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Food Sovereignty: something's moving in Europe

20 February 2010, by **Esther Vivas**

Responses have varied by country according to the character of local organizations, but all are creating and strengthening alliances between the different social sectors that are negatively affected by the agrifood policies of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Together, they are creating a host of alternative practices and policies for sustainable production, distribution, and consumption.

For example, in France solidarity networks are being forged between producers and consumers through Associations for the Maintenance of Smallholder Agriculture (AMAPs). Like Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), the AMAPs establish solidarity contracts between groups of consumers and local agroecological farmers. The group pays in advance for produce that the farmer provides weekly. The first AMAP was created in 2001 between a group of consumers in Aubagne and a farm in the Olivades region of Provence. Today, there are 750 AMAPs serving 30,000 families throughout France.

These experiences in Europe date back to the 1960s, when Germany, Austria and Switzerland began to develop similar initiatives in response to growing agricultural industrialization. In Geneva, Les Jardins de Cocagne, a cooperative of

producers and consumers of organic vegetables, now serves some 400 homes. Å

In Britain, CSAs or “vegetable box schemes” began in the 1990s. At the beginning of 2007, there were some 600 CSA initiatives, up 53% from 2006. There are an equal number of farmers’ markets in the country (Soil Association 2005). In Belgium, where these alternatives have appeared more recently, some 200 homes periodically receive fresh fruit and vegetables through the solidarity purchasing groups called GASAP (Groupes d’Achat Solidaires de l’Agriculture Paysanne).

In Spain, an AMAP-style initiative of agroecological cooperatives called Bajo el Asfalto Esta la Huerta (“Under the Asphalt lies the Garden”) operates in Madrid and environs. Ecoconsum Coordination reports more than 70 similar cooperatives in Catalonia. Similar initiatives have existed in Andalucía since the 1990s.

All these experiences show it is possible to produce, distribute and consume food based on ecological practices and social justice principles, maintaining a direct relationship between farmer and consumer. Similar initiatives rapidly spreading across Europe in the last few years include farmers’ markets, direct

distribution, participatory certification models, and urban gardens.

These food networks are joining forces to politically roll back the EU’s neoliberal policies. In France, Minga, a grouping of 800 associations working on fair local and international trade, now coordinates with the Confédération Paysanne (farmers’ union), and other consumers, farmer, and agroecological organizations.

In Spain, the Plataforma Rural, a diverse, broad-based coalition that brings together farmers, consumers, environmental groups and NGOs, works to create stronger linkages between the rural and urban, to improve rural life, and to promote local, socially responsible, and ecological agriculture. The Plataforma Rural carries out unified campaigns against GMOs, large supermarket chains, the CAP and agrofuels, as well as campaigning in favor of food sovereignty, responsible tourism, and quality public services in rural areas.

In Europe, one of the principle reference networks is the VÃa Campesina Coordinator which brings together organizations and farmers’ unions from Denmark, Switzerland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Greece, Malta, and Turkey. Its objective is to fight the current agriculture policies promoted by the

EU within the framework of the CAP, to move toward a diverse, land-based, smallholder agriculture and a more vibrant rural world. The European Coordinator of La VÃa Campesina works with other social movements within the European Social Forum, and with other unified campaigns against the CAP, and GMOs.

One important challenge in Europe is to increase the connections and coordination between the distinct networks that are part of the alternative globalization movement

("Another World is Possible") and those groups working for food sovereignty. The International Food Sovereignty Forum, celebrated in Mali in 2007, in which networks of women, peasants, fishermen, consumers, and pastoralist organizations all participated, is a good example. Countries including Hungary and Spain are moving in this direction, by holding national forums.

Activists in Europe are beginning to coordinate action strategies in favor of food sovereignty at the local, national,

and continental levels. As these networks bring in new players, they gather strength. The task is not easy, but food sovereignty movements and anti-globalization movements are steadily building a common front behind a call popularized by La VÃa Campesina: "Globalize struggle, globalize hope."

*This article is an abridged version of the article "SoberanÃa alimentaria: algo se mueve en Europa " published in Spanish in the magazine **El Viejo Topo**, n. 255.*

Rising extremism, war on terrorism and women's lives in Pakistan

16 February 2010, by **Bushra Khaliq**

Many religious political parties and sectarian groups were pampered and encouraged to grow by military regimes. Millions of petro dollars were poured in by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to strengthen these parties and groups under direct state patronage. The Islamist forces had a quiet walk over democratic and progressive forces, to consolidate their socio-political spaces in the country. Religious schools (madrassas) were set up to groom and recruit jihadis. These madrassas emerged like mushrooms across Pakistan particularly in tribal areas, which served as real breeding grounds for religious fundamentalism.

The Constitution of country was injected with pro-Islamic clauses, imposing restrictions on women rights, curtailing their mobility to participate in social life. Burka culture was promoted and women were pushed inside the four walls of the house. Segregation on basis of gender was introduced at all levels in the name of Islam. Military dictator Gen.Zia-ul-Haq enacted discriminatory laws against women to please religious forces. Parallel Islamic courts were established by Saudizing the constitution. Under Evidence Act women's' evidence was declared half

in comparison to a man. Burden of proof of rape was shifted on woman, while in case of unwanted pregnancy as result of rape, victim was used to subject to punishment by lashes, prison and stoning to death. Women movements and progressive forces though in their limited capacity reacted to these barbaric state measures but could not stop the ugly onslaught of extremist forces.

War on Terrorism

After 9/11 attacks and subsequent US war on terrorism, madrassas continued to grow and so were the influence of extremist forces. Though madrassas are only about 7 per cent of primary schools in Pakistan, their influence is amplified by the inadequacy of public education and the innate religiosity of the majority of the population. Right now there are more than 15,000 registered religious seminaries in the country catering over 1.5 million students and more than 55,000 teachers. This lot of religious proponents has spread in every nook and corner of the country, clamoring for Jihad against

everything which, to them, is non-Islamic.

