotiations of Kyoto Protocol Conference of Parties

functionaries confirmed that Northern states and their corporations won't make an honest effort to get to 350 CO2 parts per million. On the right, Barack Obama's negotiators seem to

feel that the 1997 Kyoto Protocol is excessively binding to the North, and leaves out several major polluters of the South, including China, India, Brazil and South Africa.



Kyoto's promised 5% emissions cuts (by 2012, from 1990 levels) are impossible now. Obama's people hope the world will accept 2005 as a new starting date; a 20% reduction by 2020 then only brings the target back to around 5% below 1990 levels. Such pathetically low ambitions, surely Obama knows, guarantee a runaway climate catastrophe - he should shoot for 45%, say the small island nations.

The other reason Kyoto is ridiculed by serious environmentalists is its provision for carbon trading rackets which allow fake claims of net emissions cuts. Since the advent of the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme, the Chicago exchange, Clean Development Mechanism projects and offsets, vast evidence has accumulated of systemic market failure, scamming and inability to regulate carbon trading (see a website launched today [www.350reasons.org](http://www.350reasons.org)).

A final reason we need to rapidly transcend Kyoto's weak, market-oriented approach is that devastation caused by climate change will hit the world's poorest, most vulnerable people far harder than those in the North. Reparations for the North's climate debt to the South are in order. The European Union offered a pittance in September, while African leaders are stiffening their spines for a fight in Copenhagen reminiscent of Seattle a decade ago.

Since discussing this threat six weeks ago in a ZNet column, subsequent Bangkok negotiations and web traffic offered me a sobering reminder of Northern stubbornness, on two fronts - those whose interests are mainly in short-term capital accumulation, but also the mainstream environmentalists who are only beginning to grasp the huge strategic error they made in Kyoto.

#### Negotiating Climate Change

In the first camp, Obama's people are hoping non-binding national-level plans will be acceptable at Copenhagen. But their case is weaker because at home, the two main proposed bills - Waxman-Markey which passed in the U.S. House of Representatives and Kerry-Boxer which is under Senate consideration -

will do far more harm than good.

Don't take it from me; the best source is Congressman Rich Boucher, from a coal-dominated Southwestern Virginia district. Boucher supported Waxman-Markey, he told a reporter last month, precisely because it would not adversely affect his corporate constituencies. The two billion tons of offset allowances in the legislation mean that "an electric utility burning coal will not have to reduce the emissions at the plant site," chortled Boucher. "It can just keep burning coal."

Boucher was one of the congressional rednecks who wrecked Obama's promise to sell - not give away - the carbon credits, and then bragged to his district's main newspaper, the Times News, that "this helps to keep electricity prices affordable and strengthens the case for utilities to continue to use coal."

Boucher and company are also working hard to disempower the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from regulating CO2. This was accomplished in Waxman-Markey, and upon introducing his legislation, Senator John Kerry gave the game away by noting EPA regulatory authority is not gutted in his bill now, only so that it can be gutted later, so as to provide "some negotiating room as we proceed forward."

The Senate bill has all manner of other objectionable components, which hard-working activists from Climate SOS, Rising Tide North America, Friends of the Earth, the Center for Biological Diversity, Biofuelwatch and Greenwash Guerrillas have been hammering at.

Hence in the U.S., the balance of forces is fluid. On the far-right, the fossil fuels industries are intent on making Obama's climate legislation farcical - and have so far succeeded. In the centre, the main establishment "green" agencies - such as the Environmental Defense Fund and Natural Resources Defence Council - are plowing ahead with carbon trading strategies, hoping to salvage some legitimacy for Obama, because these bills are a "first step" to more serious emissions reduction, they

claim.

Yet U.S. negotiators will go to Copenhagen (as they did in Bangkok and will next month in Barcelona) with the aim of smashing any residual benefit of the Kyoto Protocol - such as potential binding cuts with accountability mechanisms - and then allow these U.S. dynamics to play out in a manner that locks in climate disaster.

So just as in 1997, when Al Gore introduced carbon trading into the initial deal - and subsequently broke an implicit promise by failing to get the U.S. (under both Clinton and Bush) to ratify the Protocol - there is every likelihood that if an agreement in Copenhagen were reached, it would be as worthless as Kyoto.

