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The meaning of the 16th World Congress

3 January 2010, by François Sabado

The 16th Congress of the Fourth International, which will be held in February 2010, already constitutes an event for revolutionary Marxists. Delegations from around sixty countries from every continent will be present. Evidence of the capacities of the Fourth International to participate in unitary processes and pluralist political debate on the radical left, this congress will also involve a significant number of guest organisations which are not members of the Fourth International.

This congress takes place at a specific time in the world situation marked by a global crisis, a "crisis of civilisation" of the capitalist world. A crisis which combines economic, social, ecological and food-related elements, in short a crisis which every day shows the increasingly higher human cost of the functioning of the capitalist system. The fiasco of the Copenhagen summit is a striking illustration of it. Contrary to all the talk of a "green capitalism" or an "ecological refoundation of capitalism", the basic logic of the system, namely the search for profit, is opposed to the fundamental interests of the peoples and workers of the world. One of the tasks of this next congress will be to review the current developments of the world economic crisis and to update a transitional programme in the face of the capitalist crisis.

This programmatic work will find new dimensions, precisely faced with the ecological ravaging of the planet. This is the meaning of the presentation to the discussion of a resolution on the ecological crisis and the broad axes of an "ecosocialist response". This desire for updating or programmatic innovation in the context of the general references of revolutionary Marxism is one of the qualities of the revolutionary Marxist current represented in the Fourth International. This responsiveness in elaboration has been a fundamental attribute for analysing the developments of capitalism after the second world war, grasping the dynamics of the revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, orienting revolutionary Marxists in the fight against women's oppression, or that against the oppression of lesbians and gays, to understanding the broad features of the new historic period determined by capitalist globalisation, the fall of Stalinism, the social liberal development and the structural modifications experienced by the workers' movement in the developed capitalist countries.

It is in this context that the next congress will be one of the places for exchanges on the new experiences of construction of movements, revolutionary currents or anti-capitalist parties in the broad sense. Belonging to an international current which has ensured a certain historic continuity in the struggle against the capitalist system but also against all systems of oppression, in particular the bureaucratic states of the East, and which relates to a project of self-emancipation provides a series of theoretical and political tools to forge a certain vision of the world. These gains should be preserved, maintained, enriched.

This is the meaning of the Fourth International, its publications, activities and international formations. But today it is also about discussing a new, broader perspective of regroupment corresponding to the new historic period. We must work for the convergence of a series of experiences and social and political currents on the basis of "a common understanding of events and tasks". The Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal, the Red Green Alliance in Denmark, the PSOL in Brazil, the currents for the construction of a new workers' party in South Korea, the LPP in Pakistan, the PPP (Polish Parry of Labour), the left currents of Die Linke in Germany or the NPA in France, each constitute in their way forms of organisations of this anti-capitalist left.

In some Latin American or African countries this question can be posed through relations with the forces of radical or revolutionary indigenous nationalism through anti-imperialist fronts. These forms are moments or spaces of regroupment for revolutionary forces.

This approach, which we discussed at the 15th World Congress of the Fourth International in 2003, has been one of the references to orient us in the processes of reorganisation of the workers' movement. It should today be deepened in a situation marked by

global crisis. That means taking into account the emergence of organisers of mobilisation and movements against capitalist exploitation, the new trade unionism of struggle, the political reorganisations underway on the left, the revival of the global justice movement through the struggle to "change the system, not the climate", to create a new anti-capitalist left independent of social democracy and the centre left.

Of course such a goal cannot be summed up in a series of recipes or models of organisation. Each organisation has its history, its own traditions taking into account each national reality, but the search for convergence should be at the centre of discussions on the construction of new anti-capitalist forces. The history of the Fourth International teaches us also that, if general discussions on programme take place on the international level, the national tactical choices are made by national organisations or parties. Each, thus, brings their own contribution, enriching the general discussion. This also is the meaning of a congress of the Fourth International.

Trotsky lives!

1 January 2010, by Paul Le Blanc

Along with Lenin and other leaders of the Russian Revolution associated with the Bolshevik – soon renamed Communist – party, "he first came to global attention in 1917. … He lived a life full of drama played out with the world as his stage. The October Revolution changed the course of history, and Trotsky had a prominent role in the transformation. … There is no denying Trotsky's exceptional qualities. He was an outstanding speaker, organizer and leader." (1, 3)

As the workers' councils (soviets) and earnest revolutionary ideals of the Bolsheviks gave way to the increasingly vicious bureaucratic dictatorship under Joseph Stalin, Trotsky became the most formidable critic of what was happening. He was taken seriously not simply by anti-Stalinists on the Left, "but by a large number of influential commentators who detested the Stalin regime. Trotsky's explanation of what took place since the fall of the Romanov monarchy in February 1917 took root in Western historical works," Service notes. At the same time, "Stalin depicted Trotsky as a traitor to the October Revolution, laid charges against him in the show-trials of 1936-8 and ordered Soviet intelligence agencies to assassinate him. In 1940 they succeeded." (2, 1)

Yet Stalin's Communism proved unable to sustain itself for even half a century afterward. With the global triumph of capitalism, however, there is also a multi-faceted global crisis of capitalism – assuming far-reaching dimensions that are ecological, social, cultural, political, military, and economic. Ten years ago the members of the United Nations promised the achievement by 2015 of Millennium Goals that would dramatically push back global poverty and hunger, also advancing the empowerment of women and the education of children, improvements in health care, improvements in environmental sustainability, improvements in "fair trade," and more. The modest gains toward realizing the UN Millennium Goals are more than balanced by setbacks and disappointments. An old socialist slogan of the 1970s – "Capitalism Fouls Things Up" – seems quite relevant in the early 21st century.

This is certainly an ideal moment for people to engage with one of the greatest revolutionaries of modern times. Service makes exciting claims: that his searches among archival holdings shed new light on the subject, and that he offers, for the first time, an objective account of this symbol of revolutionary Marxism. But in more ways than one, the book he has produced is not what it claims to be. In fact, what many reviewers have enthused over, in their discussions of Service's book, is the demolition of what they (and Service) consider to be a myth. As novelist and journalist Robert Harris approvingly comments in London's Sunday Times, "50 years after the last full-scale biography of Trotsky in English, Robert Service has turned his attention to this myth – and has, effectively, assassinated Trotsky all over again." [1].

A cultural phenomenon

There is at least one problem here – the reviewer's claim that this is the first full-scale biography in English since the outstanding and sympathetic three-volume work by Isaac Deutscher which appeared in the 1950s and '60s (and has been recently republished by Verso). In fairness to Service, he himself actually asserts: "This book is the first full-length biography of Trotsky written by someone outside Russia who is not a Trotskyist." (xxi)

However phrased, the claim is simply not true. In 1975, Joel Carmichael produced a work of about 500 pages, Trotsky: An Appreciation of His Life. In 1977 Robert Payne's The Life and Death of Trotsky (close to 500 pages) appeared. In 1979, Ronald Segal's over 400-page biography, Leon Trotsky, was published. Service's purported biographical assassination comes in at slightly more than each of these, but not by much. Service's emphasis on not being a Trotskyist is belied by the fact that these three works are all non-Trotskyist — and two reject fundamentally (as does Service) all that Trotsky stood for.

For that matter, over the past couple of years, preceding the appearance of Service's book, there have been three additional major studies, all critical-to-hostile – Ian Thatcher's Trotsky (2002), Geoff Swain's Trotsky (2006), and Bertrand Patenaude's Trotsky: Downfall of a Revolutionary (2009). It

is remarkable that so many critical books have appeared on Trotsky's life. If one is willing to add a major Russian work translated into English in 1995, there is Dmitri Volkoganov's hostile Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary, which received a reception quite similar to that accorded to Service's new volume. One might ask why such obsessive debunking must go on and on … and on.

This is hardly a problem for Simon Sebag Montefiore (whose help Service acknowledges in his preface). An upper-class historian, novelist, and authority on Stalin, Montefiore complains in the Conservative Daily Telegraph that "Trotsky, like Mao and to some extent Lenin, has long been one of those Communist titans who, for some, achieved the status of fashionable radical saints, even in the democracies that they would have destroyed in an orgy of bloodletting." While "Lenin and Mao have been recast as brutal monsters not unlike Stalin himself," only now has Trotsky also been able to join the pantheon of Red monsters – presented by Service in all his "ugly egotism and unpleasant, overweening arrogance, the belief in and enthusiastic practice of killing on a colossal scale." [2]

The more politically neutral Times offers a more delicious characterization by reviewer Richard Harris, hardly a Tory but rather an enthusiastic supporter of the former "New Labor" Prime Minister Tony Blair. Perhaps drawing from his own experience, he writes: "If one can imagine the most obnoxious middle-class student radical one has ever met — bitter, sneering, arrogant, selfish, cocky, callous, Â¬callow, blinkered and condescending — and if one freezes that image, applies a pair of pince-nez and transports it back to the beginning of the last century, then one has Trotsky." [3]

In the Wall Street Journal, scholar and human rights activist Joshua Rubenstein offers a mixed judgment. While praising Service's "vivid" and "long overdue" biography as "approaching Trotsky without emotional or ideological attachment" (which could be the understatement of the year), he also accurately notes that Service "slips into personal animus that is sometimes out of place," and that the book "hardly discusses Trotsky's writings, either as a Marxist theoretician or as an accomplished and independent journalist" – which is a remarkable limitation, given the centrality of such things to all that Trotsky was. [4] What would one make of biographies about Newton or Darwin or Einstein that hardly discussed their scientific theories? This is a fatal limitation: one cannot understand and assess Trotsky without a more serious-minded engagement with his ideas.

At least one reviewer, Tariq Ali, in the left-leaning Guardian simply slams "Service's plodding account in which some of the allegations are so trivial that they are best ignored." He adds, as if amplifying Rubenstein's point about the failure to deal with Trotsky's actual ideas: "On most of the important issues – the danger of substituting the party for the state in Russia, the necessity of uniting with social-democrats and liberals to defeat Hitler, the futility of forcing the communists into an alliance with Chiang Kai-shek in China, the fate that awaited the Jews if Hitler came to power and constant warnings that the Nazis were preparing to invade the Soviet Union – he was proved right time and time again." [5]

The actual book

Engaging seriously with the actual book under review, one cannot agree fully with the judgments of the reviewers just cited. It is somewhat better, and much worse, than one might be led to believe. Service's study is really quite readable. The prose is clear, and the story interesting. It follows the basic outline sketched by Trotsky himself in his literary masterpiece My Life, supplemented by Deutscher's brilliant trilogy – The Prophet Armed, The Prophet Unarmed, and The Prophet Outcast. This provides a coherent structure, which Service seeks in a workman-like manner to compress into a more succinct, relatively fast-paced narrative.

Service certainly dispenses large dollops of the negative judgment regarding Trotsky, the stuff that many reviews on the right and left focus on. Debating about Trotsky with Christopher Hitchens, under the auspices of the Hoover Institution, Service characterized the revolutionary as "the most amazingly brilliant man . . . but such a dreadful mistake of a life and a career." [6] That matches the thrust of his speaking tours, and of all the publicity around the book.

Nonetheless, there remains the strong influence of Deutscher's magisterial biography, the considerable researches from post-1960s social historians on the Russian Revolution (essentially corroborating John Reed's exuberantly sympathetic eyewitness account, Ten Days That Shook the World), and the power of Trotsky's own writings. All push into the pages of Service's biography, and they push in a different direction than that in which he himself prefers to travel.

More than this, in some ways — not in all, as we shall see — Service proves himself a capable historian. He spent many years researching Lenin, producing a capable if increasingly hostile three-volume political summary, "capped" by a sadly inferior (though widely lauded) biography. This has given him a fair sense of the shape of the history of the Russian revolutionary movement leading up to the 1917 Revolution. This stands him in good stead as he contextualizes much of Trotsky's story. In addition to this, and in addition to the use of a considerable amount of secondary literature, he actually spent time mining the archives and has come up with new material.

Service makes much of this archival exploration, promising new revelations supposedly culled from earlier drafts of My Life and other writings. While there are, in fact, no stunningly defamatory "revelations" forthcoming from the archives, there are insights offered from – for example – correspondence between Trotsky and his first wife Alexandra. A youthful Trotsky, imprisoned for revolutionary activities, writes to his lover: "Mikhailovski in an article about Lassalle says that one can be more frank with the woman one loves than with oneself; this is to a certain degree true but such frankness is

possible only in a personal conversation but not always, only in special and exceptional circumstances." Engaging with such correspondence, Service comments aptly: "Then and later he favored extreme images and striking turns of phrase. This was no artificial invention. It flowed from the personality of someone who did not feel alive unless he could communicate with others." (52, 53)

At the same time, there is a remarkable sloppiness that crops up in this book. For example, Service speculates that Trotsky's father hired a rabbi to teach his young son the Torah (24) – but his source is the short account by Max Eastman in Leon Trotsky: The Portrait of a Youth, which makes it clear that the father hired a private tutor — one who had a beard, to be sure, but who was an agnostic scholar, not a rabbi. This matches the relatively secular inclinations that Service acknowledges were characteristic of Trotsky's father. It is odd that, with no more evidence to cite than Eastman, Service converts this into Jewish religious instruction. [7]

At times, his "facts" are simply wrong. Service tells us that Trotsky "spoke out against 'individual terror' in 1909 when the Socialist-Revolutionaries murdered the police informer Evno Azev, who had penetrated their Central Committee." (113) But this is impossible. Azev most definitely was a police spy who held a position of immense authority within the Socialist-Revolutionary organization: coordinating the terrorist assassinations carried out by the Socialist-Revolutionaries. This was a tactic which Trotsky and other Marxists of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party absolutely opposed. But Azev himself, after being exposed, escaped to Germany, where he was imprisoned until 1917 and apparently died of kidney disease in 1918. [8] Why would Trotsky denounce a murder that never happened? Of course he didn't. But it certainly undermines one's confidence in Service's ability to get things right.

There are also examples of important facts being left out of the account. One of the most disconcerting comes up in Service's seemingly detailed account of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations. The Bolshevik Revolution had come to power promising "peace, bread, land" and one of the highest priorities for the new soviet government was to extricate Russia from the devastation of the First World War, with Trotsky as the chief peace negotiator with the Germans, "moving like a weaver's shuttle between Brest-Litovsk and the Russian capital," as Service nicely phrases it. (208) The German military sought to impose a very nasty settlement, which the revolutionaries were loathe to accept. Some argued for waging "revolutionary war" against German imperialism while Lenin insisted that the regime must sign the German peace terms, however odious. Trotsky took a middle position – "neither peace nor war" – in hopes that through drawing the negotiations out and peppering them with widely-publicized revolutionary speeches, the proletarian ferment visible in Central Europe would be transformed into workers' uprisings. Service notes that Trotsky first won a majority (even the anxious and skeptical Lenin went along). But then, he tells us, Lenin somehow – presumably through persuasive conversations and lobbying among his comrades – was finally able to secure a majority for making peace. How did this happen? What Service inexplicably fails to mention is that the German military, losing patience, launched a massive and successful offensive which demonstrated the hollowness of the "revolutionary war" notion and the inadequacy of Trotsky's compromise position. The German High Command then put forward even more odious demands which Lenin now had little difficulty in persuading a majority to accept. [9]

There are a number of surprising examples of more minor sloppiness. For example, André Breton, the poet and theorist of surrealism who sympathized with Trotsky, is consistently but incorrectly identified as a "surrealist painter." (399, 453, 461) The anti-Trotskyist Bertram Wolfe is mistaken for Trotsky adherent Bernard Wolfe (441). At one point Service tells us: "Instead of calling his first son after his own father, he and Natalya had chosen the name Sergei." (201) But of course Sergei Sedov was the second son and Lev Sedov the first, as Service himself documents elsewhere in the book.

More than once such sloppiness is exposed by Service himself. Describing the 1916 voyage of Trotsky and his family to New York on a Spanish steamship, Service tells us that "Trotsky claimed they travelled second class." This is "exposed" as "a silly fib," since – while paying for second-class tickets – it was found that the second-class berths were overbooked, "and they were given a first-class cabin at no extra charge." But according to the footnote Service offers, Trotsky was telling this "silly fib" to himself, since it appeared (apparently as a mistaken recollection) in his 1935 diary, not meant for publication and only published after his death. In the same passage, Service asserts that the Trotskys "did not mingle with passengers from the lowest decks," feeling "no impulse to spend time talking to workers." Yet a few lines later, Service tells us that, in discussions about World War I, "Trotsky only met one person who appealed to him. This was a housemaid from Luxembourg." In the next paragraph, Service tells us, an entry in Trotsky's diary indicates that his sons "made friends with the Spanish sailors, who told them that they would soon get rid of the monarchy in Madrid," which – one would assume – also appealed to Trotsky. (153)

Personality and politics

As already noted, there is a significant amount of anti-Trotsky editorializing, especially concentrated in the book's introductory and concluding sections, but interlarded as sniping assertions, speculations, and projections throughout much of the biography. The book's purpose, Service insists, "is to dig up the buried life" of a man whose "self-serving account of Stalin and Stalinism deeply influenced the discourse of writers both left and right," but who had himself demonstrated a "lust for dictatorship and terror," and, in fact, positively "reveled in terror." (The faint-hearted

need not fear – the book never really presents such raw lust and reveling!) Trotsky's character, according to Service, involved the following traits, to take some of those offered in the book's index: alienating others, arrogance, aversion to sentimentality, bossiness, careless about people's attitudes to him, dislike of losing at games, egotism, impatience with stupidity, insensitivity, perfectionism, prickliness, Puritanism, temper, vanity, self-centered, will to dominate. (4, 499, 497, 597) Nor is this all wrong.