This unchecked growth of religious fundamentalism was not only result of the US war on terrorism or that of Pakistani intelligence agencies policies, but it was also the complete failure of civilian and military governments as well to solve any of the basic problems of the working class in Pakistan. Successive regimes remained unsuccessful to break the socio-politico-economic grip of feudalism and absolute exploitive nature of Pakistani capitalists.

The on-going US "war on terror" has proved counter productive and further fueling religious fundamentalism in Pakistan. The heavy price of war against Taliban is being paid by civilian population. Thousands of innocent people particularly women and children have been killed in Drone attacks and operations by Pakistani army. About 2 million people had to flee from conflict zones of Swat valley in 2009. Women were the worst sufferers among internally displaced people (IDPs). By many in Pakistan it is seen as a war on Muslims, rather a war on terrorists. It is really difficult situation for left and progressive

forces to convince the people that war on terrorism has purely long-term capitalistic agenda.

Thus the war on terrorism not only helped grow further extremism but also created non-conducive atmosphere for the progressive and women rights forces to work in. The agenda of women rights is relegated to large extent. Any body talks about women rights is branded as anti-Islamic and pro-west. The imperialist occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan provided the religious fanatics a political justification to promote their agenda of further religiosity of state and society.

Women as punching bag for extremists

The rapid rise of religious extremism has made the lives of women in Pakistan more miserable and oppressed. The few freedoms and democratic rights earlier available to women are being crushed by the extremist groups. They banned Girls' education declaring it as "western conspiracy". More than 300 girls' schools were burnt, destroyed or closed down by local Taliban in Swat. Women have also been banned from markets and shops. A strict dress code was imposed. In North West Frontier province of Pakistan, a woman must be fully covered, from head to toe. Even girls of eight-nine years have to follow the dress code. Women are not allowed to take part in the political activities and are barred from voting in elections. Women have become an invisible community in the areas controlled by the fundamentalist religious groups. Even after flashing them out of these areas by military, situation for women remains same.

Women have become a punching bag for local militant groups, attempting to impose their own brand of Islam on them. They want to establish Taliban style government in Pakistan. They have been attacking and bombing the music shops and girls' schools, scaring women to remain in their homes. They banned female workers in the public and private sectors.

Women in Pakistan are already deprived of their basic democratic, political and economic rights. In many parts of the country, they have to confront centuries-old traditions and customs. Honor killing, social and economic discrimination, repression, domestic violence, discriminatory laws and sexual harassment are common issues being faced by women.

Musharraf regime made tall claims about legislation to protect women rights. The "Women's Protection Bill" in reality helped little to improve conditions for working class and poor women. The new PPP government also made similar statements to improve women rights conditions but women have little hope with regard to materialization of these statements. Though it has recently introduced legislation against sexual harassment at work place, obviously a welcome step, but what needed is a constitutional package covering socio-economic and political rights of women, in order to mainstream them.

Extremism & Feudalism one against women

In patriarchal Pakistani society, women are mere a symbol of family honor and dignity. Female members of the family are considered as private property. Under the prevailing feudal culture women are confined to home to "save male honor and dignity". It is strongly believed that if women are allowed out of the home to receive education, to do shopping or a job, the society will become "immoral and vulgar". Even a common Muslim male, who does claim not to be a fundamentalist believe that outspoken and rights-demanding women are responsible for promoting immorality and vulgarity in society.

The extremists are bent upon imposing their code of ethics on women in the name of Islamic teachings. While feudalism implements its code of morality in the name of "tradition and custom". Both are one to crush women rights and unfortunately they are in abundance in Pakistan. About 70 percent

population of Pakistan lives in rural areas, where poor masses, particularly women have no control over lives. They do not have right to choice marriage. Girl education is strongly discouraged and women are told to tolerate oppressive norms in the name of morality. The nefarious nexus of feudalism and religious militancy is virtually driving their lives. Their influence is no more confined to the most backward areas of the country. It also gaining ground in the big cities and towns as well.

Though state introduced some laws to stop the practice of inhuman traditions and customs, but these legislations failed to stop the practice of anti-women traditions, particularly in rural areas. For instance a piece of legislation was introduced in 2005 which declared honor killing a heinous crime and the death penalty was imposed as punishment under this law. But this strict law and capital punishment failed to reduce the number of honor killings. There were more than 800 such cases reported in 2007. The number of unreported cases was many times higher. While customs such as "swara" and "vani" are banned by law, they continue to take place. The "swara" and "vani" are practiced in some parts of southern Punjab and NWFP.

These customs allow young girls to be offered to settle the dispute between rival families. For example, if a person is accused of murder, wants to settle a dispute with deceased family, they can offer their daughter or sister to "absolve" themselves of the crime. Young girls, two or three years old are simply passed to the rival family. This custom is used to settle all sorts of disputes, without involving the country's law or police. Other traditions include child marriage, exchanged marriage, Forced marriage and marriages to the Holy Quran also continue, despite the existence of the laws and widespread social consensus against them.

The marriage to the Holy Quran is a custom that exists among the feudal families of Sindh. Under this custom, the male members of the family refuse to allow the female members to marry and declare that they have been married to the Quran. The main

reason behind this custom is to safeguard part of the land which, otherwise, will go away with marriage of daughter or sister. In the presence of the laws, these barbaric and inhuman traditions and customs are still flourishing. The rising wave of fundamentalism, coupled with results of war on terrorism are making the lives of women more miserable,

curbing their fundamental and universal rights.