Which brings us to quandaries faced by two other forces: the ordinary environmentalist in the U.S. - perhaps a typical fan of useful [www.grist.org](http://www.grist.org) blogs - and activists based in the so-called Third World who have to deal with the most adverse impacts of climate chaos in coming decades.

Grist's Jonathan Hiskes recently reacted to the first dilemma by characterizing Goddard Institute for Space Studies director James Hansen - the most celebrated U.S. climate scientist - as "especially troublesome." Hansen not only put his body on the line this year in a high-profile arrest at a West Virginia coal generator, and testified repeatedly against carbon trading, but also endorsed Climate SOS, to Hiskes' dismay.

Why rail against Hansen? Hiskes claims that when describing Obama's bills as "worse than nothing," Hansen and other "no-compromise types" ignore "the historical precedent of legislation that is deeply flawed at first evolving into something effective and durable. The original Clean Air Act did not address the acid rain crisis, an omission not corrected until 1990. The original Social Security Act did not include domestic or agricultural workers, effectively excluding many Hispanic, black, and immigrant workers."

The obvious difference is that those two laws empowered

environmentalists and workers against enemies. They had universalizing potential and could be incrementally expanded. In contrast, Obama's climate legislation is so far off on the wrong track - by commodifying the air as the core climate strategy and empowering the fossil fuel industries - that the train cannot be steered away from its over-the-cliff route. Just let it crash.

(Oh bummer, the same seems to be true of 2009 legislation and fiscal programs for the economy and healthcare, which empower banksters, derivative financiers, energy firms, insurers and others who caused the problems in the first place.)

The second force caught in the quandary of climate politics is Penang-based Third World Network (TWN) and its many admirers, who insisted at Bangkok that the Kyoto Protocol be retained because, first, at least it offers the possibility of a binding framework, and second, countries not presently liable under Kyoto should still have the right to increase emissions so as to 'develop.'

I'll grant the first point, for if U.S. negotiators block Kyoto's extension, then national-level agreements could indeed be much weaker. On the other hand, if the EPA actually used its powers to reduce the top 7500 or so largest point-sources of U.S. carbon pollution, that would be far stronger than carbon trading legislation which lets polluters off the hook.

The main problem with TWN's 'development' argument is that a great deal of CO2-emitting economic activity and resource extraction in the Third World are better considered 'maldevelopment' - and for environmental, socio-economic and moral reasons should halt.

Here in South Africa, a long-term (apartheid-era) state relationship to the so-called 'minerals-energy complex' generated a political bloc so powerful that it is now in the process of building \$100-billion in new coal-fired and nuclear plants. Their strategy is to keep offering the cheapest electricity in the world to UK/Australian (formerly SA) mining/metals firms, including Anglo,

BHP Billiton, Lonplats and Arcelor-Mittal.

By way of background, state supplier Eskom lost \$1.3-billion last year gambling on aluminum futures. Forty percent of SA's CO2 emissions can be traced to a handful of the largest firms, including the dangerous oil-from-coal/gas operator Sasol. And cheap electricity for the mining/metals firms contrasts with wickedly-high price hikes (a 250% projection from 2008-11) for ordinary people, which in turn contributes to the intense demonstrations now destabilizing dozens of municipalities (the Centre for Civil Society documents these daily in our Social Protest Observatory, at [www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs](http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs)).

Moreover, as corporations export profits and dividends to London/Melbourne headquarters, our vast balance of payments deficit gives The Economist magazine cause to rate South Africa the world's riskiest emerging market. In sum, it is impossible to argue that SA's world-leading per capita CO2 emissions represents 'development.'

One way to address this maldevelopment - especially from exports of CO2-intensive minerals and cash crops, as well as manufactured goods transported by air and ship - is import/export taxation.

French president Nicolas Sarkozy proposed a small import tariff (the equivalent of 4 cents per litre of petrol) last month: "Most importantly, a carbon tax at the borders is vital for our industries and our jobs." In the U.S., the energy secretary and organized labour are also making noises along these lines.