Isaac Deutscher also affirmed that Trotsky sometimes displayed a "prickly and overbearing character and a lack of talent for teamwork." Trotsky's Bolshevik comrade Anatoly Lunacharsky offered an acidly frank pen-portrait in 1923: "His colossal arrogance and an inability or unwillingness to show any human kindness or to be attentive to people, the absence of that charm which always surrounded Lenin, condemned Trotsky to a certain loneliness." Others, including Service, indicate that Trotsky could indeed show kindness and great charm, and that over time he mellowed somewhat – and yet these less endearing characteristics never vanished. From the archives he digs out correspondence to Trotsky's second wife Natalya from Lev Sedov, Trotsky's capable revolutionary-activist son, complaining in 1936 "that all of Papa's failings are getting worse with age: his intolerance, hot temper, teasing, even crudity and desire to offend," and that "Papa never recognizes when he's in the wrong. That's why he can't bear criticism. When something is said or written to him with which he disagrees he either ignores it entirely or gets back with a harsh reply." (230, 431-432) Yet other qualities that Lunacharsky stressed also persisted – "the remarkable coherence and literary skill of his phrasing, the richness of imagery, scalding irony, his soaring pathos, his rigid logic, clear as polished steel," and the fact that "there is not a drop of vanity in him, he is totally indifferent to any title or to the trappings of power." And yet, Lunacharsky concluded, "Trotsky treasures his historical role and would probably make any personal sacrifice . . . in order to go down in human memory surrounded by the aureole of a genuine revolutionary leader." [10] (Some see this latter quality as a flaw, others as a strength.)

While there is overlap between much of this and aspects of Service's description, essential elements in his negative characterization (charges of hypocrisy, ingrained authoritarianism, "reveling in terror") seem to flow from the author's desire to turn people against a serious consideration of Trotsky's orientation, not from the research he has done. One suspects it precedes that research and is rooted in his ideological and institutional commitments. While Service is not up-front about his own politics, in the first sentence of the book's preface he forthrightly describes the Hoover Institution as his "base." For many years it has been widely known for its conservative orientation, and Service enjoys the status of a highly esteemed Senior Fellow there.

The Hoover Institution's mission statement affirms "the principles of individual, economic, and political freedom; private enterprise; and representative government were fundamental to the vision of the Institution's founder," the conservative U.S. President Herbert Hoover, who believed deeply in laissez-faire capitalism. "By collecting knowledge, generating ideas, and disseminating both, the Institution seeks to secure and safeguard peace, improve the human condition, and limit government intrusion into the lives of individuals." The influence on Service of this perspective was suggested during his Trotsky debate with Christopher Hitchens at the Hoover Institution itself. "With a centralized state-run economy," he argued, even with "a somewhat more astute character such as Trotsky, . . . it was an absolute certainty that you couldn't . . . get the kind of results that you wanted for popular consumption such as you can have under a market economy." [11]

Whatever the motivation and underlying ideology, all too often we find Service engaged in an odd game of scoring of nasty personal points. It gets in the way of what one might expect from a serious biographer. Here are four examples among many.

â€¢ - In reaction to Trotsky's love letters to Alexandra, in which he expresses doubts and depression, Service informs us that "unconsciously Trotsky was trying to induce Alexandra to do more than love him: he wanted her to understand and look after him and perhaps this could be achieved by admissions of weakness." How does Service know that Trotsky's admission was an insincere calculation? An admission of weakness to someone you love is not necessarily a manipulative ploy. Service's put-down of Trotsky here is out of harmony with his seeming acceptance of Trotsky's admission to Alexandra that "one can be more frank with the woman one loves than with oneself." (52)

â€¢ - Sometimes, Service's eagerness to be critical interjects a superficiality cutting across a more substantial and plausible criticism that could be made. As a very young revolutionary, when he and his comrades had been arrested, Trotsky took the lead in a rather pointless challenge to prison authorities that landed him and his comrades all in solitary confinement. "As with several such episodes of daring in his life, Trotsky did not include this information in his published memoirs." But the initial hot-headed "heroism" had been unnecessary. After the punishment, we are told, Trotsky and his comrades chose the path of peaceful cooperation. Service prefers the following: "It had to be dragged out of him by admiring writers. Although he liked to cut a dash in public, he disliked boasting: he preferred others to do the job for him." (56) A less convoluted explanation, however, is that Trotsky was by no means proud of such immature and pointless "daring." Perhaps he was a little ashamed.

â€¢ - During his exile in Vienna, Trotsky is hit in rapid succession by a series of troubling events – the death of his mother, a painful accident at the dentist from which he gradually recovers, the sudden appearance of his eleven year old daughter from his first marriage (after five years of not seeing her), who visits from the Ukraine in the company of his father. Trotsky then suffers an illness brought

on by stress. His father goes with him to the doctor. “Perhaps Trotsky had taken his father along because he needed him to pay for the consultation,” Service speculates. “His letters [neither quoted not cited] hint at a further motive. Trotsky seems to have appreciated being accompanied by someone devoted to his interests. He was again the center of attention, and the joint visit to the Viennese professor restored his spirits.” (123-124) Why turn this all into an example of Trotsky being egotistical and self-centered? In fact, it might make sense for a father to want to be there for his son under trying circumstances, and it might be natural for even a person in his 30s to value and need the company and reassurance and caring of his father. In the 1920s, Max Eastman noted: “Trotsky is proud of his father.... He loves to talk about him.” [12]

â€¢ - There is a parenthetical comment about Trotsky and Karl Radek in 1915: “They were almost friends, insofar as either man had any.” (145) Yet Service himself notes close friendships that Trotsky had with Adolf Joffe and Christian Rakovsky, and – among those who were outside of the Trotskyist movement – one could add Alfred and Marguerite Rosmer as well as Otto Rühle and Alice Rühle-Gerstel. There are other friendships one could mention (in addition to friendships with certain members of his family). [13]

Nonetheless, Service is enough of an historian that often the material takes over the man, drawing the narrative into a clear account of what Trotsky and other revolutionaries actually thought and attempted and accomplished. In describing the months leading up to the October/November Revolution of 1917, describing the process of convergence of the most committed revolutionaries into the Bolshevik party, he gives a true sense of the realities. He quotes the future Bolshevik Moisei Uritsky who was powerfully impressed (as were many) by Trotsky, freshly returned from exile and showing himself to be one of the most eloquent, passionate, brilliant mass orators: “Here’s a great revolutionary who’s arrived and one gets the feeling that Lenin, however clever he may be, is starting to fade next to the genius of Trotsky.” Service writes:

Lenin felt no worry about having personal rivals on the political far left. He needed and wanted active, talented associates such as Trotsky. He and Trotsky agreed on a broad agenda for revolution in Russia. The Provisional Government had to be done away with and a “workers’ government” instituted. The era of European socialist revolution had arrived. The Great War would be terminated only when the far leftists came to power and repudiated capitalism, imperialism, nationalism and militarism. There had to be immediate basic reform in Russia. The peasantry should take over the land of the Imperial family, the state and the Orthodox Church. Workers should control the factories. . . . All spoke approvingly of the power of the masses. There was agreement that workers and peasants should be encouraged to remake life as they wanted. Factories, offices and farms ought to be reorganized. Differences remained among Bolsheviks – and they were about to be brought to the surface the moment the party seized power. But between February and October the disputes were containable. . . . [T]he Provisional Government [of pro-capitalist and moderate socialist politicians] had to be overthrown in favor of a revolutionary administration. Fundamental social and economic reform would then be implemented. The European war would be brought to an end. Revolution in Russia would be followed by the overturning of the ruling classes throughout Europe. Failure to act would be a disaster. The counter-revolutionary elements in the former Russian Empire were waiting for their opportunity to strike. (167-169)

All of this gives a good sense of how things were – in the thinking of Lenin, Trotsky, and others who rallied to make the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

Problems of Communism

The problem with this, from Service’s standpoint (and that of the Hoover Institution), is that the revolutionary socialist goals are simply impossible to achieve. Presumably, the only reasonable path involves supporting private enterprise and limiting government intrusion into our social life, as explained in the Hoover mission statement. Violation of such strictures results in chaos, and as a consequence would-be revolutionaries, still determined to force their ideals onto an unwilling society, inevitably construct a totalitarian order. This defines the story that Service feels he must tell.

Service’s view was sharply challenged in his debate with ex-Trotskyist Christopher Hitchens. The most powerful forces initiating a brutal civil war against the Bolshevik Revolution had little desire, as Hitchens put it, to replace the workers’ and peasants’ soviets by “a parliamentary democracy with an independent judiciary.” He noted that “if Trotsky’s Red Army had not won the Russian Civil War, then the word for fascism . . . was probably going to be the Russian word instead of an Italian word.” Service squirmed a bit: “It’s a little exaggerated, but it’s pretty fair that the Whites had officers who were vicious, carried out a brutal civil war against the Reds.” To which Hitchens snorted: “Brought the Protocols of the Elders of Zion [an anti-Semitic classic concocted by Russian reactionaries] to Europe in their backpacks when they left. Not doing us any favors. Brings the German [version] of Fascism with it!” Throughout much of Europe, varieties of fascism and vicious dictatorships received support from the upper-classes to create a barrier to the spread of revolution. [14]

Contrary to the expectations of Lenin and Trotsky, and despite the upwelling of global insurgencies, socialist revolutions of the workers and peasants were not triumphant outside of Russia. The isolation of this vast but backward country in a hostile capitalist world, the brutalization of World War I and the Russian Civil War, the destructive impact of all these factors on the Russian economy

combined with the revolutionaries' own mistakes and managerial inexperience – the result being a horrendous crisis, dramatically eroding popular confidence in the revolutionary regime. A "temporary" Communist party dictatorship was consequently established to secure stability until the Soviet republic could be rescued by the "imminent" World Revolution that never quite materialized. Many revolutionaries died or de-radicalized in the five years after 1917, although both idealistic and opportunistic elements from the larger population flocked to the new party in power. In many cases, the surviving Communists and newer Communists – if they were not in the "rank-and-file" – became corrupted with their exclusive access to power and privilege. Lenin died in the midst of the crisis, in alliance with Trotsky pushing against the expanding, increasingly privileged party-and-state bureaucracy that ruled in the name of Communism. Lenin's last struggle was too little, too late.

It fell to Trotsky to become the primary spokesman and symbol of the Left Opposition. There were earlier left-wing oppositional currents which Trotsky and Lenin had short-sightedly helped vanquish. [15]There would also be later ones – the more frightened and ineffectual "Right Opposition" led by Nikolai Bukharin, and the more militant yet hopeless stirrings associated with Mikhail Riutin. But Trotsky's opposition – whatever its limitations and contradictions – represented the most impressive, consistent, persistent alternative to the bureaucratic tyranny and murderous policies that triumphed under Stalin. After its thoroughgoing defeat in the late 1920s, and particularly after his expulsion from the Soviet Union, Trotsky sought to build up a principled revolutionary current in the world Communist movement (the parties associated with the Communist International, or Third International). When he concluded that the bureaucratic dictatorship in the Soviet Union could be replaced by democratic soviets of the workers and peasants only through a revolutionary overthrow, he drew those from various countries who agreed with him into the small but uncompromising Fourth International, whose small parties and grouplets sought to provide "a stainless banner" to the workers and the oppressed, in hopes that the anticipated new wave of wars and revolutions would draw masses of workers and oppressed peoples to the revolutionary Marxist, Bolshevik-Leninist perspective that he and his comrades sought to preserve.

Service's attitude toward all of this is marked by utter contempt, asserting again and again that Trotsky "shared many of Stalin's assumptions," specifically: "He called for state economic planning and offered nothing that was essentially different from Soviet practices except the assurance that he would do things less violently and more democratically." (357) It is obvious why a Senior Fellow of the Hoover Institution might be horrified over Trotsky's commitment to state economic planning (this Trotsky certainly did share with Stalin), but one wonders at Service's dismissive attitude toward making economic planning less violent and more democratic.

Unfortunately, one of the many bits of misinformation conveyed in this biography is Service's assertion that Trotsky, "in his autobiography of 1930 would represent himself as a constant critic of the basic official measures introduced in the 1920s," particularly the concessions to market economics represented by the New Economic Policy (NEP) which stretched from 1921 to 1928. Service correctly points out: "Trotsky never called for the NEP to be abandoned even while calling for certain features to be modified or removed. He accepted that the Soviet economy would require a private sector for the foreseeable future." The problem with what Service says is that Trotsky indicates the same in his 1930 autobiography. There he notes that Stalin and other critics in the Communist Party leadership "discovered that my stand at the time was one of 'under-appreciation of the peasantry,' and one almost hostile toward the New Economic Policy. This was really the basis of all the subsequent attacks on me. In point of fact, of course, the roots of the discussion were quite the opposite…" When Lenin "shaped the first and very guarded theses on the change to the New Economic Policy," Trotsky continued (and Service documents), "I subscribed to them at once." Lenin and Trotsky favored, for this period, a form of mixed economy under workers' control (until new possibilities of socialist development would be opened by workers' revolutions in more advanced industrial countries). At the same time, the two agreed to "a bloc against bureaucracy in general," as Trotsky put it in his autobiography. This was to become a key pillar in the program of Trotsky's Left Opposition, sustained when he joined with others (including Gregory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, for a time Lenin's widow Nadezhda Krupskaya) in what came to be known as the United Opposition. "The Leningrad workers were aroused by the political trend in favor of the rich peasants – the so-called kulaks – and a policy aimed at one-country socialism." This attitude was certainly embraced by the Opposition. But never was it advanced in opposition to the basic measures represented by NEP – nor does Trotsky seek to give this impression in his autobiography. [16]

Internationalism and Workers' Democracy

Another key pillar of Trotsky's program, while leading the Left Opposition and afterward, was continuing (in the spirit of Lenin's Bolsheviks) to tie the fate of the Soviet Union to the spread of socialist revolutions to other countries. Service complains that in his revolutionary internationalism Trotsky "offered no analysis of how far he was willing to risk the existence of the Soviet state." (357) Here again it is the biographer, not Trotsky, who seems to be at one with Stalin, who insisted that – regardless of what happened with the world revolution, the Communist regime could and should focus on building "socialism in one country."

Trotsky – like all Marxists up to the 1920s – understood that socialism could not be built in a single economically backward country. The ability of the workers and peasants of Russia to move forward to a better

life, and to the thoroughgoing economic democracy that socialism was supposed to be, was dependent on their moving forward on the same path as, and receiving life-giving assistance from, the working classes making socialist revolutions in the more advanced industrial countries. Naturally, the anti-colonial revolutions in Asia and Africa would also be essential to bringing down global capitalism. Insurgencies in the "backward" regions would feed insurgencies in the "advanced" economic centers – which would then further assist the march of progress in the "backward regions. This had been the whole point of devoting so much time and energy and resources to building up the Communist International and its member parties.

The fact that Service (along with many others) doesn't quite "get it" is suggested in the way he discusses Trotsky's revolutionary internationalism, especially in the post-1917 period. It is almost as if one were discussing fashion, rather like one's taste for "political correctness" or one's taste in ties: "Trotsky remained a vigorous internationalist. He wrote endlessly about the need for revolution in Europe and Asia. This too was hardly an unusual standpoint to take in the first years after the October revolution, but Trotsky held to it with remarkable firmness. . . . He remained averse to either extolling or deprecating the qualities of particular peoples and believed that this was the proper approach of a Marxist." (207) This last comment is true but beside the point. Quite simply, without the triumph of revolutionary internationalism, the revolution in Russia would be defeated.

In a later attempt to get it right, Service opines that the reason for building "a fresh global organization dedicated to bringing down capitalism and promoting revolution," the Communist International, was rooted in the concern that "so long as they ruled the sole extreme-left European state they would remain a likely target for attack by a coalition of capitalist powers." This conception was shared by Stalin and his temporary ally Nikolai Bukharin in the mid-to-late 1920s. But Trotsky responded: "The capitalist world shows us by its export and import figures that it has other instruments of persuasion than those of military intervention." Against them he quoted Lenin: "So long as our Soviet Republic remains an isolated borderland surrounded by the entire capitalist world, so long will it be an absolutely ridiculous fantasy and utopianism to think of our complete economic independence and of the disappearance of any of our dangers." Warning against the notion that "the USSR can perish from military intervention but never from its own economic backwardness," he insisted that so long as the Soviet Union existed within a global capitalist economy, it would not be possible for it to achieve socialism. This had been a perspective shared by Lenin and the early Bolsheviks – but the new bureaucratic power elite crystallizing around Stalin, denying any break with Lenin's thought, embraced the notion that it was possible to achieve "socialism in one country." [17]

Service has so little understanding of Trotsky's Marxism that he attributes to him the notion that "Marxists in Russia would be able to . . . build an entire socialist society." (109) In fact, while Stalin proceeded to advance toward such "socialism" in economically backward Russia (through his brutal and murderous "revolution from above"), Trotsky insisted prophetically that such efforts could at best result in a "skinflint reactionary utopia of self-sufficient socialism" that had little to do with the actual socialist goal. Genuine socialism could only be created on the basis of relative abundance, and as part of the transition from global capitalism to worldwide socialism. [18] Service does not bother to deal with this 1928 critique of the Stalin-Bukharin Draft Program for the Sixth Congress of the Communist International (which he even mistakenly confuses with the Fifth Congress).