What is really needed is a united class-based struggle against the rotten system of capitalism, which is directly encouraging religious extremism and feudalism to continue. Capitalism, coopting with feudalism and extremism can not create the

conditions in which women can enjoy full rights, freedom and equality. The need for a democratic socialism, providing guarantees of equal rights and opportunities to women is the need of the hour. Women in Pakistan can only enjoy full liberty and freedom in a true socialist society, free from all exploitation, repression and discrimination.

Ilham Moussaid : statement by the National Executive Committee of the NPA

15 February 2010

The NPA is confronted with a political-media campaign centred on one of its 2000 candidates in the regional elections, Ilham Moussaid, who wears a headscarf and is in fourth position on the NPA - Alternatifs list in the Vaucluse department of the Provence-Cote d'Azur (PACA) region, where Jacques Haüyé heads the departmental list.

Contrary to what some people have been making out, it is in no way a question of a Â« political and media coup Â» orchestrated by the leadership of the NPA, but of a decision that was taken in Vaucluse. A minority of the members of the NPA in this department were opposed to it. The decision taken by the Vaucluse comrades cannot be taken to be the position of the NPA as a whole, since it had not been discussed in advance at any level of the party.

2) Our comrade Ilham Moussaid is a member of the NPA, and as such, can put herself forward as a candidate in the same way as the other members of our party.

A majority of comrades in Vaucluse decided to accept her as a candidate. Whatever one may think of this decision, it was taken in conformity with the statutes of the party. We assure the NPA-Alternatifs list and all of the candidates of our solidarity at this difficult moment.

3) Ilham wears a headscarf (and not a burqa, as some people have said and written). She sees no contradiction between this and the founding principles of the NPA, of which the feminist and secular dimension constitutes one of the keystones, and affirms her attachment to these values and to all of the founding principles of the party.

The headscarf is not only a visible religious symbol, but also an instrument of subjection of women, used in various forms and at various times by the three monotheistic religions, even though Ilham does not experience it as such, and is not the only woman in our society to feel that way.

4) The announcement of the candidacy of Ilham Moussaid has provoked many reactions. All of them are not of the same kind. The criticisms and disagreements expressed within the NPA and by movements or by activists of the social movement and the feminist movement represent arguments which enrich the discussion, and the debate will continue.

On the other hand, we denounce the hate-ridden and hypocritical flood coming from the far Right, the UMP, the Socialist Party, and indeed the Left Party and the Communist Party. We don't hear so much from them

when the President of the Republic falls into the arms of the Pope or crosses himself in public on an official visit, or when Boutin brandishes the Bible in the National Assembly. The institutional parties spend millions on financing private high schools, in particular Catholic ones. As for the Communist Party, it really ought to be more careful, since, alongside the SP, it accepted on its lists during the local election campaign a candidate wearing a headscarf, who continues to wear it in the municipal council of Echirolles of which she is a member.

5) Within the NPA, the EC confirms that the debate on Â« religion and emancipations Â», planned before this political-media campaign, will take place. The internal debate that we are having is a public debate. The decision taken in Vaucluse does not create any Â« jurisprudence Â» on the question. The congress of the NPA is sovereign.

6) Now it is time to first of all and above all conduct the campaign around the lists that we are presenting or supporting, a campaign to get across what is really different about us, that we are a Left that is anticapitalist, antiracist, ecologist, internationalist and feminist, a Left which has always been in solidarity with women who resist those who want to force them to wear the veil.

Adopted unanimously by those

Beyond the World Social Forum ... the Fifth International

14 February 2010, by **Éric Toussaint**

Interview

Brasil de Fato - How do you assess the two different viewpoints presented at the World Social Forum opening debate [1], that is, the one which says the Forum should be “used” as a political platform with a greater capacity for action and political influence, and the other which says the event should keep to its original form and purpose as a place to exchange ideas?

Eric Toussaint - We need an international instrument to determine priorities in terms of demands and objectives, to provide a shared calendar for actions, and to be part of a common strategy. If the Forum cannot accommodate this, we must build another instrument, which doesn't mean leaving or scrapping the Forum. I think the Forum has its place. But since there is a sector of the WSF that does not want the Forum to become an instrument for mobilization, it would be better to build another one together with organizations and individuals who are convinced that this is what we need. This would not prevent us continuing to play an active part in the Forum. I say this to prevent a split or an endless debate which will bog us down rather than help us. It is clear that this sector prefers to keep the World Social Forum as a place for discussion and debate, and doesn't want to see it become an instrument for action.

This is quite a strong sector, isn't it?

Yes, it is. You might say it's part of the historic core that participated in the

creation of the Forum. But it doesn't represent all of it, since the MST [2] and personalities like Chico Whitaker and Oded Grajew are opposed to the Forum becoming an instrument of struggle. I would add that it worries me to arrive in Porto Alegre and see that the seminar “Ten years later” is sponsored by Petrobras [3], Caixa, Banco do Brasil, Itaipu Binacional, with several governments in attendance. This really worries me. I would much rather have seen a Forum with less financial means but more militant in nature. We can rely on the help of voluntary activists, stay with them in town, organize accommodation in sports complexes, schools, etc.

What is this new instrument you are referring to?

A proposal was made which, in point of fact, has had relatively little repercussion. I'm talking about Hugo Chávez' call at the end of November 2009 for the creation of a Fifth International composed of social movements and left-wing parties [4]. I think it's very interesting in principle. There could be a new perspective if there were reflection and dialogue between parties and social movements: a Fifth International as an instrument of convergence for action and for the creation of an alternative model [5].