Sarkozy's small incremental tax will not change consumption patterns. Explains Soumya Dutta from the People's Science Movement, "In India, a far less affluent society, whenever gasoline or diesel prices are raised by even 6-10%, there is an initial hue and cry. Within a month, things settle down and the consumption keeps growing - invariably."

The South Centre's Martin Khor condemns Sarkozy's move as 'climate protectionism,' remarking,

"It would be sad if the progressive movement were to support and join in the attempts by those who want to block off products from developing countries in the name of climate change." He is correct to label such taxes "self-interested and selfish bullying acts."

More generally, says Khor, "We shouldn't give the powerful countries an excuse and legitimacy to use climate or labour or social issues to block our exports and get away with it through a nice sounding excuse."

Of course, the details of the French strategy, and indeed its protectionist orientation, must be criticized. But the most crucial factor when imposing any kind of sanctions - whether a carbon tax or trade sanctions against Burmese regime or Zimbabwe's main ruling party - is the consent of those affected who are themselves struggling for change, a point Sarkozy hasn't factored in.

### **An Alternate Strategy for Copenhagen**

How might one? Turning a carbon tax into a positive funding flow for the Third World is a suggestion by Daphne Wysham of the Institute for Policy Studies. Proceeds should go directly to the countries whose products are being taxed, for the purposes of explicit greenhouse gas reduction.

These nuances in national-level strategic debates should be tackled by Northern activists bearing in mind the Global South's genuine development aspirations.

Regardless, core principles of the progressive movement are non-negotiable. In advance of Copenhagen Bella Center protests, here are demands articulated by Climate Justice Action:

- leaving fossil fuels in the ground;
- reasserting peoples' and community control over production; relocalising food production;
- massively reducing overconsumption, particularly in the North;
- respecting indigenous and forest peoples' rights; and

- recognising the ecological and climate debt owed to the peoples of the South and making reparations.

If the center is not holding, that's fine:

the wave of courageous direct-action protests against climate criminals in recent weeks - and the prospect of a "Seattle" in Copenhagen on December 16 - is an inspiring reflection of left pressure that will

soon counteract that from the right. It's our only hope, isn't it.

From [The Bullet](#), bulletin of the Socialist Project in Canada

# Mexican electrical union fights for its life

1 November 2009, by **Dan La Botz**



On the night of October 10, President Calderón ordered federal police to seize the power plants, while he simultaneously liquidated the state-owned Light and Power Company, fired the entire workforce, and thus did away with the legal existence of the union. The Mexican president's attack on the Electrical Workers Union might be compared to Ronald Regan's firing of more than 11,500 members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers (PATCO) in 1981 or to Margaret Thatcher's smashing of the National Union of Minerworkers (NUM) in 1984 in which over 11,000 miners were arrested and the union defeated. [11]

## Changing the Balance of Force

Calderón's move to destroy this union represents an important turning point in modern Mexican labor history, a decisive step to break the back of the unions once and for all. Following up on his three-year war on the Mexican Miners and Metal Workers Union (SNTMM), Calderón has now decided to take on the leading union in Mexico City. But, even more important, it is, as one Mexican political leader noted, it is an act intended "to change the balance of forces," so that they favor the government.

"After its electoral defeat and out of fear of social protest which the [economic] crisis is provoking, the government wants to give a demonstration of its power which everybody will understand: the left, the social movements, the PRI

[Institutional Revolutionary Party], the unions, the Congress, the businessmen and the media. The logic is the same that was used in the [Salinas government's] attack on La Quina [head of the Mexican Petroleum Workers Union] in 1989: if you can do it the strongest, then you can do it to the weakest. If the most combative union can be defeated, then so can any other force."

Mexico City, where this blow has been delivered, is heart of the political opposition to Calderón and the base of support for left-wing leader Andrés Manuel López Obrador who claims to have won the last election. Mexico City is also the base of Marcelo Ebrard, the mayor of the metropolis, who some see as another possible presidential contender in 2012. So this attack on the union is also an attack on the left at its strongest point. And, at least at this moment "and while we still hope to see the Mexican workers take the strong measures needed" it seems as if the government can and has defeated the strongest, and can now turn its attention to the weaker.