In The Revolution Betrayed, Trotsky deepened his analysis by referring to the perspective advanced by Karl Marx nine decades earlier: "A development of the productive forces is the absolutely necessary practical premise [of Communism], because without it want is generalized, and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and that means that all the old crap must revive." The reference to "all the old crap" is to brutal competition, inequality, exploitation, oppression – qualities that characterized Stalin's version of "socialism" no less than capitalism. Trotsky elaborated:

The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each against all. When there is enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there is little goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the Soviet bureaucracy. It "knows" who is to get something and who has to wait. [19]

None of this comes through in the dozen sentences that Service devotes to The Revolution Betrayed, the 1936 culmination of more than a decade of analytical effort and one of the keystones of Trotsky's theoretical heritage. He remains remarkably dismissive of the passionate critique that the object of his biography advances through the 1930s. "The bureaucracy can no longer uphold its position in any other way than by undermining the foundations of economic and cultural progress," according to Trotsky. "The struggle for totalitarian power resulted in the annihilation of the best men of the country by its most degraded scoundrels." His proposal was for a political revolution initiating the following changes: "the establishment of the widest Soviet democracy and the legalization of the struggle of parties; the liquidation of the never-changing bureaucratic caste by electing all functionaries; the mapping out of all economic plans with the direct participation of the population itself and in its interests; the elimination of the crying and insulting gaps of inequality; the liquidation of ranks, orders, and all other distinctions of the new Soviet nobility; a radical change of external politics in the spirit of principled internationalism." [20]

In the face of all this and more, Service shrugs: "He was no more

likely than Stalin to create a society of humanitarian socialism even though he claimed and assumed he would. … His confident assaults on Stalin in the 1920s and 1930s distracted attention from the implausibility of his own alternative strategy." (497) The reason for this, apparently, was the authoritarian role he had played in the crisis of civil war and economic collapse from 1918 to 1922. "The Bolshevik party had treated even workers and peasants savagely whenever they engaged in active opposition," Service writes. "Trotsky's earlier ideas about 'proletarian' self-liberation were like old coins that had dropped unnoticed out of his pocket." (267) For seriously revolutionary-minded people, Trotsky's trajectory in these years raises important questions – but for Service it slams all doors firmly shut. He seems to use what happened in this intense five-year period to dismiss everything that Trotsky thinks, says and does afterward, and to question all that went before.

This is in stark contrast to the interpretation offered by Deutscher, who comments that "in the first half of 1922 Trotsky still spoke primarily as the Bolshevik disciplinarian; in the second half he was already in conflict with the disciplinarians," coming "closer to the Workers Opposition and kindred groups" – not accepting what he believed to be utopian, unrealistic aspects of their positions, but "acknowledging the rational side of their revulsion against authority. … He began to protest against the excesses of centralism as these made themselves felt. . . . He clashed with the party 'apparatus' as the apparatus grew independent of the party and subjected party and state to itself." Deutscher emphasizes what he perceives as the growing cleavage between "the power and the dream" – and the deepening contradiction felt by the Bolsheviks who had created a machine of power to make the dream a reality. "They could not dispense with power if they were to strive for the fulfillment of their ideals; but now their power came to oppress and overshadow their ideals." Deutscher added: "Nobody had in 1920-1 gone farther than Trotsky in demanding that every interest and aspiration should be wholly subordinated to the 'iron dictatorship.' Yet he was the first of the Bolshevik chiefs to turn against the machine of that dictatorship when it began to devour the dream." [21]

Service will have none of this. But he does not succeed in providing a persuasive and coherent alternative perspective. Rejecting both the dream and the power, he can find no redeeming qualities in the subject to which he devotes more than 500 pages.

The actual Trotsky

Regardless of one's political standpoint, serious engagement with Trotsky's life and ideas generally results in one being more profoundly and positively impressed than Service and his cheer-leaders would have us be. Christopher Hitchens – breaking from Trotskyist and revolutionary perspectives, and tacking closer to the Hoover Institution's conservative orientation than he certainly had ever imagined – has not been able to stop himself from insisting that Trotsky was "a person of immense moral and physical courage . . . who . . . wrote pamphlets and made speeches against the menace of Hitlerism, which are much better and were made much earlier than any of Winston Churchill's." [22]The splendid literary and social critic Irving Howe, another ex-Trotskyist who avoided tacking quite so far rightward, felt compelled to insist thirty years ago that Trotsky "must be regarded as one of the great writers of his time," and went on to specify:

Perhaps nowhere else do these talents shine forth so brightly as in Trotsky's writings in the early 1930s on the rise of Nazism. These consist of articles and pamphlets composed hurriedly in exile: there is no effort to work out a theoretical synthesis, partly because Trotsky's major objective is to offer tactical guidance for preventing Hitler's victory and partly because the phenomenon of Nazism is still new. But such brilliant works . . . contain within them many of the elements needed for a theory of Nazism. … Trotsky's main purpose in these writings was not to provide a full-scale theory of fascism but to stir the German left toward concerted action. With blazing sarcasm and urgency – he never could be patient toward fools – he attacked the preposterous policy of the German Communists [following Stalin], who in their ultra-left "third period" were declaring the Social Democrats to be "social fascists" representing a greater danger than the Nazis. Trotsky kept insisting on what seems utterly clear and simple: that only a united front ("march separately, strike together") of the Communists and Social Democrats could stop Hitler. … Had Trotsky's advice been followed … the world might have been spared some of the horrors of our century; at the very least, the German working class would have gone down in battle the than allowing the Nazi thugs to take power without resistance. [23]

How could it be that Service would shrug this off?

With a similar minimal engagement with the documentary sources, Service also shrugs off the efforts to build up the Fourth International – a global network of revolutionary socialist organizations, quite small but to which Trotsky devoted the final years of his life. Howe sees him in these years as a figure of "flawed greatness … an all too human figure," who "alternates between periods of ferocious work and sluggish withdrawal. He feels guilty with regards to his children, all of whose lives, in one way or another, have been sacrificed in the political struggle. He is afraid that he may die before finishing his revolutionary task. He is overcome by the incongruity between the magnitude of his political perspective and the paltriness of his political means." Nonetheless, "caustic and proud, shaking off his personal griefs in order to return to the discipline of work," he tries to do the very best he can – particularly in what Howe sees as the "ill-starred venture" of the Fourth International. [24]

Service cannot allow himself such critical generosity. There are a scattering of little nuggets drawn from the archives – although, in some cases already published and long-available to the rest of us. A genuinely revolutionary approach of socialist organizations toward workers in struggle should be "not to command

the workers but only to help them, to give them suggestions, to arm them with facts, ideas, factory papers, special leaflets, and so on." The need to make revolutionary socialist organizations "habitable for workers" (not just intellectual and white-collar workers) was a primary concern for Trotsky. "Many intellectuals and half-intellectuals terrorize the workers by some abstract generalities and paralyze the will toward activity," he cautioned. "A functionary of a revolutionary party should have in the first place a good ear, and only in the second place a good tongue." (443) [25]

For the most part, however, Service is satisfied with superficialities ("global Trotskyism was a lot less substantial than Stalin imagined") and snide inaccuracies: "He had sealed himself in the cave of his fundamental beliefs. He allowed no questioning of them. He bullied his followers who dared to object; and he preferred them to leave the Fourth International than to cause him bother." (441, 472) Whatever limitations one sees in Trotsky's political practice in the Fourth International, serious histories of the Fourth International as well as a number of memoirs and primary sources, do not confirm Service's glib characterization. [26]

Service focuses on Trotsky's 1939-1940 polemics with James Burnham to make his point about Trotsky's sterile bullying. These were part of a fierce factional battle in the U.S. Socialist Workers Party that – when examined in its fullness – actually refutes the point Service is making. This is documented and succinctly presented in Isaac Deutscher's biography:

The American Trotskyists had split into a "majority" which, led by James P. Cannon, accepted Trotsky's view, and a "minority" which followed Burnham and [Max] Shachtman. Trotsky urged all of them to exercise tact and tolerance; and while he encouraged the "Cannonites" to conduct the argument against Burnham and Shachtman vigorously, he also warned them that the Stalinist agents in their ranks would seek to exacerbate the quarrel; and he advised them to allow the minority to express itself freely and even to act as an organized faction within the S.W.P. "If someone should propose ... to expel comrade Burnham," he gave notice, "I would oppose it energetically." Even after the minority had held its own National Convention, Trotsky still counseled the majority not to treat this as an excuse for expulsions." [27]

As it turned out, the political differences were so sharp that Burnham, Shachtman, and their co-thinkers felt a need to establish their own separate organization. The biographers of the two provide essential information. "In April 1940 Shachtman left the Socialist Workers Party and founded his own Workers Party on the basis of his own conceptions," notes Peter Drucker in his left-wing study of Shachtman. They simply did not want to be constrained by the limitations of Trotsky's perspectives, unlike him seeing the Soviet Union under Stalin as not simply needing an anti-bureaucratic political revolution but, in fact, representing a new oppressive form of society as bad as capitalism (and some would soon say worse than capitalism). This new group was almost immediately jolted by the discovery that one of its key theorists was as "bad" as Trotsky had said he was. In his conservative study of James Burnham (who soon enlisted in the Central Intelligence Agency and became an editor of the right-wing National Review), Daniel Kelly notes that "on top of his disillusionment with Trotsky, Burnham now seemed uncertain about the value of the movement and even of socialism." Within weeks, he had abandoned the Workers Party, explaining to his stunned comrades "that he could no longer accept Marxism, whose ideas modern historians, economists, and anthropologists had shown to be false." [28] It is really not at all surprising that that he and Trotsky had come into such sharp conflict.

Shachtman and his comrades were eventually followed in their exit from Trotsky's Fourth International by others having the somewhat different perspective that the Soviet Union represented simply a new variant of capitalism (state capitalism). Yet the independent currents – generating an impressive body of political thought and analysis – nonetheless retained a positive attitude to Trotsky, in stark contrast to Burnham (and Service). [29]

Political choices and Permanent Revolution

Fifteen years after his break, Burnham would denounce the Trotsky biography of Isaac Deutscher. Near the beginning of the review, he offered a list of Trotsky's sins that would certainly not surprise Service: pride, subjectivism, impatience, and inhumanity. He conceded that Deutscher's work was well-researched study and filled in "many gaps," and that it showed Trotsky's considerable talents but "conscientiously displays, also, Trotsky's weaknesses, not only those major flaws that I have already named, but the human failings that were sometimes the obverse of his talents." Nonetheless, the biography was an "intellectual disaster." The reason was ideological: "Mr. Deutscher writes from a point of view that accepts and legitimizes the Bolshevik revolution." Burnham lamented that "the minds of many of our university students and opinion-makers are being deeply formed" by Trotsky's perspectives which Deutscher sought to convey. "Not all the scholarly references from all the libraries," according to Burnham, "are enough to wash out the Bolshevik stain." [30]

Service – with the assistance of the Hoover Institution and to the applause of many pro-capitalist intellectuals – seeks once and for all to un-do such damage. A central point of this biography, repeated over and over again, was that Trotsky's orientation does not represent any meaningful alternative to Stalinism. Service informs us at the beginning of the book that "Stalin, Trotsky and Lenin shared more than they disagreed about." Near the end of the book he insists that Trotsky "was close to Stalin in intentions and practice." (3, 497) The same theme is sounded more than once in-between – even as the evidence (sometimes the evidence he himself presents) suggests otherwise.

There were plenty of informed people of the time, both Trotskyist and non-Trotskyist, who saw things quite differently. Among these was the eloquent powerhouse of British empire and conservatism Winston Churchill, who in conversations and writings of the 1930s emphasized the differences between the revolutionary Trotsky and the much more reasonable Stalin. The old counter-revolutionary expressed himself most candidly in a 1938 private conversation with the Soviet Ambassador to Britain. This was when Stalin's bloody purge against "the anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites" was going full throttle. Service himself offers the story in passing. "I hate Trotsky!" Churchill told Stalin's man. "I've kept an eye on his activities for some time. He's Russia's evil genius, and it is a very good thing that Stalin has got even with him." (465)

Indeed, the cigar-chomping aristocrat had said as much publicly a year earlier, with all the self-satisfied conservative eloquence he could muster:

Once again he has become the exponent of the purest sect of Communism. Around his name gather the new extremists and doctrinaires of world-revolution. Upon him is turned the full blast of Soviet malignity. ... The name of Lenin, the doctrine of Marx, are invoked against him at the moment when he frantically endeavors to exploit them. Russia is regaining strength as the virulence of Communism abates in her blood. The process may be cruel, but it is not morbid. It is a need of self-preservation which impels the Soviet Government to extrude Trotsky and his fresh-distilled poisons. [31]

This, shorn of its excess and its tacit embrace of Stalin, is the image that Service also offers us, despite a far more positive sub-text inadvertently pushing up like grass, flowers, and dandelions through the cracks of his somewhat barren account.

In the youth radicalization of the 1960s and 1970s, many young activists read the condensed little collection of writings edited by Isaac Deutscher and George Novack, widely circulated in paperback, entitled The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology. In the introduction to that volume, Deutscher described Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution – to which Service gives remarkably short shrift – as "a profound and comprehensive conception in which all the overturns that the world has been undergoing (in this late capitalist era) are represented as interconnected and interdependent parts of a single revolutionary process." In the theory of permanent revolution, we see the dynamic interplay of democracy and class struggle, the self-activity of the masses of laboring and oppressed people reaching for their own liberation within, while at the same time straining beyond, the context of global capitalism. Three elements can be found in Trotsky's theory: (a) the possibility and necessity, under the right circumstances, of democratic and immediate struggles spilling over into the struggle for working-class political power, (b) culminating in a transitional period going in the direction of socialism, (c) which can be realized only through the advance of similar struggles around the world. In fact, these elements permeate Trotsky's orientation from his youth to his death. "To put it in the broadest terms," Deutscher emphasized, "the social upheaval of our century is seen by Trotsky as global in scope and character, even though it proceeds on various levels of civilization and in the most diverse social structures, and even though its various phases are separated from one another in time and space."

Young activists hoping for a better world may be drawn to the vitality of Trotsky, despite Service's efforts. It is possible that some of them may even get their introduction to Trotsky by reading his book. The assumptions of the Hoover Institution may, after all, turn out to be less relevant than the life and ideas of Trotsky in face of what is actually happening in the world. The young activists may conclude that they are living in the age of permanent revolution, and then commit their lives to making it so.

Robert Service. Trotsky: A Biography. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009. 600 pages, including end notes, bibliography, index. $35.00.

Footnotes

[1] Robert Harris, "Trotsky: A Biography by Robert Service," Sunday Times, October 18, 2009, http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/non-fiction/article6876331.ece.

[2] Simon Sebag, Montefiore, "Trotsky by Robert Service: review," Daily Telegraph, 11 October 2009, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/6271804/Trotsky-by-Robert-Service-review.html.

[3] Harris, cited in footnote 1.

[4] Joshua Rubenstein, "Revolutionary's Road," Wall Street Journal, November 27, 2009, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704431804574538603020283292.html.

[5] Tariq Ali, "The Life and Death of Trotsky," The Guardian, 31 October 2009, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/oct/31/trotsky-stalin-service-patenaude. While Ali's leftist dissent is uncommon in "mainstream" sources, there has been a negative chorus forthcoming among the marginalized left – with critiques available on-line from Peter Taafe, David North, Paul Hampton, Dave Sherry, and others. Each raises points worth considering (although I am not persuaded by North's argument that Service is cynically "making an appeal to anti-Semites" in the way he writes about Trotsky).

[6] "Trotsky Per Hitchens and Service," Hoover Institution, July 28, 2009, http://www.hoover.org/multimedia/uk/52383062.html.

[7] Max Eastman, Leon Trotsky: The Portrait of a Youth (New York: Greenberg, 1925), 26-27.

[8] Nurit Schleifman, "Azef, Evno Fishelevich (1869-1918)," The

Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution, ed. by Harold Shukman (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1988), 303-304.

[9] Isaac Deutscher, The Prophet Armed, Trotsky: 1879-1921 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1954), 381-386.

[10] Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky, Revolutionary Silhouettes, with an introduction by Isaac Deutscher (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 21, 62, 65, 67, 68. Service chooses not to acknowledgeTrotsky's poignant description of his son, Leon Sedov – Son, Friend, Fighter, written on behalf of himself and Natalya upon a death clouded by mysterious circumstances, in which Trotsky says "he was our son, truthful, devoted, loving, . . . he had, as no one else on earth, become part of our life, entwined in all its roots, our co-thinker, our co-worker, our guard, our counselor, our friend." (Leon Trotsky, Portraits Political and Personal [New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977], 190.)

[11] "Mission Statement," Hoover Institution, http://www.hoover.org/about/mission; "Trotsky Per Hitchens and Service," cited in footnote 6.

[12] Eastman, 7.

[13] Elsewhere in the volume, Service acknowledges Joffe and Rakovsky, among others, as close friends of Trotsky. In addition, see Alfred and Marguerite Rosmer, From Syndicalism to Trotskyism: Writings of Alfred and Marguerite Rosmer (London: Porcupine Press, 2000), and Alice Rühle-Gerstel, "No Verses for Trotsky: A Diary (1937)," Encounter, April 1982, 27-41. Sara Weber also writes of her friendship (seemingly not an unusual one) with Trotsky and his companion Natalia in "Recollections of Trotsky," Modern Occasions, Spring 1972.

[14] "Trotsky Per Hitchens and Service," cited in footnote 6. Similar points are made, with substantial documentation, by Arno J. Mayer – The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) and Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The 'Final Solution' In History (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998). Also see the second volume – dealing with the civil war – of William Henry Chamberlin's 1935 classic The Russian Revolution, 1917-1921, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), and David S. Fogelsong, America's Secret War Against Bolshevism, 1917-1920 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

[15] On this complex question, see Victor Serge, Memoirs of a Revolutionary (London: Writers and Readers, 1984), 115-156, Simon Pirani, The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920-24: Soviet Workers and the New Communist Elite (London/New York: Routledge, 2008), and Paul Le Blanc, "Bolshevism and Revolutionary Democracy," New Politics, Winter 2009, 45-52.