But in my opinion it would not be an organization like the previous Internationals were - or still are, since the Fourth International still exists - that is to say, party organizations with a fairly high level of centralization. In my view the Fifth International should not be highly centralized and it should not require the self-dissolution of

international networks or of an organization like the Fourth International. They could join the Fifth International and still keep their own specifics, but their membership would demonstrate that all the networks or major movements are determined to go further than the present ad hoc coalitions on climate or social justice, food sovereignty, the debt, etc.

We have common causes among many networks and that's a positive thing. But if we could successfully form a permanent front, it would be better still. The term “front” is a key word in defining the Fifth International. For me, the Fifth International would be, in the present situation, a permanent front of parties, social movements and international networks. The term “front” clearly implies that each would keep its identity but would give priority to what unites us in order to achieve objectives and take the struggle forward. Recent months have once again shown the need to increase our capacity to mobilize, because international mobilization against the coup d'état in Honduras was totally inadequate.

This is a matter of serious concern, because with the United States supporting the coup by validating the elections that followed [6] But now you say there was no satisfactory response to what happened in Honduras and Haiti. What happened? What went wrong?

Yes, you are quite right to point out the gap between the big success in Belém and what has happened since. The record for 2009 is worrying. There were no big social mobilizations in the major industrial economies at the epicentre of the crisis. Except in

France and Germany where there were fairly strong demonstrations, especially in France where more than two million and a half demonstrators took to the streets in two protests in the first half of 2009 [7]. In the United States there were a few strikes but they were limited. However, the mass sectors – those who are suffering the most from the crisis – have a lot of trouble getting mobilized. It's as if people are stunned, "groggy". Unemployment has increased sharply in the Northern hemisphere. In Spain, it has grown from 10% to 20% of the economically active population: something we haven't seen for 30 years.

In the countries of the South, governments like Lula's give the impression that a country like Brazil or certain other countries won't be affected by the crisis in the North because they have taken financial and economic measures to withstand it. However in the South too, the level of mobilization against the international crisis is low. But let me draw a historical comparison. After the 1929 crash on Wall Street, the big radical social struggles only started to take shape in 1933, 1934 and 1935. So, historically speaking, we see that mass reactions are not immediate. If the crisis continues, and if its effects continue to be very serious, people will finally start to mobilize en masse.

But beyond this more historical analysis, do you believe that the Left was unable to prepare an appropriate response?

This is yet another point. Let us take an example. We have seen that Brazilian youth in the state of Pará were keenly interested, they were massively present at Belém's Social Forum in January 2009. They participated in debates about radical alternatives. But as the World Social Forum is not a tool for mobilization, it stopped there. Moreover, TU top managements are highly bureaucratized. Their favourite policy consists in hoping that the government's decision will prevent a clash. They coach and support government policies that cushion the impact of the crisis for the most deprived. There is an absence of determination among TU leaders, left-

wing or 'social-democratic' parties, which means that governments of countries in the North go on implementing social-liberal or neo-liberal solutions. They do not even try to implement neo-Keynesian policy. Roosevelt's 1933 New Deal, compared with the policies implemented by Obama or by governments such as Zapatero's or Gordon Brown's, stands out as definitely left-wing. It is obvious therefore that the leaderships of traditional left-wing parties and of the Trade unions bear a heavy responsibility, combined with the WSF's inability to cope with the crisis. This is why, and I go back to what I said in the first part of this interview, we badly need a new instrument.

Do you think that this crisis has opened a new era of multipolarity?

It is clear that U.S. economic domination is not what it used to be twenty years ago. The U.S. lost its economic prominence but it is still the only country that combines industrial domination (albeit weakened), an international currency (although it is weakened, the dollar is still the main international currency) and a permanent military presence in over one hundred countries. It possesses invasion capacity. Five months ago I published an article in which I interpreted the coup in Honduras and the seven military bases in Columbia as evidence of U.S. aggressiveness towards Latin America. [8] Journalists said I was exaggerating, that the U.S. was unable to intervene in Latin America, that it no longer had the necessary military capacity with its military involvement in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. Yet it sent 15,000 soldiers to Haiti. Consequently, yes, it is still a power that can send troops, equipment and military support to various parts of the world. The case of Haiti is emblematic in that it demonstrates the capacity of the U.S. to respond promptly. U.S. power still prevails in terms of geostrategy. True, new powers are emerging such as China, Russia, India and Brazil, which are regional powers. There is also the EU.

The notion which to me best defines Brazil's international situation is 'peripheric imperialism.' Why "imperialism"? Because Brazil looks

on neighbouring countries just as a traditional imperialist country looks on countries in which it invests. Brazil looks on its neighbours as places where Brazilian transnational companies can invest, and the foreign policy of the Brazilian government supports these companies' expanding policies: Petrobras, Vale do Rio Doce, Odebrecht, etc., are now present in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Chile, Argentina, and even in Africa, where they invest large amounts. Yet there is a multipolar feature in the sense that there is no super-imperialism. On the other hand the so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) do not offer a progressive alternative to the old imperialisms (U.S., EU, Japan). They merely want to negotiate with these old imperialisms for a place in the international division of power, labour, global economy and access to natural resources. So I cannot see current power playing a progressive part which we could support.

The alternative we do find is an initiative such as ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, proposed by Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez), the components of which are not imperialist countries, fortunately. Regional alternatives such as ALBA are very important. My concern in this respect is that we ought to hasten the process and get beyond speeches through a better integration of the various countries. But we should highlight the positive points: at the ALBA meeting on 25 January 2010, it was decided to cancel Haiti's debt to member countries, thus teaching a lesson to the world powers that were meeting in Montreal on the same day and discussing debt relief conditioned to structural adjustment measures.

In this context, how do you assess the progress of initiatives such as the Bank of the South? Do you think this progress has reached a satisfactory stage?