## A Turning Point

This is a turning point because it allows Mexico's capitalist class to resume the neoliberal project begun under Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1988 but interrupted by a series of unforeseen events: the creation of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in 1989, the Chiapas Rebellion led by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in 1994, president Ernesto Zedillo's precipitation of the economic crisis of 1994-96, and finally the end

of the old one-party state under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and its replacement by National Action Party (PAN).

Salinas had succeeded in privatizing the Mexican Telephone Company (TELMEX), the railroads, and the Cananea Copper Company, but he failed to finish the job, with the energy sector, petroleum and electric power generation still state owned. Now, after a twenty year interruption, Calderón has undertaken to finish the job.

## The Origin of an Independent Union

The full significance of these events can only be appreciated when one sees them in the light of both their history and the current political context. The Calderón administration has chosen to attack one of Mexico's oldest, most militant and most democratic union. The Mexican Electrical Workers Union was born in the great Mexican Revolution of 1910-1940, a tumultuous upheaval from below by the country's workers, farmers and peasants, swept away the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and replaced it with a new order, if not exactly the order that the underdogs had been hoping for. In 1911, a group of electrical workers at the Light and Power Company organized the League of Electrical Workers. Then in 1914 they founded the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas).

The newly created Electrical Workers participated in the general strike of 1916 to defend the right of

independent unions to exist. In 1917 the union negotiated its first contract, laying the basis for what would become one of the strongest collective bargaining agreements in the country. Less radical than some other unions and more independent than many, the Electrical Workers survived the labor wars of the 1920s that pitted corrupt, government-backed unions against revolutionary anarchists and Communists.

### **The Union in the Cárdenas Period**

When the popular nationalist and leftist General Lázaro Cárdenas became president, he brought most of the Mexican labor unions into his orbit and under his influence. The Electrical Workers general secretary Francisco Breña Alvarez, however, guided the union along its own independent path. In June of 1936, the Electrical Workers Union faced a conflict over wages with the British-Canadian Mexican Light, which then owned the central electrical companies for which their members worked.

The Cárdenas government would have liked to avoid a strike and proposed arbitration, but the union rejected any form of arbitration and struck. The strike by the union's 3,000 members shut off power in Mexico City "except to hospitals and other essential services" paralyzed the streetcars and brought management to the table. The union successfully defended the right to strike, eschewed arbitration, defeated the company, and maintained its independence from the government.

### **Between Scylla and Charybdis**

During the late 1940s and 1950s, Mexico experienced its own wave of anti-Communism and its own version of McCarthyism, as the government deposed independent union leaders and replaced them with government-backed gangster leaders, the so-called charros. The Mexican Electrical Workers succeeded in avoiding the worst of that era, allowing it to emerge in the 1960s and to continue in the 1970s as an ally of the "worker insurgency" then taking place and as friend to the new independent unions that were then emerging.

During the 1980s, the Electrical Workers Union once again found itself in conflict with the government-employer. In 1987, as students also struck the university, the union shut off power to Mexico City once again as it had 50 years before. Throughout the years of the Carlos Salinas presidency (1988-1994), the union maneuvered between the Scylla of government domination and the Charybdis of the president's program of privatization.

The Electrical Workers veered toward the privatizing president to protect its own interests, but simultaneously strove to escape the sirens of patronage. That period was not its most heroic, yet, despite its compromises with Salinas, the Electrical Workers Union did not completely forfeit its independence and emerged in the 1990s and 2000s to lead coalitions to defend national electric power companies, Light and Power and the Federal Electric Commission, and the Mexican Petroleum Company (PEMEX) from privatization.

### **Fighting Privatization**

The union was outspoken and active in its opposition to President Vicente Fox, his National Action Party (PAN), and its rightwing agenda. The Electrical Workers Union organized around it self a coalition of other unions, peasant leagues, and urban poor people to create the National Front Against Privatization. When Felipe Calderón became president in 2006, the Electrical Workers continued their struggle against privatization, joining with the National Union of Workers (the UNT), Mexico's independent labor federation, to build a massive national coalition dedicated to changing the direction of the country.