[16] Service, 349; Leon Trotsky, My Life, An Attempt at an Autobiography (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 462, 466, 479, 521.

[17] Leon Trotsky, The Third International After Lenin (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 47, 49, 48.

[18] Ibid., 45-46;

[19] Leon Trotsky, The Revolution Betrayed (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1937), 56, 112. The quotation from Marx can be found in The Germany Ideology (1845) – for the full excerpt see Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, eds., Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), 427; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 37. One could write a substantial and remarkable doctoral dissertation on the evolution of Trotsky's analysis that culminated in The Revolution Betrayed – and fortunately, someone recently has done just that. See Thomas Marshall Twiss, Trotsky and the Problem of Soviet Bureaucracy (University of Pittsburgh, 2009).

[20] "The Totalitarian Defeatist in the Kremlin," Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1937-38 (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1976), 447; "Answers to the New York Herald-Tribune," Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1936-37 (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 413.

[21] Isaac Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky 1921-1929 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1959), 51, 53, 54, 78.

[22] Trotsky Per Hitchens and Service," cited in footnote 6.

[23] Irving Howe, Leon Trotsky (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 136, 140. The writings referred to here can be found in Leon Trotsky, The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971).

[24] Howe, 134, 135, 143.

[25] "The Social Composition of the Party," Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1936-37 (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), 489, 490.

[26] See Robert J. Alexander, International Trotskyism, 1929–1985: A Documented Analysis of the Movement (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991); Pierre Frank, The Fourth International: The Long March of the Trotskyists (London: Ink Links, 1977); George Breitman, "The Rocky Road to the Fourth International, 1933-38" in Anthony Marcus, ed., Malcolm X and the Third American Revolution: The Writings of George Breitman (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2005), 299-352; James P. Cannon , "Internationalism and the SWP," in Speeches to the Party

(New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), 67-91 . Useful material (some of uneven quality) can also be found in the pages of the journal Revolutionary History – see http://www.revolutionaryhistory.co.uk/

[27] Isaac Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky 1929-1940 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1963), 475-476.

[28] Peter Drucker, Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the "American Century" (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994), 109; Daniel Kelly, James Burnham and the Struggle for the World, A Life (Wilmington DL: ISI Books, 2002), 84-86.

[29] See Sean Matagamna, ed., The Fate of the Russian Revolution: Lost Texts of Critical Marxism (London: Phoenix Press, 1998) and Tony Cliff, Trotskyism After Trotsky: The Origins of the International Socialists (London: Bookmarks, 1999) and A World to Win: Life of a Revolutionary (London: Bookmarks, 2000).

[30] James Burnham, untitled review, Russian Review, volume 14, No. 2, April 1955, 151-152.

[31] Winston Churchill, Great Companions (1937), reprinted in Irving H. Smith, ed. Trotsky: Great Lives Observed (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 87-88. This dovetails with the anti-democratic, elitist (indeed, racist) upper-class attitudes documented in Clive Ponting, Churchill (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994).

Germany: The anti-capitalist left after the success of Die Linke

30 December 2009

Friedrich Dorn: With the success of Die Linke in the recent parliamentary elections, what action do you think is possible for you in Parliament? What do you think of the composition of your parliamentary group?

Andrej Hunko: First, what is essential for me, is that I define myself as an integral part of the social left and the social movements and that I stress this each time I have the opportunity to express myself. I am radically opposed to any classic politician's attitude of the type "Vote for me and I'll do the rest", which leads directly into the social democratic impasse.

Secondly, it is clear that having been elected as a deputy, I have a larger audience and thus more possibilities to spread my ideas which would otherwise have a smaller audience. From this viewpoint, the outgoing parliamentary group has done some good work in the previous parliament. It has placed in the area of public debate questions which would otherwise have remained much more marginal. I think, for example, of the minimum wage and the war in Afghanistan.

This activity oriented to public opinion is one thing, but it is just as important for me to do serious parliamentary work. One can wonder how far the parliamentary possibilities of transforming society go in a system where economic power seems to have more importance than the power legitimately and democratically elected through the ballot box, but independently of this question, it is the task of left parliamentarians to go to the end of these limits to test them.

The Die Linke parliamentary group has 76 members, 40 of them women. For the first time, a majority of its deputies come from the western Länder. It should be said that as a rule the western lists are more open to a plurality of views than those in the east. Overall this new parliamentary group should have the same political orientation as the previous one. Some representatives of the left wing from the western Länder have now appeared, whereas the wing which subordinates the horizon of a new left to the winning of "red-red-green" parliamentary majorities has also been strengthened. Of the 76 deputies, 35 are new.

Friedrich Dorn: At the first working meeting of the parliamentary group, a ten point programme was unanimously adopted. What is the content of this programme and what do you think of it?

Andrej Hunko: The goal of this ten point programme was to fix the contours of our first initiatives in the Bundestag. It has a symbolic limited value and obviously does not replace the programme on which we were elected. For me what is decisive is that there is no challenge to the demand for withdrawal of the Bundeswehr from Afghanistan, nor programmatic adaptation to a declining SPD. That has not happened, to that extent I am satisfied and I voted in favour.

However, the fact the significant demand to increase the minimum allocation to 500 euros does not appear in this programme poses a problem. I have since been assured that this demand would be taken up in the next budget debate, as the parliamentary group does every year. Despite that it would have been preferable if this demand was present. In any case I draw the lesson that the critical deputies of Die Linke should better prepare and organise to avoid such incidents in the future.

Friedrich Dorn: Oskar Lafontaine did not wish to remain as chair of the parliamentary group. How do you interpret that?

Andrej Hunko: That was a real surprise. The fact that he abandoned this function is linked to the demand for a mixed co-presidency at the head of the party and the parliamentary group: Gregor Gysi was to lead the parliamentary group with a women of western origin, while Lafontaine would lead the party with a woman from the east. In principle it is a good thing, and it is necessary to introduce quotas at the head of the party also, now that this has been imposed for all functions at other levels.

Obviously this demand only has meaning if those chosen are really representative of the different character of the party structures in east and west. If such is the case, the co-president of the parliamentary group should reflect the western party's more rebellious, trade union and social movement oriented character.

It is interesting that on the very day the news of Lafontaine's stepping down was announced, the right wing of the party continued to tell the media that differences between east and west had disappeared, which removed the necessity of a co-presidency of the parliamentary group. It is about preventing the western party, which is more to the left, being represented at this level.

This example shows to what point Lafontaine's withdrawal carries the danger of seeing the parliamentary group slide rightwards. The left deputies will have a lot to do to stop this drift.

Friedrich Dorn: What are the electorate's expectations of the party and its deputies? What type of pressure will Die Linke undergo from other parties and how should it respond?

Andrej Hunko: It is still hard to interpret the expectations of the voters. Die Linke's electoral campaign was essentially based around clear slogans, like "Vote for us to get rid of Hartz IV!" (the name given to the package of laws attacking social benefits), "No to retirement at 67!", "Out of Afghanistan!". Die Linke was the only party which led a campaign with this content.

For me, what our electorate expects is that we concretise our demands, and create maximum pressure to make them a reality. If Die Linke should abandon these positions, the party has no purpose.

As to pressure from other parties, it takes varied forms. The CDU and FDP rely above all on demonization and the anti-communist reflexes which are particularly strong in Germany. The SPD and Greens demand primarily that we abandon our positions on Europe and peace. They basically use the argument that we are "Europhobes". They make approval of all the militarist aspects of the Treaty of Lisbon a central question.

Friedrich Dorn: What debates are there in the party on "red-red-green" majorities in the Länder and nationally? And what is your opinion?

Andrej Hunko: To be honest, we should note that the debates on governmental participation are not especially vibrant. Thus the second legislature of the red-red coalition (SPD-Die Linke) in Berlin has led to much less discussion than the first, between 2002 and 2006. In the party as a whole, there are few debates on possible participation in the regional governments in Thuringia and the Saar. Similarly, there are few polemics on the preliminary talks around an SPD-Die Linke coalition in the Land of Brandenburg.

At the national level, governmental participation is ruled out for now. For it to become thinkable, the party must impose on its members the principle of approval of military interventions. There are regular attempts in this direction, there will be again in the future. Some in the party employ all their energy to create conditions which will render possible a coalition government in 2013, at the next Bundestag elections.

I disagree with them totally. "Antikapitalistische Linke" is structured around "red lines" which cannot be crossed by a governmental participation. First there is our opposition to attacks on social benefits, to privatisation, to Hartz IV and to military intervention. If we observe these criteria, we will avoid the worst of what happened for example in the case of Rifondazione Communista in Italy.

In the light of the current relationship of forces in Germany, I find that participation in governmental coalitions smacks of adventure. But the problem is expressing this in a language which people can understand, because in the end, among those who identify with Die Linke, many want the right wing government kicked out and replaced, especially in North Rhine-Westphalia next spring. So we must make our viewpoint understood by fixing concrete criteria which would suppose a deep change in orientation by the SPD and Greens... which is highly unlikely.

Rather than pondering governmental combinations, Die Linke should invest its energy in setting up broad coalitions of social resistance to the offensive of capital. On this level of culture politics in Germany is very backward. The first thing is to be capable of modifying the social relationship of forces and to breach the ideological hegemony of neo-liberalism which continues its domination.

One of the key ideas of those in the party who advocate governmental coalitions is that in Germany a left socialist party can only remain in the minority and so it is necessary to move towards the SPD and Green. I don't see it like that. The last elections showed clearly that Die Linke could enlarge its electoral potential significantly, despite the violent attacks from the media. In recent weeks, the percentage des gens saying they could possibly vote for Die Linke has gone from 19% to 27%. So some taboos have been breached. Nothing stops us from thinking that this percentage could again grow significantly.

The task of the hour is to transform this feeling into votes, political

activity, participation in the movements and, finally in changing the relationship of forces within society. So much more becomes possible than will be the case if there is participation in a government to rescue capitalism.

Friedrich Dorn: What do you expect in the coming months and what will be decisive?

Andrej Hunko: For me as a member of Die Linke in North Rhine-Westphalia, the elections to the regional parliament on May 9, 2010 will be of crucial importance. More than 20% of the German population lives in this Land. The left wing of the party is particularly strong there. For the evolution and future orientation of the party, a success (that is, entry into the Landtag) will be decisive. So we must succeed.

In terms of extra-parliamentary activities, I think the actions planned for early December against the extension of the Afghanistan war are extremely important. Then it is important to see how actions of resistance to the crisis develop, above all when layoff plans are announced. The new government is still hesitating to make the population feel the full weight of the crisis. But it could happen at any time. United anti-crisis fronts involving unions, social movements and left organisations should be set up in the coming weeks.

Last and certainly not least, there is the Copenhagen climate summit in December. In Germany in particular, where links between ecologist movements and anti-capitalists have loosened, we must work to restore them.

Friedrich Dorn: To conclude, a question on the European dimension. You followed the two referendums in Ireland, could you comment on them?

Andrej Hunko: I was in France on May 29, 2005 when the treaty on the European constitution was rejected, I was also in Ireland on June 12, 2008 and October 2, 2009 during the votes on the Treaty of Lisbon. For me, the whole procedure by which this treaty has been put in place has been monstrous.

In France, the treaty was rejected above all because of its neoliberal orientation and also its militarist aspects. Some weeks later, the Dutch confirmed this rejection. Yet this did not lead to the elaboration of a new treaty with a different orientation. Formal modifications were introduced to avoid referendums in most countries. Only in Ireland was a referendum necessary.

All the controversial points of the old draft treaty, like the neoliberal orientation or the obligation to contribute to military efforts, remained unchanged. In Ireland the treaty was also rejected in 2008. But this new rejection did not influence the convictions of the EU élites, who subjected the Irish population to threats and an intense blackmail and imposed a new vote. The fear of being completely disconnected from the rest of Europe led the Irish population to vote for it this time, which means that the treaty will now enter into force.

The treaty of Lisbon will render the struggle for a social, peaceful and democratic Europe more difficult. Also the way it has been done sheds light on the ruling circles of this Europe, particularly on their will to make the EU a neoliberal military union at any price.

The left and socialist forces should make it known more broadly, as clearly as possible, that this road does not lead to the European integration of the peoples, but to the formation of an imperial bloc heavy with danger. Nobody should approve of this.

Germany: change for the parties, but not yet for the class struggle

30 December 2009, by Jakob Schaefer

As the international conjuncture is not really improving, a whole series of enterprises are threatened with bankruptcy. We are talking about companies which are "fundamentally sound" according to classical capitalist criteria, but which today suffer from a lack of liquidity, because the banks are taking less risks or loans are dispensed at extortionate rates reflecting the estimated risk. If the world economy does not start to seriously recover in the coming months, in some regions up to 25% of mechanical construction and installation enterprises will be heading for bankruptcy. In the car industry also, whose role is very important (770,000 direct or indirect jobs; a production of 6.2 million cars per year before the crisis, of which a large proportion are exported) production overcapacity of nearly 30% at the world level makes the threat of massive layoffs very real.

Meanwhile, the deficit in public finances will exceed 100 billion euros in 2010. This is due to the fall in tax income and increased social expenditure. The state must then borrow more, at the risk of finding itself one day unclassified by the international rating institutes. We are a long way from state bankruptcy, but credit will become dearer, and the margins of manoeuvre narrower. Local government bodies will face greater difficulties in meeting their "normal" obligations.

That is why, from the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie, the simplest and most urgent solution would be to increase taxes. That would have been much easier with the SPD than with the FDP, which has made tax cuts its centrepiece and seeks to impose a

20-25 billion euro tax cut for the rich.

The alternative to tax increases would be a large scale austerity programme in the social sector. This is no longer an obvious way out, because the trade union bureaucracy would have cooperated with the SPD in a manner which it would not do with the CDU and still less its sworn enemy the FDP. Thus the new government must satisfy the rich (in particular through tax cuts) while not making it impossible to rebalance the budget.

That is why it is doing nothing that the unions might take as a provocation: no threats against co-management, protection against dismissals, wage negotiation procedures codified in the law on works councils. All things that in other circumstances would be among the priorities of a CDU-FDP government. Because what matters above all else for the dominant class is the immediate improvement of economic conditions for capital. Any measure which is not reflected by an identifiable gain is then ruled out.

Obviously the opposite is true at enterprise level where layoff plans abound. Even so, the governmental programme contains more than platitudes: a reduction of the resources devoted to the "labour market" (which will make it more difficult, indeed impossible, to set up programmes of qualification, return to work and reconversion, and this will throw those dismissed straight into unemployment), rights of lessors strongly strengthened, suppression of some branch minimum wages (there is no national minimum wage in Germany). The FDP wants to impose a flat rate individual supplement for sickness insurance and so on. But none of this is linked to political attacks against the unions.

Why this prudence?

1. Nothing is more precious than a situation in which the unions keep quiet;

2. At the elections to the Bundestag, participation fell from 77.7% to 70.8%, which reflects a general increase in disaffection with the "dominant politics";

3. The reformist party Die Linke has grown and has been able to attract some former SPD voters;

4. The government knows that even after the crisis ends, significant factors of instability will remain. Thus the number of unemployed will grow still further, and with this popular anger. Today already the feeling of insecurity is widespread, even if most people have not yet directly felt the effects of the crisis. But when the number of unemployed goes beyond a certain psychological threshold, suddenly millions will be in a more serious situation than today.

Since mid-October, the degradation is clear: bankruptcy for the "Quelle" distribution group (with thousands out of work as a consequence), followed by the announcement that Opel had not been bought out and that General Motors was "restructuring", meaning more dismissals and so on.

The legislative elections did not involve a left-right confrontation. The SPD has followed neoliberal policies for some years. Following the electoral disaster it has announced no significant change of orientation. All the full timers, from the top to the bottom of the apparatus, have been trained in the politics of social dismantling. Those who disagreed have long since gone over to Die Linke.

The Greens have not been a party of the left since the 1990s. They voted for Agenda 2010, the most significant programme of social destruction in the history of the Federal Republic. And for the first time since the Second World War, they have allowed the German bourgeoisie to again participate actively in wars, first in the Balkans, then in Afghanistan.

Only Die Linke differs from the neoliberal parties. It is a reformist party, comparable to the Parti de Gauche in France (Mélenchon has good and privileged relations with Lafontaine). Its political limits are very visible and each time it announces its participation in a regional government its true colours come to light: first in the Land of Mecklenburg West-Pomerania and Berlin, today in Brandenburg.

In Brandenburg, the SPD could have continued to govern with the CDU but preferred to join Die Linke in government so as to integrate and compromise the party. Die Linke could no longer accuse the regional government of being "antisocial". As coming to government it its ultimate goal, Die Linke considers this coalition a "great success in itself". The concrete effects have been a coalition programme envisaging the suppression of 11,000 jobs in the public sector, as well as the extension of the extraction of lignite and the operation of thermal power stations fuelled by lignite, the source of a particularly polluting energy.

We do not yet know where the opposition will come to the attacks, which will certainly get worse after the coming elections in North Rhine-Westphalia in early May. A lot depends on developments in the unions. They have been the only force with any possibility of influencing what happens in the workplaces and at the central level. Since the 1990s, they have increasingly adapted to neoliberal policies, accepting "co-management" while avoiding conflicts with capital or the government. When the SPD was in government they did not even mobilise against retirement at 67, the work of the social democrat Müntefering. This is not only a consequence of the close links of the trade union bureaucracy with the SPD, but also the product of the bureaucratic system itself: thus the integration into the workplace councils leads one to think like the other members of these councils, salaries are exorbitant, the apparatus enormous (for example, at the IG Metall headquarters there are 600 full timers, in the regions several thousand well paid full timers, Huber, the president of the union, earns 218,000 euros a year!)