In 2007, at the request of Rafael Correa and his minister for Economy and Finances, I participated in the drafting of Ecuador's position with regard to the Bank of the South. Ecuador stands for a project in which the Bank of the South invests in public projects, or projects by native

traditional communities. For instance, the regional financing of a food sovereignty policy, making the needed land reforms and urban reforms possible, giving priority to the railway over road transport. This is one possible option for the Bank of the South. Brazil and Argentina have a different project. It consists of financing projects in poorer countries that are part of the initiative (Bolivia, Paraguay, Ecuador), infrastructure works projects in the context of IIRSA (Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America), by means of contracts with Brazilian and Argentinian companies, that is, again, using public money for private contractors, launching large-scale projects without any respect for the environment or concern for the situation of working people. This is the choice made by Brazil and Argentina, which currently prevails in negotiations for the Bank of the South.

Left-wing governments must react and choose a genuine integration of people, not an integration that favours TNCs, whether from the North or from the South. An integration that does not take the EU as a model. Europe integration is ruled by the logic of private capital accumulation - a liberal or neo-liberal logic. Considering the governments that have been put in power in some countries, considering the strength of social movements and the tradition of radical struggles, Latin America is the place in the world where an alternative model can most easily be implemented.

You often say that there are two Lefts: the ecosocialist left and the social-liberal left. How can you explain that although the neo-liberal model was shown to be a failure by the crisis, President Lula - whom you define as a social-liberal - should be one of the leaders whose power seems to be greater than before?

What defines the fate of the country are the social movements, the experiences that masses accumulate through their mobilization. And we can see that countries with the politically most advanced governments are those where social movements have been most radical. This level of social mobilization exerts a pressure

on governments to take the political and social measures that are most consistent with left-wing positions. In Brazil, unfortunately, this kind of mobilization has been wanting for the last five or six years. And the government started in a favourable international economic context. Between 2004 and 2008 the country's economy benefited from a rise in the international prices of commodities, a growth related to the speculative bubble in the North, which generated more exports. And up to now, as noted earlier, the international crisis has not hit Brazil. So the government can claim that the favourable economic situation is the outcome of its policy, which is not strictly the case.

But how come it was not hit by the crisis?

Because the fall in commodity prices in the second half of 2008 was followed by a new rise in 2009. Export revenues have been maintained. Also, the "Bolsa Familia" programme has provided the lower classes with a level of consumption that sustains the domestic market. [9]

The question that can be asked is: what is going to happen in the coming years? What is going to happen to growth in China? We know it cannot go on. We know that several speculative bubbles are developing in China - a real estate bubble, a stockmarket bubble, and an exponential growth of debts. Growth in China is sustained thanks to a substantial increase in public expenditure in order to compensate for the loss of foreign markets as a consequence of the crisis in the USA, Europe and Japan. The growth rate is artificially maintained thanks to these bubbles. In the current global situation China is driving what is left of economic growth. Without China we would go through a period of sheer global recession. The situation in Brazil is linked to China's through the export of ore, etc. But also because the situation in China maintains the global economy at a certain level of growth. If it fails, which to me is not a certainty but a possibility, it will affect Brazil's economy. Brazil will also suffer from the consequences of other international financial explosions that will occur in the coming years.

Commodity prices are higher than is warranted by the global economy. There are speculative investments in food commodity exports such as soybeans. Once the speculative bubble bursts, commodity prices will fall, and this will affect Brazil. This is why it is wrong to claim that Brazil has some sort of panzer economy. It depends on an international evolution over which Brazil has no control whatsoever. What Brazil can do to remedy this is to increase its domestic market, introduce protectionist measures, control capital flows more tightly, implement a distributive economic model, get rid of monopolies and lobbies, implement radical land and urban reforms. It could then become a model in the context of regional integration with a genuinely left-wing orientation. But this would require another government option.

How do you assess the response to the crisis that can be observed with more progressive governments, such as those of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador?

There has been a positive aspect, not only in these three governments but also to some extent in the way Lula, Cristina Fernández (president of Argentina) and Michelle Bachelet (former president of Chile) managed the crisis. In spite of the IMF's recommendations to reduce public expenditure, governments applied heterodox policies, even Alan García's right-wing government in Peru. This made it possible for these governments to maintain a certain level of economic growth. In this respect the responses of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela were not very different: they maintained significant public expenditure in order to sustain consumption and economic activity. Of the three, the one that slightly radicalized its economic policy was Hugo Chávez', with more nationalizations. But quite frankly, the policies that Correa, Chávez and Evo Morales have used to counter the crisis do not greatly differ from those of other governments in the region. There is no radical difference in the economic sphere. I think that there are differences in terms of anti-imperialism, constitutional reforms, regaining control of natural resources. But it would be an over-simplification

to claim that there are huge differences among the economic developments in the region. Personally, I would have preferred to be able to say truthfully that the governments of Ecuador, Venezuela and Bol via are implementing a radically alternative model. But this is not yet the case. There are signs and perspectives which are quite interesting, but we mustn't confuse words and intentions with the facts of real life.

How do things stand in the debate on the public debt issue?

The issue of the debt has its ups and downs. It was a hot topic in the 1980s, it came back to the fore with Argentina's default at the end of 2001. [10] Now we are back to a situation of tension in this respect, but this is only the beginning. In 2007 Ecuador's government set up an audit committee in which I participated.