For almost a decade the Electrical Workers and its allies have successfully stopped first Vicente Fox and then Felipe Calderón from selling off the national patrimony.

Most recently, the Electrical Workers and its Mexican Union Front (FSM), have brought together other labor unions, peasant leagues and organizations of the urban poor. The

FSM in turn united with the independent National Union of Workers (UNT) to create the "frentote" a gigantic coalition of virtually all of Mexico's organized working people. The SME, thus, stood squarely in the path of President Felipe Calderón and his National Action Party.

### **The Union and its Contract**

The Mexican Electrical Workers Union had developed over the years into a powerful institution. The union's total members reached 43,000 working members and 22,000 retirees represented by between 700 and 840 full-time, paid delegates. The union contract, first negotiated in 1917, had evolved into a complex document describing 2,800 job categories and 92 wage scales for the various jobs. This contract protected the rights and privileges of union members, with SME union members having wages, benefits, and working conditions far superior to those of workers in many other unions and especially to unorganized workers.

The contract also gave the union power vis-à-vis the company in matters of financing, development and new technology. It required management to inform the union of the annual budget, building plans, investment and acquisitions, and current finances. The contract forbade the company from out-sourcing work even in non-electrical areas such as auto shops, construction and carpentry. The union had virtual control over all hiring and firing, and the union ran a technical school with more than 1,200 students preparing to become Light and Power employees. The union contract also required the company to provide the union with 75 million pesos (7.5 million dollars) for contracting expenses, cultural activities, for retirees, and in advances for union dues in June so that union members could buy school supplies. While critics called this the "dictatorship of the proletariat," in was in reality a strong union contract, not so different than those found two decades ago in every industrial country in the world, providing its members with job security, economic security, and in general with social well-being. Calderón has swept away the union and torn its contract to bits.

## Union Conflict Precipitates Crisis

Calderón may have been encouraged to make his bold move to eliminate both company and union by the development earlier this year of an internal union conflict. The Mexican Electrical Workers Union is a notoriously democratic union which has often seen rival factions struggle for leadership of the union. The June 2009 union elections saw Martán Esparza, the incumbent general secretary heading up the Green Slate of the Unity and Union Democracy caucus and Alejandro Muñoz, the union's treasurer, heading up the Orange Slate of the Union Transparency caucus. Muñoz accused Esparza of having used his union office to line his own pockets, and Esparza made similar accusations against Muñoz.

Esparza also accused Muñoz of colluding with César Nava, a PAN leader who previously served as Calderón's closest aide (secretario particular). Muñoz denied the accusations that he was close to Nava.

Muñoz accused the union of irregularities in the electoral proceeding, but was convinced to await the results of the June election, which he lost to Esparza. A month later, Muñoz filed charges with the Federal Board of Conciliation and Arbitration. This opened the door for the government to intervene in the union. Subsequently, on September 10, Secretary of Labor Javier Lozano, declared that there had been irregularities in the election, and on October 5 he refused to recognize Martán Esparza as general secretary, effectively decapitating the union by declaring that it had no legally recognized leadership. The Mexican government has broad powers to withhold recognition (known as *toma de nota*) from union leaders. This government interference violates the International Labor Organization's Convention 87 which says workers have the right to organize and run unions of their own choosing. Five days after Lozano refused to recognize the union leaders, Calderón sent the police and army to seize the plants.

It is hard to tell exactly how the internal conflict affected the union and its leaders, but in the crucial days

before the government carried out its coup, the leadership failed to mobilize the union and its allies to defend their workplaces and union. Though the union had told the press a week before that it believed the government was preparing to seize the company facilities, it apparently took no steps to advise its members to resist the police and hold the plants. For example, on October 10 group of just 30 police officers seized the Systems Operation center which controls the electrical substations of the entire country " and amazingly the famously militant union did nothing to attempt to stop that takeover of that crucial facility or any others. At the same time the police also took over the union hall and its radio station, also without resistance. [12]

## The Political and Labor Union Context Today

Calderón and his National Action Party, controlling the executive branch of government, have led this attack, but they have had the support of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which dominates the legislative branch. The government's attack on the Mexican Electrical Workers Union has been opposed by the parties of the left: the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the Workers Party (PT), and Convergence. The PAN and the PRI together control more than two-thirds of the representatives and senators.