That said, the German unions are not "yellow" unions. They remain worker's organisations which depend on the will and commitment of their members. When anger mounts, the unions (and to a certain degree even the union bureaucracies) can be

pushed into struggle (at least a little), which will have effects on the general political climate, the breadth of the government "reforms" as well as on the new possibilities offered to the forces opposing the capitalist system. That is why the RSB stresses unions work and the construction and leadership of the union left.

And that is also why the RSB (one of the two public factions of the Fourth International in Germany) is committed to organising the social movement. The coalition "Wir zahlen nicht für eure Krise" ("We won't pay for their crisis") initiated a national demonstration last March 28 in Berlin and Frankfurt, supported by 55,000 people. This led the unions to organise their own demonstration on May 16 in Berlin, with 100,000 participants. It isn't enough, but it is a beginning.

The trade union left and a good part of the social movement are agreed on developing propaganda for a general strike. Today, the unions are very far from adopting such a perspective, especially as there are many legal obstacles in Germany as in other countries to this and political strikes are explicitly banned. But obviously once a movement has been launched, these questions will be settled by the masses and not the courts.

What role will Die Linke play?

1. This party wants to govern. It is not opposed to the capitalist system but to neoliberalism.

2. Its demands are narrow and do not go beyond the limits imposed by the capitalist system or even those of the left wing of the trade union apparatus. For example, on the minimum wage, Die Linke demands it be fixed at 8.44 Euros. Following the demonstrations last March 'it took up the demand for 10 Euros per hour, but "Not immediately, when we are in the federal government", and after a transitional phase of 4 years.

3. It does not participate in the construction of the trade union left, it seeks to have good relations with the trade union leaderships, in the reformist and parliamentarist tradition, but at the same time some of its activists play a leadership role in the social movements.

4. At the level of general politics, Die Linke represents a fragmentary and inconsistent alternative, but it is a new phenomenon in a country which has not heard an "anti-neoliberal" discourse or argument for decades.

Germany : elections mark significant break

30 December 2009, by Angela Klein

In 2005 the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and liberals (FDP) scored 21,282,250 votes, in 2009 they got 20,971,084, or 311,166 votes less. Germany has 80 million inhabitants, 62 million of them eligible to vote, but only 44 million bothered to.

However, the new left wing party, Die Linke, obtained an excellent score and established itself on a lasting basis as fifth biggest party in the German parliament, while the social democrats (SPD) fell back into the "ghetto of 30%" of the 1950s, from whence it had emerged after the rightwards turn of Bad Godesberg.

These two elements have the consequence that the numerical majorities which could allow the constitution of red-red-green governments (that is Die Linke-SPD-Green) in the Länder do not necessarily translate into political majorities. In the Saar region an alternative government foundered because the Greens preferred an alliance with the Christian Democrats and FDP. In Thuringia it was the SPD leader who rejected an alliance with Die Linke — against the wishes of the rank and file of his party. In Schleswig-Holstein the voters elected a red-red-green majority, but due to the regional electoral law the parties of big capital won the majority of seats. In Saxony, the social democrats did not reach the threshold of 10% of votes — a disaster in a region which was once the cradle of the German workers' movement.

It was then only in the Land of Brandenburg that the outgoing SPD prime minister, Matthias Platzeck, agreed to a coalition with Die Linke. This done, he succeeded in making it accept a governmental programme which only contained social liberal positions. Die Linke had requested more jobs in the public sector, while in fact 5,000 will be suppressed. It had proposed the abolition of entry fees for university, but they will be preserved in another form. The programme professes its approval of the Treaty of Lisbon and envisages the construction of new lignite-fuelled thermal power plants. The rank and file of the party has protested strongly against this programme, but it has been accepted under the pressure of Gregor Gysi and Lothar Bisky.

The SPD leaves a vacuum

The most significant result was the collapse of the SPD vote: it was down to 23%, or 9,990,488 votes — its lowest score since the foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). For eleven years the SPD was in government. In this period it lost half of its voters while its membership fell below that of the Christian Democrats (barely 500,000 members; at the end of the 1970s it still had a million!)

The Schröder era, continued in the grand coalition, left its traces. Its political line, even if it was in open opposition to its electoral programme (like agenda 2010), was dictated from top to bottom, the contact of the leadership with the intermediary

cadres and offices was broken, among the SPD deputies in the Bundestag there were very few trade union functionaries. The SPD is no longer a party which helps ordinary people resolve their problems, or speaks for those left behind by global competition. Trades unionists voted 35% SPD, 21% CDU/CSU. Among non unionised workers it was the opposite: they voted 35% CDU/CSU and 21% SPD (in total, 24% of workers voted for the SPD). The rate of unionisation has fallen worryingly. At the sociological level, it is not a workers' party, most of its members have an academic qualification. The majority of its voters are either civil servants (29 %) or pensioners (26 %).

Since Schröder the SPD has preached individual responsibility, less state, more private. It has turned towards the more privileged layers, who see themselves "at the centre" of society and have more reserves. It is now divided and no longer knows if it should defend the social state or demolish it. A new generation which will struggle for a real programmatic reorientation is not visible.

The SPD leaves a big vacuum. Until the end of the 1990s it contributed to structuring society, but the turning point of agenda 2010 and the preponderance of the media in the party's internal debates and in its decisions mean that the SPD has lost its footing and this has left a gap in the political structure of society.

Success and new challenges for Die Linke

Die Linke does not fill this vacuum. It only won one sixth of the votes lost by the SPD. It did not make a serious incursion into the abstentionist camp; on the contrary, it lost 350,000 votes among them. In spite of that, it won 5 million votes and scored more than 5% in every Länder, including in the West. In the East it is now the biggest party in Brandenburg, the second biggest in Berlin and in Mecklenburg Vorpommern — two Länder, which have experienced governments with Die Linke participation, it should be said.

But, at least in the West, it is an electoral party, with a certain audience in the trade unions, among students and the intelligentsia, but without real roots in the neighbourhoods and the workplaces. The challenge for Die Linke is twofold: to build these roots and at the same time to provide a clear vision of a non-capitalist and ecological society. There are deficits on these two fields.

The elections in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), in May 2010, will constitute a big challenge for Die Linke. If it enters the parliament of the most populous Land (with 18 million inhabitants) that would mean another great leap forward. The federation of NRW is, along with Bremen, the one which is most to the left. The right there is very much in the minority and the two left currents — the Anti-capitalist left and the Socialist Left — are dominant. It has just held a congress where it voted for its programme for the coming elections. It demands, among other things the socialisation of the energy sector (one of the main industries in the region), a 30 hour week without loss of wages, starting with the public sector, a free midday meal in all schools and crèches, a social mobility ticket for the whole region, a demilitarisation of workplaces, the socialisation of Opel and its transformation into an enterprise of ecological mobility. Oskar Lafontaine addressed the delegates with an implicit critique of the programme of the coalition in Brandenburg. "A dismantling of jobs in the public sector should be taboo" he said. The congress even voted an addition to the programme, which marks an implicit but clear break with what is happening in Brandenburg.

There are also risks. The more the party grows in number, the more new members are people without political experience or worse, with the habits of social democracy. The municipal elections at the end of August absorbed a large number of activists, who now sit in the municipal parliaments rather than being involved in the construction of the party. The weight of daily routine could push the party rightwards.

Drift of the Greens

The turn by the Green to coalitions with the parties of big capital seems lasting. The Greens are the party with the highest proportion of university graduates, their programme for a New Green Deal rests on the collaboration and persuasion of private companies. The CDU has seized this opportunity, making concessions it would never previously haves accepted. It conceded the abolition of university entry fees that it had itself introduced in the previous legislative period and promised renewable energies, although new coal based power stations will be built, with a ceiling of 500 MW per station.

It is not the first time that the Greens have experimented with such a coalition (called a "Jamaica" coalition because of its colours: black, yellow, and green). They already exist at a local and regional level, as in Hamburg, where the Greens have paid a high price by approving the construction of a coal powered station of 1600 MW.

Aggressive liberals

The electoral campaign of the FDP was very aggressive, which earned them 1.1 million votes from the Christian Democrats. Their preferred slogans were for a radical reform of the tax system, with a big reduction in its progressive element; a flat rate contribution (thus the same for the banker as for the housewife) to social security; reduced protection against dismissals; and above all more subsidies for companies in financial difficulty.

Because of this the trade unions and social democrats waged a campaign against "the coalition of social coldness" raising the expectation of radical frontal attacks from the beginning. In fact the new government did not begin with frontal attacks, but by small steps, which risked not meeting sufficient resistance and thus opening the door to bigger s attacks.

The goals of the FDP obviously come up against the crisis and the fiscal deficit. But also the CDU/CSU wishes

to have a "social and democratic image" and compete at this level with the SPD. Angela Merkel has learnt the lesson: in 2005 she led a rightist electoral campaign and the gamble did not pay off. Her score was not enough to form a bourgeois government and she had to form a grand coalition with the SPD. There she changed direction and began to cultivate a social image whose costs were paid by the SPD. The Christian Democrats remain a genuine popular party, winning the votes of 26% of the workers, and even 35% of unorganised workers. There is a social wing and a neoliberal wing. The crisis will sharpen these internal conflicts.

The Merkel II government

The programme of the government bears the mark of the CDU/CSU. The anti-social discourse of the FDP has been rejected; tax reform has been put off to 2013. Apart from this, it is a perplexing document: the new government does not know how to manage the crisis, which it moreover completely underestimated. Its sole hope is the return to growth, preferably next year. In view of that it has even decided to extend the partial unemployment benefit, while aid to companies in difficulties will on the other hand be reduced.

The Opel affair, in which General Motors (GM) has decided not to transfer the company to the consortium formed by the Russian bank Sberbank and the components manufacturer Magna despite the efforts of several governments, at both regional and federal level, has created a climate in public opinion climate unfavourable to subsidies to companies. The Opel case could become a real disaster: GM has announced 10,000 dismissals in Germany and 50,000 across Europe, and the closure of the Bochum and Eisenach factories in Germany, as well as that in Antwerp in Belgium (in Germany Opel employs 25,000 people in four establishments, including Rüsselsheim and Kaiserlautern in addition to those mentioned). Opel workers will have every opportunity to organise a resistance on the European scale and defeat the plans of GM, indeed take the initiative for a reconversion of production in an ecological direction. A defeat for the Opel workers would have serious consequences for the class struggle.

Half of industrial enterprises are affected by the crisis, with engineering the hardest hit with 70% of factories in difficulty; 20% are fighting closure. The engineering union IG Metall estimates that in Baden-Württemberg a third of the factories in the sector could be close. The same situation exists in printing and print media. The crisis has also affected the big store chains: Karstadt, an up market store, wants to close 11 establishments, while others like Woolworth or Hertie have already closed. A wave of concentration of regional banks is expected; here it is above all the European Commission which is pushing for their sale and privatisation.

The government, while decreeing austerity measures in health, the pensions system and the management of unemployment, is borrowing at a record level: 86 billion Euros for 2010. For 2009 it has indicated to Brussels a fiscal deficit of 3.7% of GDP, for 2010 a deficit of 6% of GDP is forecast. Germany has joined those countries of the European Union (EU) not respecting the stability pact — now 20 out of 27 countries. Nonetheless, the new finance minister has promised a rectification of the budget by 2013.

The first measures have already been announced. Old age insurance will be accompanied by a second private pillar; the employer contribution for social security will be capped at the current level, whereas the contributions of employees and pensioners will increase. Pensions will be frozen for at least 5 or 6 years (the grand coalition had passed a law forbidding them from being reduced). The precarious sector will be extended. The jobs agency, which had been fundamentally restructured in line with the Hartz laws, will be reformed again. The Christian Democrats support the British model: care for people not integrated into the labour market should be taken on by local government, which has no budget for this.

Climate policy — where Angela Merkel claims to be at the cutting edge — is a farce. While the government is aiming at an 80% cut in CO2 emissions by 2050, it is building new coal fuelled power stations which will bury their carbon dioxide (a technique which has not yet been elaborated or experimented with). Renewable energies should have priority, but at the same time the closure of nuclear power stations at the end of their activity will be postponed.

The impression which dominates is that the government does not know how to define priorities in this area, that it simultaneously wants nuclear power, coal, Russian gas, Central Asian oil, Saharan solar power, Norwegian wind power and so on. This when Germany is already an energy exporter.

Difficult resistance for workers

The response of the unions to this programme of salvaging of big capital is completely inadequate. On the night of the elections, the head of the DGB union confederation, Michael Sommer, and that of IG Metall, Berthold Huber, expressed hope that the social wing of Christian Democracy will see that the worst does not happen. Opel is a good example of the majority orientation in IG Metall: it rests on state subsidies to safeguard the "industrial substance". While the GM multinational shows contempt for the decision of the German government, the union reacts with demonstrations and warning strikes without any strategy of struggle. For such a strategy in the current situation is only possible by going beyond capitalist logic. To obtain the buyout of Opel by Magna and Sberbank, Opel workers renounced some millions in wages per year, in consideration for 10% of the shares, following the US model. Now GM wants to benefit from the same concession. Huber has let it be understood that the unions would not ask for wage increases beyond the rate of inflation. The bosses have immediately made it known that they would instead be pressing for a wage freeze in 2010.

The main workers' union, Ver.di, pursues a more political debate. It demands a programme of investment of 40 billion Euros to create new jobs in the public sector, a legal minimum wage (which still does not exist in Germany), a longer period for unemployment benefit (it is currently a year) and the reintroduction of the tax on wealth. Nonetheless there is a big gap between words and results in collective agreements.

Resistance to the crisis depends on the capacity of unions to organise struggles. The DGB now has 6.4 million members (there are 38 million employees in total in Germany). The level of unionisation remains high in the big industries like cars and chemicals, but it is weak in small and medium industry and above all in private services (a sector in strong growth due to the outsourcing of these services by the big companies), where unions are forbidden. The discontent is very strong given the policy followed by the union leader and union membership continues to fall. But there is no culture of spontaneous struggles and it is very rare that the union teams start them.

Minority currents in the unions demand that they support the social struggle in the broad sense of the term and an anti-capitalist perspective. In IG Metall, a small current (led by Hans Jürgen Urban, a member of the union leadership) has taken up the old social democrat ideas of the 1920s, demanding an economic democracy and a stronger regulation of the market. The handicap of such an orientation is that it does not prepare a confrontation with capital but on the contrary is based on the approval of the employers in the context of a new compromise. A more radical current in Ver.di and IG Metall demands the nationalisation of key industries and a radical reduction in working hours. It has a small influence in the workplaces, but remains very much in the minority. At Opel, a radical nucleus — Gegenwehr ohne Grenzen (GOG, Resistance without frontiers) — exists only in the factory at Bochum. GOG demands that the workers vote on the concessions made by the unions in the negotiations — and calls for a vote against — but it proposes no alternative beyond this; the other employees have neither the habit nor the experience of a confrontation with the employers and do not know how to define any object of struggle other than their jobs and wages.

Nonetheless, this year examples of factory occupations and conversion of production have taken place in small companies and these experiences have not been a defeat. In addition a significant student struggle is underway against the Bologna reforms, the lack of liberty in studies and university entry fees. In mid-November faculties were occupied, in more than a dozen cities, following the example of Austrian students. It was the SDS, a student organisation linked to Die Linke, but formally independent — most of its members are not party members — which played the main role in the organisation of this struggle.

Finally, a network of local anti-crisis committees is preparing a new national demonstration next spring. However local activities are still very weak. Die Linke will bear a big responsibility in the encouragement and organisation of local and national struggles.

Appeal to support families of four dead comrades

24 December 2009, by Farooq Tariq

They held two focus group meetings and a wider consultation on 11-12 and 13 December in port cities of Pasni and Gawadar. They also formed core groups and clusters of local HBWW and planned to organize more meeting in the region in month of January next year.

Comrades Abdul Salam, Najma Khanum, Rehana Kausar and Wahid Baloch were dedicated members of the team who lost their lives for the cause of downtrodden masses and were on mission till their last breath. Another member of team, Mohammed Rafiq Baloch, central president National Trade Union Federation, Pakistan (NTUF) survived but severely injured in that fatal accident.

Comrade Abdul Salam, Najma Khanum and Rehana Kausar were the staff members of Labour Education Foundation (LEF). While Wahid Baloch was trade union activist in industrial city of Hub and by profession he was a driver.

Abdul Salam, 29 was working as coordinator on peace, democracy and trade union issues. He was also elected central Finance Secretary of National Trade Union Federation, Pakistan (NTUF) in 2007. He was the Secretary of Labour Party Pakistan, Karachi chapter for 2007-2009. Comrade Abdul Salam had initiated number of awareness activities for the trade union members, young students and political activists. He conducted 6 regular monthly study circles on social, economic and political issues in different localities of working class. He was the guiding force behind his last initiative of six-month training course on labour laws for new and young trade union activists in a view to build a team of committed workers who represent workers in labour courts.

He was on the of editorial board of weekly Mazdoor Jeddojehad for two years. He was also a regular contributor in respect of articles to Mazdoor Jeddojehad in Urdu and Pashto and was the main source for the LEF's monthly "Newsletter'. He had translated a Pashto novel of Noor Mohammed Tarakai in to Urdu. He

was Pashto poet of good repute and organizer of the "Jurs", a progressive Pashto literary forum in Karachi. He belonged to working class family and started his career as textile worker in Al Karam Textile Mill, where he was expelled from job nine year ago because of trade union activities. He contested the management in court and won the case in October 2009.