And on the basis of our conclusions, Correa's government decided to suspend payment of \$3.2 billion of debts in commercial bonds, sold on Wall Street and closing between 2012 and 2030. Correa suspended payment from November 2008 and stood firm against the creditors, bond holders. On 10 June 2009 he managed to have 91% of those bonds sold to Ecuador's government at a 65% discount. Which means that Ecuador will recover \$3.2 billion of bonds for a payment of \$1 billion. Ecuador saved \$2.2 billion, as well as the interests that remained. This shows that even a small country can stand up to bond holders and force them to make a sacrifice. Those who normally always came out winning had to accept the fact that they would no longer reap big profits with these bonds. The lesson is that if Ecuador could do it, countries like Brazil, Argentina and others could do it too. Argentina had suspended payment in 2001 but in 2005 it made the mistake of exchanging bonds

instead of buying them or repudiating them altogether. It exchanged them at a discount but still had to pay interest at a high rate. Argentine's debt today is the same as what it was in 2001. The issue of debt payment will be back on the international stage for two main reasons. First, the financial and economic crisis, which reduced exports from the South and the tax revenues they generate, makes it more difficult to pay back the public internal and external debt. Second, the cost of refinancing the debt has increased. Since bankers in the North are caught up in the crisis, they tend to be more demanding towards countries of the South that wish to borrow on an international level.

Igor Ojeda interviewed Eric Toussaint for the Brazilian weekly paper Brasil de Fato, February 2010.

Translated from the French by Judith Harris, Christine Pagnoulle.

Postal workers have to pay for privatization

13 February 2010, by Lot van Baaren, Paul Benschop

Twenty years after the privatization of PTT, now named TNT Post, the bosses are on a collision course with the employees and trade-unions. Either the employees accept a 17.5 percent cutback in wages or 11.000 people will be fired. The postal workers refuse to accept this and demand a 1.5 percent wage increase.

The Netherlands takes the lead in privatization. Dennis de Jong, a member of the European Parliament for the Socialist Party, doesn't hide his annoyance; "The European Union decided that of the first of January 2011 postal companies have to be privatized. The Netherlands are rushing ahead of European policy, its part of the vanguard in privatization."

In Belgium the pace is slower; "the postal business is not yet privatized, the state owns 51 percent of the

stocks and a British bank insurance group owns the rest. But the prospect of the arrival of new, private owned businesses in 2011 has lead to significant changes over the past few years", says Serge Alvarez-Fernandez from Brussels. He has been working for the postal company for over twenty years. The post market is not completely open in Belgium but private companies are allowed to deliver express mail and packages. The most important competitors in this new market are DHL, FedEx and the Dutch TNT.

The situation in Britain is comparable to that in Belgium. Pete lives in London and has worked for twenty years at the British Royal Mail; "Royal Mail is still state-owned but over the last few years liberalization is implemented bit by bit." Parts of the postal delivery are taken care of by

TNT and the German Deutsche Post. Peter; "neither of these companies has the infrastructure necessary to take care of door-to-door deliveries. They sort mailings of big companies - they have the actual delivery done by Royal Mail."

The French postal company is also still state-owned. Christophe from Paris has been working for sixteen years at the postal company. "If you judge them on basis of their discourse, all of the political parties, including the right-wing ones, are opposed to privatization. But the right-wing parties and the social-democratic Parti Socialiste have agreed that it's necessary to "modernize" the postal company."

The privatization of the postal company in the Netherlands had important repercussions on the wages

and working conditions. Rob van der Post is 54 years old and has been working for the PTT and TNT since he was seventeen years. "The liberalization of the postal market has opened the door for companies like Sandd and Selekt Mail. By allowing this, the wages and working conditions of the postal workers are endangered. The government can not force companies like these, we call them 'the cowboys of the postal market', to pay decent wages. In order to compete with them, TNT has started its own second-tier delivery, Network VSP. That is a fully owned subsidiary of TNT. The result of this is that TNT is destroying the old company. TNT itself is partly responsible for a damaged business and the decrease of mail that's delivered by TNT."

Shortly before Christmas, the postal companies Sandd and Selekt Mail successfully took the state to the court. These two competitors of TNT pay their employees not per hour, but pay piece wages. Frank van Heemskerk, Minister for Foreign Trade, tried to change this because in the current set-up, postal workers have very few rights. This is why Van Heemskerk obliged the postal companies to give ten percent of the postal workers fixed contracts before the first of April, 2010. At the end of 2012, this percentage had to increase to eighty percent. But because of the judge's ruling, the 'cowboys' can continue to pay their employees piece wages.

Laying off full timers

We can see a tendency in the Netherlands of TNT getting rid of full-timers and replacing them slowly with precarious workers like part-timers and temps. Often these are young people and women or pensioners looking for a way to augment their income. Because these workers don't rely primarily on their work at the post they are also less inclined to get organized or make offensive demands. By dividing the jobs and responsibilities TNT can pay part-timers less.

Rob van der Post: "TNT Post declared to the media that in six years time, it will not have any full-time employees left. Members of parliament now say the post market is damaged by a race to the bottom. But wasn't this the goal of liberalization all along? For employees of both TNT and the new companies, things have not improved. And the Dutch public notices a decrease in the quality of postal delivery service, sending a letter has not become faster or cheaper."

Not only is the composition of the workforce changing, the employees are more and more pressured and intimidated by their bosses. "The management is very quick to use disciplinary measures against the workers. For the smallest 'misdemeanor', they withhold an hour's wages. You can only use the bathroom if the team leader gives you permission, it's not allowed to talk and you're not allowed to eat during working hours. The managers, not the doctor, decide whether somebody is ill or not."

At present, sixty percent of the postal workers in Belgium are government employed. Since a few years temporal contracts are no longer changed into fixed contracts and employees leaving the company are replaced by temps. In France, sixty percent of the employees have a fixed contract but La Poste has not taken in new employees with a fixed contract since 2002. Christophe; "Each year, jobs disappear. Subsidiary Mediapost only recruits part-timers. In certain subsidiaries employees are paid piece wages. At Colipost the employees have to use their own cars to deliver mail."