The PRI's support has been important not only in the legislature but also in the organized labor movement. The PRI, the former ruling party of Mexico, controls the Congress of Labor, the Confederation of Mexican Workers and other confederations and industrial unions, such as the Petroleum Workers Union. So, though the Mexican Electrical Workers Union is party of the Congress of Labor, none of the other union leaders in that umbrella organization of the official labor movement have said a word in defense of the electrical workers, and none of those unions have come to its aid.

While the PRI controls most industrial unions, the head of the largest public employee unions Elba Esther Gordillo of the 1.5 million member Mexican

Teachers Union (el SNTE) and Valdemar Gutiérrez Fragoso of the 300,000 member Mexican Social Security Workers Union (SNTSS) have been allied with the Calderón and the PAN. Gordillo joined Calderón in creating a new Alliance for Quality Education (ACE), which many critics see as opening the door privatization in that area. Gutiérrez Fragoso, in addition to his duties as head of his union is also a PAN legislator. Neither the Teachers Union nor the Social Security Workers Union have spoken out against the government attack nor acted in solidarity with the Electrical Workers Union.

## Massive Protest March

Still, the Electrical Workers Union has many allies. Labor unions and social movements, and opposition political parties organized a huge protest march on Friday, October 16 which was estimated at between 150,000 and 300,000 participants. The march began at 4:00 p.m. at the Angel of Independence on Reforma Avenue and marched to the Zócalo, Mexico national plaza, the last marchers arriving at 8:00 p.m. University workers, nuclear workers, miners, the teachers union opposition, telephone workers and many others hiked through Mexico to show their solidarity. While the march was a strong show of support, it was not a show of force, never attempting to retake any of the facilities.

Early last week Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who, arguing that he won the 2006 election, calls himself the "Legitimate President of Mexico," convened a mass meeting of tens of thousands of his supporters and turned the platform over to Martán Esparza, general secretary of the Electrical Workers Union. Both Esparza and López Obrador called the government's action unconstitutional and illegal and both called for resistance. López Obrador called upon the legislature to create a commission to investigate the situation. No such investigation is likely to take place, given that the government party and its allies control the congress.

Since the police seized the power plants there have been daily rallies

and demonstrations by thousands of Electrical Workers in Mexico City. Neither speaker proposed a plan of resistance through mass action aimed at the government but rather inclined toward legal strategies.

The mass march pressured the government into holding a negotiating session with the union, but that session soon reached an impasse. Secretary of the Interior Fernando Gómez Mont said that the government's decision was "irreversible." Secretary of Labor also commented calling the liquidation of the company a "consummated fact." The Mexican Electrical Workers also refused to compromise on its demands that the police be removed from the workplace, that the liquidation of the company be revoked, and that the government negotiate the issues with the union. Further progress in any negotiations seems unlikely, and become less likely with every passing day.

As that incident demonstrates, mass marches will not be able to force the government to reverse its decision, though it remains possible that a national response, a national civic uprising such as the local uprising in Oaxaca three years ago, might be capable of stopping the government. Still, if the union is not prepared to take the necessary action in Mexico City, it cannot expect others to come to the rescue. The union must lead or be swept away.

### **Solidarity from Mexico and Abroad**

Throughout Mexico workers, students, and communities, labor unions and left parties rallied and marched to support the Mexican Electrical Workers Union. In Cuernavaca, Morelos some 3,500 marched. In Oaxaca the Union of Workers and Employees of the Benito Juárez Autonomous University shut down the university in protest and solidarity. In San Luis Potosí the Potosí Union Front carried protested the development at the State Legislature and expressed their solidarity with the electrical workers. Divers organizations "the National Union of General Tire Workers, the Board Popular Front (FAP), and the Party of the Democratic Revolution expressed support at the

national, state and local levels.