Najma Khanum, 38 was social activist and was the former local body's councilor of the area, mainly comprising of working class. She had been staff member of LEF since 2003. She was the social Mobilizers to organize home based women workers. She was the leader of her community and always at the forefront of all political, trade union and woman rights related rallies and demonstrations. She formed a women theatre group of young girls with the title of "Apna Theatre", means "Our Theatre". Their performances on May Day, Women day and on other important events were always important portion of the programs. She was also a former member of Pakistan National Squad of women field hockey. She served LPP as women secretary of Karachi chapter for two years from 2007 to 2009. She had been running the home based women workers cooperative in Yousuf Ghoth for four years.

Rehana Kausar, 26 was one of the youngest staff member of LEF. She started to work as part time teacher at adult literacy center in Gadap town and become social mobilizer in 2006. She was very energetic and committed with the cause and a great fighter. She was also active member of LPP.

Wahid Baloch, 40 was basically trade union activist and was sacked from job by the Bawani Air Products manufacturing company three years ago where he worked as a driver. His only crime was that he was trying to form union in the factory. No factory was inclined to give him job in Hub city industrial area due to his union related activities. He was involved in all activities of National Trade Union Federation and partly worked as driver with NTUF. All the comrades were from very poor and working class families. Three were working with full time for LEF and fourth one, the driver was an unemployed trade unionist.

Comrade Abdul Salam leaves behind two little kids, two and four year old and a young widow. Salam was the only one working. Najma leaves behind three children but to some extent grown up, from 13 to 20, all are studying. Her husband has job of contractual nature with very little earnings, living in rented house. Driver Wahid Baloch leaves behind 6 young kids, the eldest is only 14. Wahid was only the source to run the home. His old father and mother also live with his family in rented house. While, Rehana was not yet married, but one of the nine sisters and brothers and one of the two bread winners among them. She was also only hope for her old aged bedridden mother and father.

We as representatives of LEF, NTUF and LPP jointly pledge to do our best to cater the needs of their families and to work hard for the accomplishment of the cause for which they scarified their lives. In this respect we need your help. We appeal to entire circle of our friend, comrades and well wishers to come forward to show their solidarity with families of our shining comrades. We are launching this appeal to all of you to support us for raising 3,000,000 Pak Rupees (35,300 US$) for the permanent well being of the four families. Our plan is to deposit fixed amounts in saving accounts bank in the name of their immediate family members so that they get a regular monthly income and an increased amount after a certain period of time.

In joint meeting of LLP, NTUF and LEF comrades on 19 December in Karachi they have promise to contribute PRs 605,000 (7,120 US$) in response to this appeal.

Your contribution will accommodate financial needs of families of our departed comrades, strengthen the confidence in movement and further the cause working people of Pakistan.

Labour Education Foundation (www.lef.org.pk) is a social organization set up in 1993; its main work is to strengthen trade unions in Pakistan. It has done great work to unionize many unorganized workers and strengthening trade unions especially National Trade Union Federation, Pakistan (NTUF) in Pakistan.

You can send your contributions to the bank account of LEF as per following details.

A/C Title: Labour Education Foundation

A/C Number: 01801876

Swift: ALFHPKKALDA

Bank: BANK ALFALAH LTD., LDA PLAZA Branch, KASHMIR ROAD, LAHORE, PAKISTAN

Looking forward for your encouraging responses.

Farooq Tariq (Spokesperson LPP)

Nasir Mansoor (Deputy General Secretary NTUF)

Khalid Mahmood (Director LEF)

COP15 is dead! Long live the movement!

24 December 2009, by SAP (Denmark)

The negotiation have been marked by the exclusion of critical voices inside the negotiations and police repression against protesters on the outside. While it's clear to everyone, who have been following the negotiations, that it's the industrialized, Western countries, that bears the largest historical and present responsibility

for climate change, the western negotiators have tried to maintain the right to be the only ones to present the texts for negotiations, meanwhile all their energy have been used for bullying the unsatisfied governments.

Obviously it is hard to see what is negotiated behind closed doors, and we must protest, that the world cannot see what the real negotiations are about and the kind of underhand tricks are being employed. But we get an idea about the negotiations, when we hear, that the African nations are being accused of 'standing with the bowl in their hand'. This racist behavior is an expression of the neocolonial ghost that lingers over the negotiations. Nonetheless we need to make perfectly clear to ourselves, that there are also class differences in the global South and that a simple transfer of money to a lot of the affected countries would mean the transfer of money to the pockets of the political and economic upper classes in these countries. This problem can only be overcome through systemic solutions, such as the abolition of intellectual property rights, negation of the current debt and the transfer of political and economic power to the South.

Large corporations have, with the support of their respective governments, decided to use the current levels of emissions as the outset for creating a just deal, or to rephrase it: They are prepared to make the enormous social and economic inequality that governs this world, as a picture of how the future should look like. This is both dangerous and unacceptable to the populations of the global South.

It is this disgusting attitude that reflects itself, when the police is used against delegates trying to exit negotiations to discuss indigenous rights and climate justice with unionists, farmers and other activists struggling for climate justice. In general we can say, that the danish government, with the silent accept of the UN leadership, have used the summit to undermine democratic rights and to install new standards for police repression of critical voices.

Just as with changes in the climate, an authoritarian state also presents itself slowly and and unnoticeable. Terror laws, 'hoodlum'-packages, phone bugging, surveillance, extended use of plainclothes cops and actual police provocations have, in the specific situation, been key to criminalize opposition to the summit and its agenda. But in the larger scale of things the police strategy, as shown during the summit, poses a serious threat to civil rights, to the freedom of speech and to the right to protest in Denmark. But it is not only a threat to the Danish movements, but to all social movements, and it marks a dangerous precedent for state behavior at future summits.

Nonetheless we can conclude, that an inspiring movement have been born in Copenhagen. So far the climate negotiations have been dominated by big NGO's and organizations attempting to perform 'progressive lobbying'. But the 12th of December demonstration proved, that climate changes have become an issue, that compels thousands of people to take the streets in one of the largest demonstrations in danish history and one of the largest ever on the issue of climate change. Many of the people, who took to the streets on the 12th did so under slogans critical of the system such as 'Planet - Not Profit', slogans, that had been chosen after an internet vote and in this way expresses a growing critique of the profit based and -oriented society.

Through the alliance between Climate Justice Now! and Climate Justice Action it was possible to unite forces on the streets with forces inside the summit walls. Furthermore it was shown possible to unite people with very diverse political and organizational backgrounds in the demands of 'Climate Justice' and 'System Change'. It's an enormous victory, that this movement held onto its code of action and did not let itself be provoked by the police. We have seen this discipline and commitment repeated in prisoner-solidarity actions all over Europe.

The movement is still young and weak, but it's international. On a minimal, but radical, program containing demands such as leaving fossil fuels in the ground and recognition of climate debt, thousands of activists from social movements have found a common foothold. Two main tasks are left in Denmark:

– The first task is to continue the solidarity work with those innocently jailed. They need all kinds of support and they need to know, hat there are forces supporting them, who stands ready to help. This work must be tied to a direct attack on the governments 'law-and-order' policies, which now threatens to undermine democratic rights. Its a task of the leftwing to include workers unions i this defense of democratic rights.

– The other task is to use the experiences from the climate summit in the building of a Danish movement. The experiences of the 12th is still present in thousands of Danes, and these people lack responses after a failed summit. This reply exists. After the 16th the organizers called for 'Peoples Assemblies' everywhere - in schools, in workplaces and in local communities and Klimaforum have presented a quite radical text, as the conclusion to the alternative summit. These initiatives must be supported. Beyond this a systemic climate critique must be rooted in actual Danish struggles, the relationship to Danish nature and the development of local Danish production.

It is imperative, that Socialist Youth Front and the Red/Green Alliance commits themselves to these struggles.

Political Bureau of SAP, 20. December 2009

Copenhagen: Collapse at the summit, rank-and-file victory

21 December 2009, by Daniel Tanuro

The text included a vague promise of 100 billion dollars yearly for adaptations in developing countries, but the formulas used and various comments lead us to fear that these will be loans administered by major financial institutions rather than true reparations paid by those responsible for the mess.

The document is totally incoherent. Heads of state and government recognize that "climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time", but at the closing of the fifteenth conference of its kind, they are still incapable of taking the slightest concrete measure to meet this challenge. They admit – this is a first! – the need to remain "below 2°degrees" temperature increase, hence the need for deep cuts in emissions "according to science, and as documented by the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report". However they are incapable of endorsing the quantified conclusions drawn by climatologists: at least 40% cut in 2020 and 95% in 2050 in developed countries. They emphasize their "strong political will" to "cooperate in achieving" (this goal) (less than 2°C temperature increase) but have nothing to propose beyond a hodgepodge of proposals, with each country communicating to the others what it intends to do, by February 1st 2010.

Trapped by the hyper-mediatisation they orchestrated themselves, the powerful of our world found themselves in the spotlight, with nothing to show beyond their sordid rivalries. Thus, the representatives of 26 major countries booted out the NGOs, sidelined small States and scribbled a text whose major purpose is to convey the impression that there is a political pilot in the plane. But there is no pilot. Or rather, it's an automatic pilot: the race for profit among capitalist groups rushing into the trade war for world markets. Candidate Obama and the European Union promised to the high heavens that business would have to pay for their emissions rights. Snake oil!: at the end of the day, most companies received these rights free of charge and are making profits on them, selling them off and billing consumers for them! The rest is in keeping. Don't touch the money, that is the watchword.

This so-called agreement is oozing impotence from every pore. You can't just tell the climate to stay below 2°C. If this can still be possible, there are drastic conditions to fulfil. These involve definitely consuming less energy, thus transforming and transporting less matter. Less must be produced for solvent demand and at the same time human needs must be met, in particular in the poor countries. How can this be done? This is the key question. It isn't so hard to solve. We could stop producing weapons, eliminate advertising budgets, and do away with many types of useless productions, activities and transports. But this would come up against capitalist productivism, the race for profits than requires growth. A sacrilege! That is taboo! And the outcome of this race? While world emissions have to be cut 80% by 2050 at the latest, although developed countries are responsible for more than 70% of warming, the only concrete measure specified in the agreement is a halt to deforestation... which only concerns the South and represents 17% of emissions. Ecological headway? No way! "Protecting" tropical forests (by expelling the people who live there!) is the cheapest way for polluters to buy the right to keep on producing (weapons, advertising, etc) and to pollute ... thus to keep on destroying forests via warming. This is how the law of profit corrupts everything it touches and changes everything into its opposite.

Fortunately, in the face of this total collapse at the summit, Copenhagen was a magnificent rank-and-file victory. The international demonstration on Saturday 12 December brought together some 100 000 people. The only precedent for such a massive mobilization on this issue was were the different simultaneous marches that brought together 200.000 Australian citizens at once, in November 2007. But this was a national mobilization and Australia was being hard-hit by the impact of warming. This is not (yet) the case in the European countries where most of the demonstrators came from, flocking to the Nordic capital to cries of "Planet first, people first", despite ferocious police repression.

Copenhagen symbolizes this new consciousness. It was the expression of participation of social movements that until very recently were on the sidelines of ecological issues, and sometimes even suspicious of them: women's organizations, peasant movements, trade unions, North-South solidarity associations, peace movements, global justice movements etc. Indigenous people are playing a key role by struggling against forest destruction (in a power relationship worthy of David confronting Goliath!), symbolizing at once resistance to the dictatorship of profit and the possibility of another relation between humanity and nature. Yet all these forces count more on collective action than on lobbying, so dear to major environmental associations. Their coming onto the scene has radically moved the centre of gravity. From now on, the struggle for an ecologically effective and socially just international treaty will play out in the street – more than in the corridors of summit meetings – and will be a social battle – more than a debate among specialists.

While the official summit gave birth to a scrap of paper, social mobilization and the alternative summit laid the political foundations for rank-and-file action to carry out in the coming

months “Change the system, not the climate”, “Planet not profit”, “bla bla bla Act Now”, “Nature doesn’t compromise”, “Change the Politics, not the climate”, “There is no PLANet B”. Despite its limitations (particularly in terms of the role of the United Nations) Klimaforum09’s declaration is a good text, rejecting the carbon market, climate neocolonialism and offsetting emissions by planting trees, or other phoney techniques. More and more people understand it: climate degradation is not the outcome of “human activity” in general but of a mode of an unsustainable mode of production and consumption. And they draw the logical conclusion: the climate can’t be saved only through changing individual behaviour; on the contrary this will take deep structural changes. It means putting the onus on the race for profits, because this race inevitably leads to an exponential growth in production, waste and transport of materials, thus of emissions.

Is the summit’s failure a disaster? On the contrary, it is excellent news. Excellent news because it is time to stop this blackmail claiming that in exchange for fewer emissions, it would take more neoliberalism, more markets. Excellent news because the treaty that governments could conclude today would be ecologically inadequate, socially criminal and technologically dangerous. It would provoke a rise in temperature between 3.2 and 4.9°C, a rise in ocean levels from 60cm to 2.9 metres (at least) and a headlong rush to sorcerer’s apprentice technologies (nuclear power, agrifuels, GMOs and “clean coal” with geological sequestration of billions of tonnes of CO2). Hundreds of millions of poor people would be the main victims. Excellent news because this failure clears up illusions that “world civil society” could, via “good governance”, in partnership with “stakeholders”, arrive at a climate consensus among antagonistic social interests.

It is high time to see that there are only two utterly counterpoised strategies out of fossil fuels: a transition piloted blind by profit and competition which takes us straight into the wall; and a consciously and democratically planned transition based on social and ecological needs, independent of the costs, which means involving the public sector and sharing wealth. This alternative path is the only means of averting disaster.

The Emperor has no clothes. The system is incapable of responding to the gigantic problem it created without inflicting irreparable damage on humanity and nature. To avert this, the time has come for the broadest possible mobilisation. This is everyone’s concern. Planetary warming is much more than an “environmental” issue: it is a huge social, economic, human and ecological threat, which objectively requires an ecosocialist alternative. The heart of the matter: capitalism, as a system, has exceeded its limits. Its capacity for social and ecological destruction clearly exceeds its potential for progress. Let this observation help to foster convergence of the struggles for another society. The Copenhagen demonstrators have opened the road. They invite us to join them in taking action: “Act now. Planet, not profit. Nature doesn’t compromise”.

19/12/09

Klimaforum: A People’s Declaration on Climate Change

19 December 2009

We, participating peoples, communities and all organisations at the Klimaforum09 in Copenhagen, call upon every person, organisation, government and institutions, including the United Nations (UN), to contribute to this necessary transition. It will be a challenging task. The crisis of today has economic, social, environmental, geopolitical and ideological aspects interacting with and enforcing each other as well as the climate crisis. For this reason, we call for urgent climate action:

A complete abandoning of fossil fuels within the next 30 years, which must include specific milestones for every five-year period. We demand an immediate cut in GHG of industrialised countries of at least 40% compared to 1990 levels by 2020.

Recognition, payment and compensation of climate debt for the overconsumption of atmospheric space and adverse effects of climate change on all affected groups and people.

Rejection of purely market-oriented and technology-centred false and dangerous solutions such as nuclear energy, agro-fuels, carbon capture and storage, Clean Development Mechanisms, biochar, genetically “climate-readied” crops, geo-engineering and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), which deepens social and environmental conflicts.

Real solutions to climate crisis based on safe, clean, renewable and sustainable use of natural resources, as well as transitions to food, energy, land and water sovereignty.

Therefore, we demand COP15 reach an agreement that will initiate the restoration of the environmental, social and economic balance of planet Earth by means that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable and equitable, and finally come up with a legally binding treaty.
The adverse impacts of human-induced climate change cause gross

violations of human rights. The nations have an obligation to cooperate internationally to ensure respect for human rights everywhere in the world according to the Charter of the United Nations. Any specific agreement on climate change must be seen in the broader context of achieving a sustainable transition of our societies.

We, participating people and organisations at Klimaforum09, commit to continue our full and active engagement in promoting such a transition, which will require a fundamental change in social, political and economic structures and a rectification of gender, class, race, generation, ethnic inequalities and injustices.

This requires restoration of democratic sovereignty of our local communities as a basic social, political and economic unit. Local and democratic ownership and control over and access to natural resources will be the basis for meaningful and sustainable development of communities, and simultaneously reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There is also the need for stronger regional and international cooperative arrangements to manage common and shared resources, and a stronger and democratic UN.
We call upon every concerned person, social movement, cultural, political or economic organisation to join us in building a strong global movement of movements, which can bring forward peoples' visions and demands on every level of society. Together, we can make global transitions to sustainable futures.

Sign the Klimaforum09 Declaration here:
http://spreadsheets.google.com/view...

System change — not climate change (full text)?

A people's declaration from Klimaforum 09,

December 10, 2009

1. Preamble

There are solutions to the climate crisis. What people and the planet need is a just and sustainable transition of our societies to a form that will ensure the rights of life and dignity of all people and deliver a more fertile planet and more fulfilling lives to present and future generations. A transition based on democratic principles of solidarity, especially for the most vulnerable, non-discrimination, gender equality, equity and sustainability, acknowledging that we are part of nature, which we love and respect. To address the climate crisis, however, awareness creation and determined actions adhering to a rights-based framework are required. The nations have an obligation to cooperate internationally to ensure respect for human rights everywhere in the world according to the Charter of the United Nations.

We, participating peoples, communities and all organisations at the Klimaforum09 in Copenhagen, call upon every person, organisation, government and institution, including the United Nations (UN), to contribute to this necessary transition. It will be a challenging task. The crisis of today has economic, social, environmental, geopolitical and ideological aspects interacting with and enforcing each other as well as the climate crisis. This very moment of conjunction of crises — climate, energy, financial, food and water crises, among others — urges us to unite and transform the dominant social and economic system as well as global governance, which blocks necessary solutions to the climate crisis. For this reason, a movement from below is called upon to act now.