The role of the trade-unions

Since a few months ago, postal workers in the Netherlands have been increasingly demanding action and there is dissatisfaction among postal workers in other countries as well. Pete; "Royal Mail is trying more and more to work with part-timers. They are partly succeeding in this but the trade-union is opposed and the majority of the postal workers are still full timers. Members of the

Communication Workers Union (CWU) were involved in a large conflict over threatened job losses. There were no negotiations and strikes were organized. These started out as local strikes and slowly became national relay strikes. Many people are afraid that if Royal Mail succeeds in employing more and more part-time postal workers this will open the way for complete privatization."

There are also strikes in Belgium. "The Post wants to replace the current employees with part-timers that work three hours a day for a smaller salary", says Serge Alvarez-Fernandez. "Both the Christian trade-union CSC/ACV and the social-democratic PMB/ACOD support the actions of the postal workers but they don't coordinate them. The Flemish parts of both trade-unions have agreed to a new collective agreement on working conditions and wages and this has crippled possibilities of action in Flanders."

On the surface, everything is calm at the TNT in the Netherlands but there is a lot of dissatisfaction in the company. The employees are more and more demanding that the trade-unions take action. Van der Post, "The unions both want to preserve jobs and gain new members in the new postal companies. As long as the unions don't take the initiative, there won't be any strike action." The prospects for action are further hampered by the fact that there are two trade-unions organizing postal workers. ABVAKABO FNV, the trade-union for government workers, organizes the employees of TNT since it used to be state-owned. FNV Bondgenoten organizes the employees of the new companies. Neither of the unions organizes support for each other.

Dennis de Jong affirms the bleak picture the postal workers paint; 'At TNT you see what happens when something is made into a market that should have remained a public service. After the privatization TNT is at risk of being chopped up in bite-size portions for venture capital.'

Prospects

The future of the Belgium Post is unclear. De Post is required to deliver

mail daily in the whole of the country whereas under the new laws the new companies are allowed to deliver mail twice a week and only to parts of Belgium. Alvarez-Fernandez, "This puts De Post in an economically difficult position. Under these conditions, it's going to be hard to compete with the new companies."

The only British trade-union with significant support of postal workers is the CWU. The union has always fought attempts of both Tories and New Labour to privatize the postal company. Officially, Labour is opposed to privatization but its policy gives a different picture. "Earlier this year Labour tried to privatize a part of Royal Mail but this has been postponed. The Tories and Libdems

are in favour of complete privatization."

Prospects in France remain unclear as well. Christophe, "Left-wing parties like the CP and the NPA and the trade-unions defend the idea that the post should be a public service and are opposed to privatization." [11]Dennis de Jong; "It's possible that the French government will privatize the post but hold on to a majority of the stocks. But the EU will still demand that competitors are allowed to operate."

At the end of last year, some people claimed that with the crisis neoliberalism was finished. The opposite seems to be true - a new wave of privatization, further

flexibilization and tearing down of social security and collective insurances is waiting for Europe. Knowing this, it's urgent that trade-unions start putting their activists into contact with each other. Any movement starts with informing people and exchanging information. How hard can it be for the European trade-union movement to facilitate an international network in this digital age? A network not just for the organizations themselves, but for members and activists. Knowledge of the similarities all over Europe and international contacts will help employees to exchange experiences of struggle and know they are not alone. Any movement has its own dynamic, and this can take effect across borders.

Bravura expression of growing left influence in Pakistan

8 February 2010, by **Farooq Tariq**

Over 140 delegates and few observers representing 7263 members of the LPP discussed the political and organizational aspects of the party. For the first time in the LPP's 13-year history, delegates attended, representing Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan, Gilgit Baltistan, Sareiki Waseeb, Pukhtoonkhawa and Kashmir. There were leaders of trade unions, of social movements, of peasants and from the labour movement — all eager to learn from each other and discuss their future course of action.

Comrades travelled overnight to arrive at the Faisalabad Centre for Peace and Harmony, a social organization, for a residential congress followed by a mass rally of workers and peasants held at famous Dhobi Ghat grounds. (On the way to the congress one comrade from Baluchistan was seriously injured in a train accident and had to be hospitalized at Multan. As a result of the unfortunate accident he lost three of his toes.)

The three-panel chair presided over the congress proceedings with a three-member standing order committee to help organize the congress.

The congress opened with a two-minutes silence in memory of seven comrades who, since the 4th LPP congress, are no more with us: Abdullah Qureshi (killed in a suicidal attack in Swat on 9th December 2007), Jilal Shah (died 2008), Master Khudad (killed in a Peshawar suicidal attack October 2009), Rehana Kausar, Najma Khanum and Abdul Salam Salam (died in road accident December 2009).

Several organizations sent donations to enable holding the congress and the one-day conference. These included Europe Solidaire Sans Frontieres (ESSF), comrades related to Workers International Network, Socialist Alliance Australia, Organization of Communist International Greece, Solidarity USA, and Pakistani comrades in Sweden, Norway and the

United Kingdom as well as several individual donations. Over 100,000 Rupees was raised in the finance appeal from the delegates attending the congress.

At the congress Comrade Farooq Ahmad read some of the solidarity messages received from the following organizations across the globe Congress opened up with reading of some of the solidarity messages received b, including the Fourth International Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL), Central Committee Communist Party of Cuba, New Anti Capitalist Party (NPA) France, International Socialist Organization USA, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), Independent Lawyers Association International UK, Revolutionary Socialist Party (Australia), Consumers Action Committee Pakistan (CACP), The South Asian Peoples Solidarity group Toronto, Canada, Action Aid International, Workers International Network (WIN), South Asia Alliance For Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and

Organization of Communist International Greece.