Expression of international solidarity arrived from the United States and Canada, from Holland Germany, and even from workers in Iraq. Unions from around the world condemned the Mexican government and gave voice to their solidarity with the Mexican Electrical Workers Union. While such expressions of solidarity help to give heart to the struggle electrical workers of Mexico, unlike in industries such as shipping where dockworkers solidarity can have a direct impact, those foreign unions can have little leverage on a nationalized power company in another country "though the CFE does import coal, and coal miners, railroad workers, and marine workers might be able to interrupt those shipments.

### **Union's Legal and Legislative Strategy**

While marching in the streets, the Electrical Workers Union is also pursuing a legal strategy, having hired Néstor de Buen, the country's leading labor lawyer, to argue that the Calderón government seizures of the company was unconstitutional and illegal. The union also plans to have its members file individual lawsuits called amparos, something like injunctions, arguing that their individual rights have been violated. While other unions have used the individual lawsuits as a mechanism to delay government actions, they would seem to be a weak tool in this case.

The union says it will also pursue a legislative strategy, pressuring the Mexican Legislature to present a "constitutional controversy," arguing in effect that the executive branch of the government overstepped its constitutional authority. Such a legislative strategy appears to have little hope of success given the alliance between President Calderón's National Action Party (PAN) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which together control a very large majority of both houses of congress.

The union's legal strategy is premised on the argument that since Light and Power was created by the legislative decree it cannot be eradicated by executive decrees. The union and its supporters have also argued that the

president's action violates both Mexican labor law and international labor standards.

### **Police, Army Still Occupy Plants**

At this moment, 5,000 federal police, backed up by at least 10,000 police reserves, and 3,000 military officers still hold over 100 facilities. The plants are being operated by management and by 3,000 electrical workers brought in from the other state-owned power company, the Federal Electrical Commission (CFE), and another 800 engineers and technicians provided by the military. Workers at the CFE are members of the Sole Union of Electrical Workers of Mexico (SUTERM), a union historically controlled by the PRI whose leaders are eager to collude with the government in the hopes of sharing in the booty of jobs, union dues, and political influence.

Since the police took control of the plants there have been many localized blackouts that have shut off power for hours to Mexico City neighborhoods, to other cities and towns, and to industry, with hundreds of factories idled in the nearby State of Mexico. The government has blamed the blackouts on the union, while the union attributes the blackouts to the incompetence of the government and the workers brought into run the plants.

### **Future of the Light and Power**

The Calderón government has said that, having extinguished the Light and Power Company, it will now turn its facilities over to a new company which it plans to merge with the Federal Electrical Commission in the near future. The government says it plans to hire 10,000 former Light and Power workers to work for the new company under new terms of employment. The 45,000 union workers have been told that they must collect their severance pay by mid-November to be eligible to be hired by the new company. So far about 1,400 workers have collected their severance pay. There have also been 11,700 payments to the 22,000 retirees. As an added inducement to workers, the Secretary of Labor has thrown in scholarships to study

English for workers who file for their severance soon.

The government has set aside 20 billion pesos (about 200 million dollars) for the costs of the liquidation of the company labor force. Each worker is being paid the severance to which they are entitled under Mexican law, 300,000 to 400,000 pesos or about U.S.\$30,000-40,000 each.

### **The Economic Argument**

Felipe Calderón's decision to liquidate the Light and Power Company did not result out of any contract negotiation or strike, but rather out of a political decision to do away with the nationalized company and the union which stands at the center of the Mexican left and in the path of the president's privatizing agenda. The Calderón government, however, argues that this was a purely economic decision based on the economic and productive inefficiencies of Light and Power. There is, however, no clear cut economic case to be made; the issues are complex.

The government argues that the Light and Power Company had an annual deficit of 44 billion pesos (400 million US dollars). Georgina Kessel Martínez, Secretary of Energy, asserts that Light and Power's expenses were almost always double its sales, requiring enormous government subsidies. In reality that "deficit" was largely the result of transferring electric power from the Federal Electric Commission (CFE) to Light and Power (LyF), both government owned companies.