Environmental and climate debts must be paid. No false, dangerous and short-term solutions should be promoted and adopted, such as nuclear power, agro-fuels, offsetting, carbon capture and storage (CCS), biochar, geo-engineering and carbon trading. Instead we should implement a truly sustainable transition built on clean, safe and renewable resources and energy conservation. We welcome alliances across social movements and sectors, representing all ages, genders, ethnicities, faiths, communities and nationalities.

We want to take the future into our own hands by building a strong and popular movement of youth, women, men, workers, peasants, fisher folks, indigenous peoples, people of colour, urban, and rural social groups which is able to act on all levels of society to deal with environmental degradation and climate change. We call for a new international economic order and support a strong and democratic UN as opposed to G8, G20 or other closed groups of powerful countries.

2. The challenge, as we see it

The concentration of greenhouse gasses (GHGs) in the atmosphere is already so high, that the climate system has been brought out of balance. The CO2 concentration and global temperatures have increased more rapidly in the last 50 years and will rise even faster in the coming decades. This adds to a multitude of other serious ecological imbalances, the impacts of which threatens the lives and livelihoods of the people of the world, most acutely, the impoverished people and other vulnerable groups.

The imbalance of the climate system leads to greater and more frequent extremes of heat and rainfall patterns, tropical cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons, extreme flooding and droughts, loss of biodiversity, landslides, rising sea levels, shortage of drinking water, shorter growing seasons, lower yields, lost or deteriorated agricultural land, decreased agricultural production, losses of livestock, extinction of ecosystems, diminished fish stocks, among others.

These phenomena are resulting in food crisis, famine, illness, death, displacement and the extinction of sustainable ways of life. Interacting with this is the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), monoculture farming and industrialised agriculture strongly promoted by corporations that seriously threaten the stability and diversity of ecosystems. This also marginalises and impoverishes small-scale farmers and undermines food sovereignty. Corporate-controlled

agriculture is geared to meet global demand for overconsumption especially in the global North rather than for local basic needs. The same can be said about modern industrial fisheries, intensive forestry and mining which destroys ecosystems, diminishes biodiversity and destroys the life and livelihoods of local communities.

These effects of climate change together with growing social inequalities and severe impacts on our common environment are already devastating the lives of millions of people as well as their local communities. However, we — the people — are not prepared to accept this fact as our fate. That is why there are fast-growing popular movements determined to defend their livelihoods and stand up against those forces and causes, which have led us on to this ultimately suicidal route of environmental destruction.

In Asia, Africa, Middle East, Oceania and South and Central America, as well as the periphery of North America and Europe, popular movements are rising to confront the exploitation of their land by foreign interests and to regain control over their own resources. A new type of activism has revitalised the environmental movements, leading to a wide variety of protests and actions against mining, big dams, deforestation, coal-fired plants, air travel and the building of new roads among others. There is a growing awareness about the need to change the present economic paradigm in a very fundamental way.

Among various movements, alternative ways of life are proliferating. At the same time it is becoming evident to the public that the present holders of power are unwilling to face and deal with the threats of climate change and environmental degradation. The so-called strategy of "green growth" or "sustainable growth" has turned out to be an excuse for pursuing the same basic model of economic development, that is one of the root causes of environmental destruction and the climate crisis.

3. The causes, as we see them

The immediate and primary cause of human-induced climate change is an unprecedented emission of greenhouse gasses (GHGs) into the atmosphere originating from the increasing burning of fossil fuels from industry, commerce, transport and military purposes, to mention a few but significant sources. Other important drivers of climate change are deforestation, extractive industries, forest degradation — excluding Indigenous people's sustainable practice of shifting cultivations — disturbance of water cycle, expanding areas through land grabbing for industrial agriculture, increased industrial meat-production and other types of unsustainable use of natural resources.

Uneven control and ownership over resources?

These immediate causes are the results of an unsustainable global economic system built on unequal access to and control over the planet's limited resources and the benefits that accrue from their use. This system is premised on the appropriation of local, national and planetary commons by local and global elites. What has been praised as great strides in technology, production and human progress has in fact precipitated global ecological and development disasters. Still, a privileged global elite engages in reckless profit-driven production and grossly excessive consumption while a very large proportion of humanity is mired in poverty with merely survival and subsistence consumption, or even less. This is the situation not only in countries of the global South but also in the global North. The world's largest transnational corporations (TNCs) based mainly in the Northern countries and tax havens, but with expanding operations, have long been at the forefront of these excesses.

The competition among global corporations and rich nations for resources and greater market shares, as well as trade agreements and treaties, have led to a neo-colonial suppression of Southern peoples, denying them rightful ownership and control of their resources. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and international financial institutions, as well as the European Union (EU) and United States (US) using bilateral trade agreements, are increasing the privatisation and commoditisation of public resources, intensifying the plunder of natural resources of underdeveloped countries and imposing conditions that increase their dependence.

Prevailing patterns of thought and alternatives?

The development model promoted by these institutions is not only a question of "economics'." The prevailing economic paradigm is strongly related to the system of thought, which is based on an imagination of the human being as "economic man". This ideology is reinforced by corporate media and marketing firms which promote egoism, competition, material consumption and boundless accumulation of private wealth in utter disregard of the social and ecological consequences of such behaviour. This system of thought is intimately intertwined with patterns of patriarchy and paternalism.

If we really want to address this crisis, we need to recognise that the human species is part of both nature and society and cannot exist without either. Therefore if humanity is to survive, we need to respect the integrity of Mother Earth and strive for harmony with nature and for peace within and between cultures.

We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live according to the principle of "One among many."`

4. A just and sustainable transition

It is clear that solving the climate crisis requires far-reaching transformations, which are currently excluded from the agenda of policy makers in governments and multilateral institutions. People are calling for system change, not "business-as-usual" and the uncritical use of technology and market fixes along which powerful interests have

set and confined the climate agenda.

Peoples' movements are not lacking alternative visions for society and concrete steps that must be taken in order to move towards a sustainable future while addressing the climate, water, food and economic crises at the same time. Such a sustainable transition will begin by many different initiatives. Some of these steps towards sustainable transition are:

Food sovereignty and ecological agriculture: Uphold the rights of people, communities, and countries to determine their own systems of production including farming, fishing, food, forestry and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to the circumstances. Peoples', especially womenÂ´s access to and control over productive resources such as land, seeds and water must be respected and guaranteed. Agricultural production must rely principally on local knowledge, appropriate technology and ecologically sustainable techniques that bind CO2 in the diverse and native plant systems, bind water and return more nutrients to the soil, than was taken out. Food and agricultural production must be primarily geared towards meeting local needs, encourage self-sufficiency, promote local employment, and minimise resource use, waste and GHG emissions in the process.

Democratic ownership and control of economy: The reorganisation of society's productive units around more democratic forms of ownership and management, in order to meet people's basic needs such as employment creation, access to water, housing, land, health care and education, food sovereignty and ecological sustainability. Public policy must make sure that the financial system serves public interests and channel resources for the sustainable transformation of industry, agriculture and services.
Energy sovereignty: A dramatic reduction of energy consumption especially in the unjustly enriched countries combined with a blend of renewable and public energy sources such as solar, wind, geothermal, mini-hydro, wave and the development of off-the-grid electricity distribution to secure energy supplies to communities, and public ownership for the grid.

Ecological planning of urban and rural zones: The aim is a radical reduction in the inputs of energy and resources and the outputs of waste and pollution while encouraging locally based supply of basic needs of the citizens. An urban and rural planning built on social justice and equal service to all reducing the need for transport. Promoting public transport systems such as light and high-speed rail systems and bicycles reducing the need for private motor vehicles thus decongesting the roads, improving health and reducing energy consumption.

Education, science and cultural institutions: Re-orientate public research and education to meet the needs of people and the environment, rather than the present bias for developing commercially profitable and proprietary technologies. Research and development should be primarily an open and collaborative endeavour in the common interest of humankind, and eliminate patents on ideas and technology. Fair and just exchange of appropriate technologies, traditional knowledge and indigenous innovative practices, and ideas between countries should be encouraged.

End to militarism and wars: The present fossil fuel-based development model leads to violence, war and military conflict over control of energy, land, water and other natural resources. This is demonstrated by the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, militarisation in across in the globe in regions rich on fossil fuels and other natural resources. Peasants and Indigenous communities are also being violently displaced from their lands to make way for agro-fuel plantations. Trillions of dollars are spent on the military-industrial complex, wasting enormous material and human resources, which should instead be devoted to implementing a sustainable transition.

By taking steps forward we can learn by doing. These steps will help us to convince the broad majority of people that a sustainable transition entails the promise of a more fulfilling and good life. The social, political, economic and environmental fields are closely interrelated. A coherent strategy must therefore address them all, which indeed is the central idea behind the concept of sustainable transition.

One aspect of this concept is the restoration of local communities rather than the global market as a basic social, political and economic unit. Social cohesion, democratic participation, economic accountability and ecological responsibility can only be accomplished by restoring decision making at the lowest appropriate level. This is a basic lesson we have learned from ethnic cultures and local communities.

A community-based approach does not however contradict the need for extensive international cooperation. On the contrary, it will need stronger alliances within and across all borders between direct producers in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and industry. Alliances also built on the strength of gender equality and on recognising and overcoming unjust power relations at all levels. It also includes the need for stronger regional and international cooperative arrangements to manage common and shared resources such as cross boarder water resources. Furthermore, international cooperation will promote the full mutual exchange of ideas, technologies and expertise across all boundaries as well as engage in an open-minded dialogue between different cultures based on mutual respect.

5. Paths to transition

Many people are involved in the practical creation of more sustainable industry, agriculture, forestry and fisheries as well as in the renewable energy sector. These initiatives within the system have furthermore created alliances with other sectors of society, trade unions, consumers, city dwellers, teachers, researchers all of whom are striving towards sustainable ways of life.

United Nations (UN) and

Conference of Parties (COP)?

We need to address the UN negotiations on climate change and the 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The lessons from previous rounds of negotiations are not very promising. Despite the high-profile schemes for concerted action launched first in the 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change of Rio de Janeiro and later in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, results are meagre and the problems have not been solved. Indeed, it has worsened as the principles, targets and the timelines of both the convention and the protocol have made little headway.

The same big corporate interests that are largely responsible for causing the climate crisis appear to have immense influence on climate policies at the national and global level. We strongly oppose this undemocratic influence of corporate lobbyism in the current COP negotiations. Contrary to this, we call on states to put in place an appraisal mechanism for all policies and policy instruments under the UNFCCC, to ensure inclusive and deliberative multi-stakeholder processes that repair existing inequalities whether based on gender, colour, age, disability or other forms of discrimination in the COP negotiations.

We demand that COP15 reach an agreement that will initiate the restoration of the environmental, social and economic balance of planet Earth by means that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable and equitable, and finally come up with a legally binding treaty.

Our demands

We are raising our voices to the leaders in the UNFCCC to put forward the people's demands and alternatives.

Phasing out fossil fuel: We call for a clear strategy for dismantling the fossil fuel era within the next 30 years, which must include specific milestones for every five-year period. We demand an immediate cut in GHG emissions of industrialised countries of at least 40% compared to 1990 levels by 2020.

Reparations and compensation for climate debt and crimes: We demand full reparations for Southern countries and those impoverished by Northern states, TNCs and tax-haven institutions. By this, we partly address historical injustices associated to inequitable industrialisation and climate change, originating in the genocide of Indigenous nations, the transatlantic slave trade, the colonial era and invasions. This must be accompanied by an equally clear strategy for compensating impoverished people for the climate and broader ecological debt owed by the enriched. A global and democratic fund should be established to give direct support to the victims of climate change. Developed countries must provide new, mandatory, adequate and reliable financing and patent-free technologies to better adapt to adverse climate impacts and undertake emission reductions. This would allow developing countries to play their part in curbing climate change, while still meeting the needs and aspirations of their people. International financial institutions, donor agencies and trade mechanisms should have no part in reparations.

An immediate global ban on deforestation of primary forests and the parallel initiation of an ambitious global tree-planting program based on native and diverse species in partnership with Indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities. Similarly a ban on large-scale industrialised fishing methods and a return to primarily local and sustainable fishing practices. Finally, a ban on land grabbing by foreign interests and the full acceptance of people's sovereignty over natural resources.

We express strong opposition to purely market-oriented and technology-centred false and dangerous solutions put forward by many corporations, governments and international financial institutions. These include nuclear energy, agro-fuels, carbon capture and storage, Clean Development Mechanisms, biochar, genetically "climate-readied" crops, geoengineering and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation as it is the UNFCCC definition (REDD), which only produce new environmental threats, without really solving the climate crisis. Carbon trading and offsetting are also false and unjust instruments because they treat a common planetary resource — the atmosphere — as a commodity that can be owned and traded. So far the system has not proven its merits, and by allowing rich countries to offset their reduction obligations, it has maintained this unjust and unsustainable system.

Equitable tax on carbon emissions: Instead of the regime of tradable emission quotas we demand an equitable tax on carbon emissions. Revenues from this carbon tax should be returned equitably to the people, and a portion should be used to compensate and contribute to finance adaptation and mitigation. This is, however, not a substitute for repayment of already accumulated climate debt. This compensation and funding should be unconditional and free of market mechanisms and financial institutions. Reduction of emissions must be strongly encouraged by a briskly increasing, transparent carbon tax, in addition to direct regulations to drive the phase-out of fossil fuels, while enabling safe, clean and renewable energy.

Multilateral institutions and TNCs: Unjust, unsustainable and unaccountable global economic and financial institutions like the WTO, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), regional development banks, donor institutions and trade agreements should be replaced by democratic and equitable institutions functioning in accordance with the United Nations Charter, that respect peoples' sovereignty over resources and promote solidarity between peoples and nations. A mechanism for strict surveillance and control of the operations of TNCs should be created as well.

Finally, we commit ourselves to a full and active involvement in carrying our sustainable transitions of our societies along the lines put forward in this declaration.

6. A global movement for

sustainable transition

Irrespective of the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change there is an urgent need to build a global movement of movements dedicated to the long-term task of promoting a sustainable transition of our societies. Contrary to the prevailing power structures, this movement must grow from the bottom and up. What is needed is a broad alliance of environmental movements, social movements, trade unions, farmers and other aligned parties that can work together in everyday political struggle on the local as well as national and international level. Such an alliance entails at the same time the creation of a new mindset and new types of social activisms, and must be capable not only of reacting to unsustainable practices, but also showing by example how a new sustainable economy can indeed function.

We, participating peoples, communities and social organisations at Klimaforum09 are all committed to build on the results achieved at this event in the further development of a global movement of movements.
This declaration aims to inspire the further development of such a movement by pointing to the general direction in which we choose to move. Together, we can make global transitions to sustainable future.
Join us.

Copenhagen: a turning point for the movement

19 December 2009, by Terry Conway, Thomas Eisler

Copenhagen demo

One of the biggest delegations from outside Denmark was the 850 strong special train organised by the Belgian organisation, Climate Social Justice, which brought activists not only from Belgium but from France and Britain too in an epic journey which took more than 12 hours each way but facilitated a broader participation - and more international discussion - than would otherwise have been possible.

While the delegations from the countries from the Global South were necessarily smaller than those from the Europe their presence was warmly welcomed - and the popular slogan of Climate Justice Now was clearly seen by most protestors as meaning the leaders of the rich countries needed to listen to the demands of the global south - and was also seen as one of the essential demands of the day.

Indeed the radicality of the slogans which dominated a mobilisation which involved most of the large non-governmental organisations as well as more radical sections of the climate justice movement was noteworthy.

The dominant placards on the march were those distributed by Greenpeace - though they didn't carry that organisations logo - or reflect their politics! The organisation conducted an unusual experiment and asked people to suggest slogans via their website and then produced the most popular. These included: "Nature does not compromise", "There is no planet B", "Bla Bla Bla .. Act now", "Change the Politics not the Climate" and "Climate Justice Now". There were also loud chants led from the platform against the greenwashing of offsetting, while slogans raised by the radical left such as "our planet not your profits" had a warm response well beyond our ranks.

Political parties, trade unions and peasants organisations were also present in this colourful, radical and truly internationalist demonstration through the bitterly cold streets of Copenhagen to the fortress of the Bella Centre where the summit itself was taking place. If the majority of the official negotiators seem to have no answers to the threat of climate chaos, those on the streets have many.

Police repression

The repression of protestors by the police has become a big issue. During Saturdays march, almost 1000 demonstrators were encircled by the police and prevented from moving. Many had to wait up to 5 hours seated directly on the tarmac – hands on the back – before being taken to the detention center. All but a few of those arrested were released without charge within few hours.

Actions by a small group of "Black Block" supporters was used by the police as justification for their action. At the former Stock Exchange and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stones and fire crackers were thrown. But the police intervention happened almost 1 km further along the route of the demonstration making it completely arbitrary who was in fact detained. The Danish parliament had hastily approved the "Scoundrels act", a package of new laws that include right for the police to hold people for 12 hours (it was previously 6) in preventive arrest without the right to appear before a judge in the run up to the summit.

People's climate summit – klimaforum 09

The COP15 has also become the occasion for the convergence of many thousands grassroots activists to debate the challenges and solutions to global warming. The main centre for the debates is the Peoples Climate Summit. A common declaration has been agreed which we print below.

