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The dubious victory

10 June 2003, by **Jan Malewski**



By occupying Iraq after three weeks of conflict, the United States has asserted its undeniable military superiority in front of the world. The political and media impact of the invasion of Iraq allows it to retake the political offensive on an international scale and in the immediate future weakens those who had been opposed to this war, decided on unilaterally by the Bush administration. The latter is determined to impose a new world order. 'Foreign Affairs', the influential review close to the US State Department, carries an article in its May-June issue which noted the end of a 20th century experience aimed at subjecting the use of force to the rule of law and called on the US administration to build 'new international mechanisms'. [1] A vast project.

Nonetheless, the US military victory in Iraq took place in a context of international isolation of the superpower, a weakening of the competitiveness of its industry and the rise of a powerful popular movement opposed to the war throughout the world. The occupation of Iraq itself is far from being stabilized and the United States is already facing attempts by the Islamic opposition to build independent administrations in the cities. The object of this article is

to consider the elements which condition the US's hegemonic project.

The military 'triumph'

Victory was achieved by the world's most powerful army, supported by 45,000 British soldiers and a handful of Polish commandos, enjoying absolute control of the air. Opposing them was an Iraqi army which had been largely destroyed at the time of the Gulf war of 1991, subjected since then to an embargo, partially disarmed by the UN weapons controllers, and whose anti-aircraft equipment had been regularly bombarded for more than ten years. Such a result should have constituted a surprise for nobody.

What is more surprising is that during the first fortnight of combat, the US-British forces met strong resistance in spite of their capacity to inflict an onslaught of fire and bombs on the enemy. There was strong Iraqi resistance in the port of Oum Qasr as well as in Basra, Nassiriya, Najaf and Kut. In Oum Qasr, occupied on the first day of hostilities, urban guerrilla warfare continued for a week. Only strong national, religious or other convictions could cause such a desperate resistance. On the other hand, the battle of Baghdad, predicted to be decisive, did not take place;

apart from the resistance of small groups of foreign volunteers, the Iraqi army and in particular the Republican Guard (presented as the spearhead of this army) did not put up resistance. Was that due to the destruction of their command mechanisms? Or the fact that air bombardment led the soldiers and their surviving leaders to give up positions that had become indefensible? According to US military figures, up to 60% of their air force was engaged against certain Iraqi military concentrations. General James Amos, in command of the US marines' air forces, said that their apparatuses had struck "massively", "day and night", "for seven to eight days" against the Baghdad and Nida divisions of the Guard. Or, should we believe certain rumours - in particular on radical Islamic Internet sites - suggesting a deal between the Iraqi military leadership (indeed Saddam Hussein himself!) and the attackers, which would have led the Saddamite leaders to exchange their lives for the abandonment of resistance?



Between March 20 and April 13 (the occupation of Tikrit without Iraqi resistance) the 1,100 US planes carried out 30,000 sorties, with 500 missions per day and firing a total of 24,000 munitions. About 800 cruise missiles were fired on Iraq (including

about thirty British missiles), according to US military commanders. [2] Far from carrying out a 'clean' war, the attackers used ammunition with depleted uranium, famous since the 1991 war for having caused disease among soldiers, 'daisy cutter' bombs which remove oxygen from an area of approximately 1.5 square kilometres, [3] as well as cluster bombs which can kill well after the combat is over. [47]

Faced with these issues, the policy of the neocons in Bush's administration is to increase the US deficit through a simultaneous increase in (in particular military) expenditure and a national tax cut for the richest (Congress voted for a tax cut of 550 billion dollars, but Bush initially wanted a reduction of 725 billion!) - a doubtful means of attracting foreign investment, because the increase in the deficit and the consequent fall of the dollar are likely to reduce to nothing the possible net benefits, but a form of redistribution of income to the benefit of the 'upper middle class' to which the neocons largely belong.

One however should not confuse tendencies of average and long duration and a completed process. The structural weakening of the US economy in the world economy is compensated for by the strategic domination of the United States. Political-military victories can contain contradictions, make it possible to mark points against competitors, delay certain processes and even overcome certain contradictions. The long-term tendencies are not written in stone. There are times of crisis, where History can take different roads, or be diverted from its course.

The movement for global justice faces new challenges

The inter-imperialist tensions revealed by the preparation for the Iraqi war and the competition exacerbated by the decline of the US economy and the downturn in the business cycle in the principal world economies, point to a period when the imperialist bourgeoisies will develop a

'chauvinistic' propaganda, developing 'their' area of influence and devaluing that of their competitors. This has already started in the United States with a campaign orchestrated by the Bush administration against 'France' and 'Germany', which is reminiscent of the propaganda developed before 1914 among the future belligerents.