Here are some parts of the messages received:

* "We think in particular of your involvement in the Lawyers' Movement for the overthrow of the Musharaf dictatorship, your intransigent defense of democratic rights and minorities threatened by religious fundamentalism, your constant combativity in offering a progressive and solidarity alternative to the joint threats of talibanism and militarism, the help which you bring to strengthening the struggles of women, workers and peasants, your active participation in the social forums and internationalism that you express in a part of the world that is in a permanent state of war, dominated by the Pakistan-India nuclear face-to-face and NATO-US intervention in Afghanistan." (Fourth International)

* "We hail the holding of your Congress, which is convened in the midst of a complex political situation and a global economic crisis that imposes new challenges on the political forces that are struggling for a better possible world for all. We wish you success in your work." (Department on International Relations Communist Party of Cuba)

* "The New Anti Capitalist Party (NPA) of France brings you its warmest greetings for your 5th congress. We wish in particular to salute the efforts that you have made to build a strong progressive and popular political force, independent of established power systems, capable of offering a socialist perspective and solidarity alternative to talibanism and religious fundamentalisms, to militarism and to the bourgeois clientelist parties. (New Anti Capitalist Party (NPA) France)

* "It is imperative for the Left in both India and Pakistan to resist this imperialist design and work consistently for bilateral peace, cooperation and friendship. The CPI(ML) and LPP have a history of shared initiatives and mutual exchanges towards this common goal and we are sure in the coming days we will be able to further strengthen

our comradely ties and defeat the designs of our pro-imperialist rulers. Wishing you every success with your Congress and the rally, with warm comradely greetings, Dipankar Bhattacharya General Secretary, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)

The 120-page draft documents on national and international perspectives were presented.

The international perspectives discussion was opened by comrade Farooq Tariq, who explained the basis of international capitalist crisis, the ecological disaster, and the imperialist occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Adding to this crisis, is the decline of reformism and growing Islamic fundamentalism. Is there a way out? Where are the forces that can save the planet and challenge the new face of counterrevolution? Where in Africa, Latin American and Asia do we see a challenge to imperialist globalization? He outlined the class struggle ahead, highlighting the role of women and building international ties as part of constructing a coming revolution.

Comrade Pierre Rousset of the NPA (France) and comrade Simon Butler of Socialist Alliance (Australia) spoke about the crisis of capitalism and climate change. Comrade Arif Afghani of Afghan Labour Revolutionary Organization (ALRO) outlined the worsening social and economical conditions of the Afghan masses. A discussion by more than 12 comrades enriched the topic, covering aspects insufficiently mentioned in the draft document.

The perspective discussion was introduced by comrade Farooq Ahmed. His main emphasis compared the policies of the present civilian government with those of General Musharaf military regime. These are remarkably similar. In addition, the rise of religious fundamentalism is direct threat to the organizations of the working class. Washington's imperialist aggression and daily drone attacks are fueling the popular appeal of the religious fanatics. He argued that, in order to cover up its anti-people policies, the present civilian government is making a lot of noise about a possible military takeover.

While there is little probability of a takeover in the near future, implementing policies to raise the standard of living of the masses remain the government's best defense.

Over 30 comrades spoke on different aspects of Pakistan's political and economical situation, once again deepening the analysis. These ranged from discussion on the national question, the rise of religious fundamentalism, imperialist economic policies, and the declining living standard of the masses.

The organizational perspectives were laid out by comrade Nisar Shah. Describing the achievements of Labour Party Pakistan since the last congress at the end of 2007, he cited its magnificent growth. For the first time, the LPP has a presence throughout Pakistan, including Baluchistan, Gilgit Baltistan and Tribal areas. The most important growth area has been in Pukhtoon Khawa, where the LPP has over 2000 members. He stressed the need for more study circles and schools for the integration of this new membership.

A second, and interrelated, point is that the LPP is working to develop the social and labour movements in Pakistan. It has promoted regional and international solidarity and actively participates in anti-imperialist globalization initiatives.

Before the opening of general discussion on organizational issues, LPP secretaries from Sindh, Baluchistan, Pukhtoon Khawa, Punjab and Sareiki Waseeb gave provincial reports to fill in the overall report with specifics.

A constitutional amendment to change the name of National Committee to Federal Committee was accepted unanimously. Another amendment to hold two annual meetings of Federal Committee instead of three was defeated.

The election of 31 members Federal Committee was held through secret ballot organized by a three-member election commission. Thirty-seven comrades contested. The newly elected members of the Federal committee include Nasir Mansoor, Mukhtiar Rahu, Farooq Ahmad, Beena Fida, Azra Shad, Rehana Shakil,

Maqsood Mujahid, Bukhshal Thallo, Aziz Baluch, Farooq Tariq, Bushra Khaliq, Zara Akbar, Nisar Lighari, Younas Rahu, Latif Lighari, Moeen Nawaz Punno, Nazli Javed, Mehr Abdul Sattar, Mian Abdul Qayum, Choudry Imtiaz Ahmad, Riffat Maqsood, Baba Jan, Ihsan Ali, Suhail Javed, Salim Noshad, Khalid Mehmood, Kafait Ullah, Abdul Jalal, Irfana Jabbar, Nisar Shah and Talat Rubab. This includes nine women.

The Federal Committee held its first meeting and elected the Federal Executive Committee, who is the main LPP officials. For the second term comrade Nisar Shah was elected general secretary and comrade Farooq Tariq as spokesperson. Bukhshal Thallo was elected secretary of Education and Culture, Nisar Lighari secretary of Youth, Nasir Mansoor

secretary of Labour and Mehr Abdul Sattar as Kissan [peasant] secretary. The decision to elect the secretary of Women was postponed until the next meeting.

Most of the congress delegates then participated in the international workers peasants' conference on 29 January at Dhobi Ghat ground Faisalabad.

Report by Farooq Tariq