In the same way as the slogans of the demonstration, the declaration also poses a radical approach to climate change, as shown by its title System change – not climate change. It points toward the need for "a just and sustainable transition of our societies to a form that will ensure the rights of life and dignity of all peoples and deliver a more fertile planet and more fulfilling lives to future generations." It takes a stance against market mechanisms such as carbon trading and offsetting and for atleast a 40% reduction in emmissions by the developed countries by 2020.
Klimaforum 09 - Peoples climate summit : www.klimaforum09.org
The protests – as well as the crack-down by the police and the lack of answers from world leaders have continued since December 12 but smaller numbers of activists have taken part in these direct actions. Not only have more arrests followed, but some from Greenpeace and Via Campesina in particular have had their passes from the Bella Centre withdrawn for attempting to organise acts of solidarity between those inside arguing for binding limits of 1.5% warming – and for climate debt to be paid for by the north – and who walked out of the talks on Tuesday - and the protestors outside.

Inside the Bella Centre, Hugo Chavez from Venezuela has echoed much of what has been raised by the activists and saluted them for being on the streets. "If the climate were a bank, they would have bailed it out already" was one of his most pertinent comments, in a long and powerful speech which drew applause from many who heard it. The Bolivian delegation has also made a strong and powerful intervention from the inside.

But it is what happened on December 12 that sums up the real step change for the movement for Climate Justice. That mobilisation itself was of course proceeded by significant demonstrations in many individual cities and countries across the globe as the summit began on December 5.

But certainly the number of demonstrators on the streets of Copenhagen is a proof positive that it is possible to develop mass mobilisations on the issue of global warming.

Given that it was the largest demonstration on any question in Denmark for more than 20 years, it will undoubtedly give a massive boost to what has been up til now a relatively weak movement on the question of climate change in that country. Other demonstrations on this question have only involved a few hundred people.

But beyond this, at an international level it shows that there is a new movement being born and being radicalised across the globe.
Naomi Klein, in an article for "The Nation" on December 12 entitled "Copenhagen: Seattle Grows Up" makes many comparisons between the movement for climate justice and the battles against free trade symbolised by Seattle and what came after. But she also makes the crucial point that what weakened that movement was that while it was clear what it was against it was less sure what it was for. She is right - Climate Justice activists are clear – there is an alternative and we are determined to build it!

New resistance network

19 December 2009

Lucien Perpette: Can you indicate the reasons for becoming involved and participating in the Forum?

Rastko Mocnik: In recent years, there have been demonstrations of students and young people in Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb and Ljubljana. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, these young people have established a resistance network which covers the whole country – quite an exploit in this republic, which is torn apart by nationalist politics. In April-May 2009, students occupied several faculties in the big cities of Croatia [1]. In the Faculty of Arts of Zagreb, capital of the country, the "blockade", during which the students organized an alternative university, lasted more than a month. In Ljubljana, in autumn 2007, young global justice campaigners took part in the big trade-union demonstration against the neoliberal policies of the government and for a wages policy indexed on the evolution of profits [2] At that time, the economy was experiencing considerable growth, whereas wages were stagnating. In addition, young people are among the groups in society who are most affected by the neo-liberal restoration of peripheral capitalism: sociologists speak about "discriminatory flexibilisation of young people". In Slovenia, 37.2 per cent of the jobs occupied by young people between 14 and 29 years old were precarious in 2001 (as against 10.1 per cent for those aged 30 and above) [3]. The situation is particularly unfavourable for university graduates of the Universities: in Slovenia, the demand for jobs requiring a university degree is almost double of that of the number of jobs on offer.

The youth of ex-Yugoslavia have responded to the deterioration of their situation by a growing politicization. In Ljubljana, last April, young people organized an antifascist demonstration on the anniversary of the foundation of the antifascist front in 1941: this very successful demonstration targeted local neo-fascism as well as the attempts at historical revisionism which are being conducted in Slovenia by the bourgeois political establishment.

The revolt of youth in Greece opened new perspectives for questions that concern the whole of Europe. In ex-Yugoslavia, there is a strong convergence between movements: they defend the gains of the socialist Welfare State and demand their reintroduction, as in Croatia where the slogan of the students still

remains: “Free Education for All!”

The exchange of information and points of view between those involved in these initiatives was thus an event not to be missed. Especially since the problems which they confront cannot be dealt with within the framework of one only country.

Lucien Perpette: What do you think of the emergence and the activities of the movement DOSTA in Sarajevo?

Rastko Mocnik: This movement is impressive: whereas at the beginning, it seemed to be just a quasi spontaneous movement of street riots, it was very quickly organized into a network which links together the most important cities in the country. At this point in time, it is probably the only politicized network which breaks through the barriers imposed by nationalist politics in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Although it is recent and composed of young people of whom the majority did not have any previous political experience, it is a politically mature movement, and one which thinks in a strategic way: their demands are radical (re-establishment of the social state), but they have succeeded in avoiding any kind of adventurous extremism.

Lucien Perpette: What is your opinion of the various speakers and the ideas that they put forward in the meeting?

Rastko Mocnik: I was surprised both by the anti-capitalist radicalism of the participants and by the high intellectual level of the discussions. The liberal ideological hegemony that is churned out daily by the mass media obviously does not have much influence on young people. The isolation of the countries of former Yugoslavia has given rise to a thirst for ideas and theoretical conceptions. And the daily scandal of a life that is wretched and of injustices is finally starting to produce its language of resistance. These young people have access to the power of electronic technologies and are competent in making use of them. They are subjected to a scandalous degree of poverty in their material existence, they are exploited, they are deprived of access to public life, but they have found the means of emancipating themselves intellectually, ideologically. It is really impressive.

Lucien Perpette: The programme was pretty intense, because it contained videos and speeches. What do you think of this process?

Rastko Mocnik: Thanks to the passion that the participants brought into their contributions, the intensity of the meeting was completely tolerable. We should take notice of the ability of these movements to document their activities and subsequently make them more widely known. Video has proved to be a very practical, economic medium, which functions on several levels (the combination of visual information and language, an impact that is simultaneously emotional and intellectual). There is there a strong potential for mobilization. These groups publish, online and in paper form, many small journals of a fairly high level. In this way they publish documents which cannot be distributed by the privatized and commercialized mainstream media; they are frequently written by academics or other specialists. We can also observe an interesting linguistic phenomenon: whereas the nationalist policies of the ruling classes are seeking to break up the surface of the former “Serbo-Croatian” language, the practical effects of these attempts are the opposite of their intentions, because they do not prevent people from understanding each other , but on the contrary enrich the stock of vocabulary and the syntactic combinations of a language which now, while no longer claiming to be a “national language”, is nevertheless still useful - or perhaps, even more useful - for the peoples of ex-Yugoslavia to start to understand each other.

Lucien Perpette: Differences emerged in the small commission charged with writing the final declaration. Can you comment on the evolution of the ideas within the commission?

Rastko Mocnik: It was an extremely instructive episode. A written discourse, being more formalized and decontextualised than oral communication, is consequently more inclined to stereotypes and ideological “presuppositions”. Consequently, the first version of the final declaration which the commission had proposed was crawling with liberal stereotypes, with expressions of the “legitimate language” of the periphery of South-eastern Europe. It provoked a sharp debate which sometimes became harder. The commission withdrew to propose a new version. In so far as I could follow the approach that was taken, it seemed to me that its members made, in a few minutes, progress for which they would have required several years if they had been isolated.

Lucien Perpette: DOSTA is fundamentally antinationalist. Does this factor enable it to win over Bosnian society (in the sense of all its citizens, whatever their “nationality”, religion, etc.) and how can DOSTA contribute to that? Do you think that it would be necessary to continue to organize Forums of Resistances, where should they be held and who might participate in them?

Rastko Mocnik: DOSTA is a great beginning. It is the product of the self-organization of a growing number of young people, a remarkable step forward even if we did not take account of the extremely unfavourable conditions which determine any political activity in Bosnia-Herzegovina. What will become of it in the future remains to be seen: it is to be hoped that the movement has already sufficiently transformed the political scene to open up space for left initiatives. What is certain however, is that neither DOSTA nor any other movement in ex- Yugoslavia or in the Balkans can do anything at all important within the limits of the national states, nor by its own forces alone. The very weakness of these new juridical-political constructions is a chance for broader, regional movements which could put on the agenda real problems which concern the peoples of the Balkans: the neo-colonial policies of the EU, predatory local coalitions and their complicity with transnational capital, the increasing exploitation of the masses and the very question of the legitimacy of the restoration of capitalism in the post-socialist world.

That is why it is necessary to maintain and strengthen contacts between the movements of resistance, to start to synchronize activities, even to start to form a united front. From this point of view, of course, it would be necessary to involve the movements of the entire post-socialist sphere - although, in fact, this criterion is becoming increasingly inoperative: we should rather speak about the new European periphery. The socialist past then acquires a new value: as the historical experience of the peripheral Welfare State, with its specific political dynamics, and also with conquests that should not be forgotten.

Lucien Perpette: How do we move from democratic, citizens' demands to social demands which call into question the neo-liberal capitalist logic?

Rastko Mocnik: In Yugoslavia, we could observe, in a relatively short period of time, the perilous "development" which transformed the Yugoslav people (which was politically constituted in the antifascist struggle and the socialist revolution) first of all into nations (sanctioned as the body of citizens of the Federal Republics by the Constitution of 1974) and finally into identity-defined ethnic communities, the social support of the new states or, rather, of the present juridical-political constructions. This development was propelled by class struggles which up until now have not really been analyzed, but whose result was the transformation of the dominant groups of the socialist system into a new bourgeoisie with its different fractions - economic (the new owners of the means of production), political and cultural (the old bureaucracy of the cultural apparatuses, generator of nationalist ideology). The common platform of these three fractions of the new ruling class was the ideology of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, with its traditional components (human rights, the rule of law, the hegemony of juridical ideology, etc). This ideology has served to legitimate privatizations and denationalizations - thus the expropriation from the people of the wealth which they created under socialism. Thus democratic bourgeois ideology democratic has discredited itself – which is, besides, a dangerous circumstance in these times of growing poverty and sharpening social tensions. The pseudo-democratic and "national" bourgeois ideology did enormous damage during the post Yugoslav wars. Most of the post-Yugoslav politico-juridical constructions were constituted by ethnic cleansing: starting with Slovenia where the expulsion of the "non-indigenous" was done in an administrative way, with the computer, not with the rifle as elsewhere [4]. The bourgeois "democratic" and citizens' ideology does not mean very much in these conditions. Juridical-political constructions which are legitimated by nationalism and liberal "democracy" began by expropriating their populations of the wealth which they had produced in the past [5]; they continue to play the role of facilitators of the exploitation of their peoples and territories by transnational capital. Consequently, any political movement defending the interests of the working classes must start by questioning both liberal "democracy" and nationalist pretentions.

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Resolution of the Forum of Resistances of Sarajevo

The organizations and participants in the Forum of Resistances which was held in Sarajevo on 12 and 13 September, 2009 adopted the following resolution:

1. It is a fact that the world is today at a turning point, due to the failure of the neoliberal economic, political, social and cultural system. This failure postulates new solutions which would make it possible to overcome and solve the problems resulting from the crisis of the modern world.

2. This global crisis manifests itself particularly at the regional and local level; it is very obvious in the Balkans, in other words in South-Eastern Europe. The failure of the neoliberal model has further worsened the situation in these societies and in their leading political and economic circles.

3. Under cover of the fight for the self-determination of populations at the national, ethnic, religious and social level, the sole objective of the oligarchic cliques and elites is to maintain themselves in power indefinitely. They are up to their necks in the magma of corruption, they are incompetent, they have no perspectives and they bask in self-satisfaction.

4. The oligarchic cliques and elites exploit the national and religious sentiments of ordinary citizens in order to maintain themselves in power and to continue to govern following anti-progressive and anti-humanist models.

5. Over the last two decades these oligarchic cliques have demonstrated that they were represented in power by extremely mediocre individuals (the "mediocracy"). It is obvious that these mediocratic elites maintain themselves in power thanks to the interventions and the support of elements foreign to the Balkans. It is a question of the interests of multinational institutions, companies and banks and of the stabilization forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

6. The result of all the factors mentioned above has led South-Eastern Europe into a dead end. The working class has seen all its rights taken away from it and is becoming dependent on the "god" of the neo-liberal market. A great many critical thinkers have been manipulated by the ruling class. Intellectual activity is no longer valued and is almost reduced to a form of bureaucracy or to sterile thinking. Today scientific and educational work has completely regressed.

7. The present crisis of capitalism is similar to the crisis of 1929 and is a

very fertile ground for the propagation of chauvinist, nationalist, fascist and fundamentalist movements.

8. As a regroupment of different organizations and individuals, the Forum of Resistances is ready to unite all the "genuine", uncompromised, progressive, democratic and left movements into a united front. The formation of a Forum of Resistances is the first step towards the fusion of all these forces.

9. The Forum of Resistances proposes the formation of a united front with the organized movements, with the trade unions, but is opposed to any form of non-respect of the interests of the working class. The Forum of Resistances commits itself to fighting for the dignity of the living conditions of the workers.

10. The Forum of Resistances also intends to orient its activities in defence of ecological interests.

11. It is important to enrich and develop new forms of participatory democracy, in particular in the spheres of the economy, as in the other fields of social life, through which the workers and citizens can limit the powers of the bourgeoisie and the political elites. The Forum of Resistances will work for the development of the class struggle, activism and solidarity within the working class. Particular attention must be paid to avoiding all misuse of participatory democracy against the interests of the working class.

12. The Forum of Resistances establishes the "Coordinating Committee for South-Eastern Europe" (CCSEE).

13. 13. The Coordinating Committee for South-Eastern Europe is open to collaboration with left, progressive and democratic organizations in the countries of South-Eastern Europe. It will represent the principal network and be the "mother" organization for the above-mentioned organizations and their activities.

14. The Forum of Resistances takes note of the fact that in the territories of ex-Yugoslavia there does not exist any left party which defends the interests of the working class.

Footnotes

[1] see Lucien Perpette, "On the way back in Croatia and Slovenia", *International Viewpoint* 413, June 2009

[2] see Lucien Perpette, Chris Den Hond, "Impressive mobilisation at the edge of capitalist Europe", *International Viewpoint* 396, January 2008

[3] For reference, here are the figures for the rates of unemployment in the post-Yugoslav Republics in 2009: Kosovo 45 per cent (the highest rate of unemployment in Europe); Macedonia 31.9 per cent; Bosnia-Herzegovina 24.1 per cent (official figure; estimates give a figure of 40.4 per cent); Serbia 18.8 per cent; Croatia 14.2 per cent; Montenegro 10.48 per cent; Slovenia 8.4 per cent.

[4] At the end of February 1992, the Slovenian authorities withdrew, without warning the people concerned, the right of residence of more than 25,000 citizens of the other Republics of the former Yugoslav federation. These people found themselves, overnight and without being aware of it, in the situation of being "undocumented". In October 2009, the consequences of this act, which has twice been declared illegal and anti-constitutional by the Constitutional Court, have still not been eliminated

[5] See Catherine Samary, *Yougoslavie: de la décomposition aux enjeux européens*, Editions du Cygne, Paris 2008.

Link up the struggle against HIV globally

1 December 2009, by Fourth International

Lesbian/gay activists have sometimes dropped other lesbian/gay political work in face of the urgency of the epidemic or succumbed to pressures towards institutionalization or professionalization. But also the necessary responses to HIV in many countries have allowed a new social and political space, which has been expressed in particular by a challenge to the power of the medical establishment, a questioning of the way the authorities fulfil their responsibilities with regard to public health and the demand that people with AIDS themselves exercise control over public health measures. This also makes possible increased resources for the development of gay organizations and more open public discussion of sexuality and sexual practices. In many countries a new generation of lesbian/gay activists, both in terms of their age and their process of radicalization, have taken leadership in AIDS advocacy, education and service organizations while gay communities have borne heavy loads of care-giving and grieving. The experience of gay activism has often been channelled into the leadership of the peer organizations of people with HIV, and lesbian and gay organizations have found themselves in activist alliances with drug injectors and people who make their living in the sex trade.

AIDS is now the fourth leading cause of death in the world; in Africa it is the leading cause of death. In the African and Asian countries where the AIDS epidemic is the most intense, unprotected heterosexual sex, not unprotected sex between men, is responsible for the greatest majority of infections. Yet in Southern and Western Africa, in Latin America and

in Southern Asia, gay communities are experiencing very high levels of infection, illness and mortality.

The global fight against HIV requires the linkage of several dynamics of struggle:

– against stigma, discrimination and isolation

– against heterosexism and sexism

– against racism and imperialism

– for democratic rights and the right of oppressed groups to organize autonomously

– against censorship and religious control of education, welfare and health services

– for the defeat of the 'war on drugs'

– for free and effective health care

– against the super-profits of the international pharmaceutical companies.

In particular we stand in solidarity with those who are battling against drug companies who are barring access to drugs in the Third World at more affordable prices. The success of the campaign against the pharmaceutical companies in South Africa has many important implications. The battle brought together AIDS activists, trade unionists and anti-globalization activists in a broad and successful alliance. Most of those involved , notably COSATU and the Treatment Action Campaign, have subsequently recognized that the battle now needs to be joined on two new fronts: (1) to demand that the South African government - and also the employers - provide drugs; and (2) to build opposition to the US government's actions in taking Brazil to the WTO over the question of generics.

All this has meant that the fight against HIV has become integrated in the minds of millions with the fight against globalization.

In addition to the intrinsic, human importance and urgency of the struggle against AIDS, doing AIDS work among men who have sex with men can be a useful way to begin work for lesbian/gay liberation in countries that do not yet have lesbian/gay organizations.

This is an except from the resolution on lesbian and gay liberation adopted by the most recent Fourth International world congress, in 2003. It is online at http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article177.