Calderón in his speech to the nation justified eliminating the company because it was "losing one third of the electricity it distributed because of theft, technical failures, corruption, or inefficiencies." That the CFE was more productive than LyF seems beyond doubt, but many things explain that:

- Mexico City, the Federal District and Central Mexico, which Light and Power served, represent the most difficult geographic, demographic, and economic area of the country. While rural areas present special challenges, the complex and constantly expanding and evolving megapolis of 20 million

people and millions of others in surrounding central states is even more so.

- The residents and businesses of Mexico City reputedly "steal" electrical energy from the system through illegal connections. I put "steal" in quotes because it is after all a national system which exists to provide electricity to the Mexican people at a reasonable cost.

- Government agencies, for example Los Pinos, the Mexican presidential residence and office, did not pay for their electricity. For reasons that are unclear, the government company also failed to charge some Mexican businesses such as hotels for their electricity.

- The union argues that for the last 20 years the government declined to invest in the company, allowing the plant and distribution system to deteriorate, in order to create an economic crisis.

### **The Question of Wages, Benefits, Pensions**

The Calderón administration has suggested that at the center of Light and Power's economic problems was the high cost of workers wages, benefits and pensions which threatened to bankrupt the system. The government says that 160 billion pesos out of its 240 billion peso wage bill went toward pensions for 20,000 retired workers.

Without a doubt, the Mexican Electrical Workers Union had succeeded in its 95-year history in winning for its members a labor union contract which might be the envy of workers throughout the country. Unlike most Mexican workers, Light and Power workers earned about 6,000 pesos (600 US dollars) per month, something approximating a living wage. Retired workers enjoyed very generous pensions equal to or greater than their work wages. But the alleged financial crisis of the company may not have been the real motive behind Calderón's aggressive action.

### **The Real Economic Motive?**

Martín Esparza, the union's leader,

argues that the real economic motive for the government's action is the desire of private industry to get its hands on the 100 kilometer network of fiber optic cable which was the property of Light and Power. The fiber optic cable system which can be used for telecommunications was licensed in 1999 to WL Comunicaciones S.A. de C.V., a Spanish company.

A year later the company, whose majority partners are two former Secretaries of Energy, Fernando Canales Clariond and Ernesto Martens, gained the right to operate the fiber optic network for 30 years, with the possibility of further extensions. Secretary of Labor Javier Lozano has also been as a consultant, assisting WL Comunicaciones in winning its concessions. [13]

### **The Impact: Business Thrilled**

Mexican and foreign capital is thrilled at Calderón's action. The Business Coordinating Council (CCE), the Confederation of Mexican Employers (COPARMEX), the Federation of Industrial Chambers (CONCAMIN), the National Chamber of the Manufacturing Industry (CANACINTRA), and the Mexican Council of Businessmen (CMHN) all praised Calderón and encouraged him to see the attack on the electrical workers as just a first step. The Mexican capitalist class has had a taste of blood, likes it, and wants more.

Investors.com, speaking for and to international capital, in an article titled "Mexico Knocks a Union's Lights Out" called it, "one of the best things to happen to Mexico." Business Week, while less euphoric, speculated that Calderón might now take on the Mexican Teachers Union and the PEMEX, the state oil company, and the Petroleum Workers Union, and Carlos Slim's TELMEX with its high telephone costs.

### **A More Authoritarian State**

Senator Rosario Ibarra, Mexico's first woman candidate for president in 1982 and longtime human rights activist, expresses her alarm at a whole series of recent developments "including the government's

seizure of Light and Power “ which suggest that the Mexican government has become more authoritarian. [14]

José Narro Robles, the rector of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), suggests that the government’s seizure of the power plants and elimination of the company and the union will aggravate an already difficult situation for the

country’s majority of working and poor people. Warning of possible social unrest, he says, “Our country is living in a very delicate moment. Nobody can deny it. No one can deny it when we have such a large number of millions of Mexicans in inadequate conditions, in poverty or in extreme poverty.”

Narro fears social unrest, and his fear is understandable, but it seems that if

the Mexican Electrical Workers Union and the labor movement are to survive, it will take social unrest of a well organized and massive sort to stop the Calderón government. If such forces began to move, they might even push that government aside, though so far, there are no signs of such a development on the scale needed.

October 20th 2009