The movement for global justice essentially managed to preserve its independence, avoiding aligning itself with any of the protagonists in the inter-imperialist conflict. The anti-war movement in which - at least in Europe, Latin America, Japan and the United States - it played a driving role did not fall into the trap of alignment with the 'institutional anti-war camp' of Chirac, Schröder, Putin and company. Nevertheless this movement, in certain European countries at least and especially in predominantly Moslem countries in Asia, largely exceeded the field of influence of the global justice movement, mobilizing hundreds of thousands of new demonstrators. The anti-war revolt for some originated in religious conviction - Islam, but also Catholicism because of the position taken by the Pope - or in national identities. In certain Arab and Asian countries, where the movement for global justice did not experience a development similar to that it acquired in the Americas and in Europe, the radical Islamic organizations confronted the state bureaucracies with 'nationalist' pretensions for hegemony within the anti-war movement. The fact that in Iraq the fight against the US occupation is carried out under the flag of Islam will reinforce the hold of reactionary Islamic currents over certain sectors of the anti-war movement.

The role played by the Security Council of the UN - the closed club of the great powers and their clients - in the debates preceding the war on Iraq also spread illusions about 'international legality', contributing to blunting the anti-imperialist edge of the anti-war mobilizations, suggesting that it was possible to force the ruling

classes to adopt a 'legal' approach at a time when Bush and his team had decided to pass to the argument of force, whereas in the framework of world political relations, the UN is at the same time an area of expression of inter-state contradictions but also an instrument in the service of neoliberal policies of recolonization.

Such diversions do not stop the development of the anti-war movement where they occur. On the contrary, the religious feeling of the masses can constitute in certain countries a powerful lever of mobilization against war. But it weakens solidarity and the international unity of the movement, opposes one national sector to another and, in the final analysis, weakens the anti-war movement where its mobilization could be most effective: at the heart of the US superpower. The attacks by Al Quaida against the people of the United States on September 11, 2001 allowed the most bellicose and imperialist neocon groups in the US to impose their projects within the US administration "the attacks of 11 September... have given American imperialists the added force of wounded nationalism - a much deeper, more popular and more dangerous phenomenon, strengthened by the Israeli nationalism of most of the American Jewish community. Another attack on the American mainland would ignite this nationalism and strengthen support for even more aggressive and ambitious 'retaliation'", writes Anatol Lieven of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. [48]



The strength of the movement for global justice stems from its opposition to neoliberal policies - which Capital seeks to impose on the whole world under the label of 'globalization' - and its claim that 'another world is possible' which tend to naturally unify revolts across the globe and lend them a spontaneously internationalist orientation. Fractures appear in this uniform aggression, inter-imperialist conflicts sharpen which forces the movement to pass on a higher level of unity, under penalty

of falling into the traps of defence of its country, its area, its identity and to regress from the internationalism which characterizes it into a form of neo-chauvinism.

In Europe in particular the movement for global justice should beware of "the assertion of different European values". [49] The aggressively neoliberal policy of dismantling of state pension systems and more generally the rolling back of the 'social state' [50] led by the European Union go parallel to its attempts to

oppose to the United States a 'European power' and should warn the movement against any idealization of 'European values'. Its engagement in the more traditional forms of the class struggle, alongside the historical labour movement, represent a healthier direction.

It remains true that on an international scale only the capacity of the movement for global justice to flesh out its claim of 'another possible world', i.e. its capacity to invent a

socialist project for the 21st century and to learn the lessons from the historical failures of the labour movement of the previous century, will be able to arm it for the ideological battle which it must carry out against the 'neo-chauvinist' radical Islamic movements and currents. By doing this it will reinforce its international bonds and will be capable of an even more effective opposition to the warlike drift of imperialism. A new 'August 1914' is not inevitable. The movement for global justice can prevent it.

Occupation and resistance

10 June 2003, by **Gilbert Achcar**

GA: I would say that what's going on illustrates what many people who were opposed to this war were predicting - that the easiest part of it would be the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Washington and London were peddling a myth that not only would it be a cakewalk in terms of the war itself, but also in terms of the control of the country afterwards. They were betting on what their people in the Iraqi opposition made them believe - and what they wanted to believe anyhow - that the great majority of the Iraqi people would greet them.

I also think they were betting on the quick collapse of just the central apparatus so that they could use the Iraqi state apparatus in order to implement what some people before the war were already calling Saddamism without Saddam.

But what actually happened was something that was predictable - and was predicted - in such a very centralised and despotic regime; when the central figure vanishes, the whole thing collapses just like a house of cards. You get a sort of chain reaction. At the moment that Saddam Hussein disappeared, this is exactly what happened.

Some people were misled by the extent of the resistance at the beginning, which was minimal but contrasted sharply nevertheless with the experience of 1991. This was because this time the offensive was carried out under very different conditions. The ground offensive started immediately rather than after five and a half weeks of relentless bombing. Therefore this time there was still some ability for the grassroots elements of the apparatus to fight back as long as the central apparatus was there. But as soon as Saddam Hussein vanished, all that collapsed very quickly.

That is the normal thing with such a regime based on fear and which is the object of hatred from the overwhelming majority of the people. Obviously the regime had its own constituency, but it was a minority of the Iraqi population.

This collapse created a vacuum into which political forces of the opposition - the real opposition, not the Washington puppet opposition - intervene to fill it. There are all kinds of groupings involved, but the most important are the Shiite Islamic forces - with various degrees of fundamentalism among them. These are forces that are definitely not

controlled by Washington.

On the other hand the enthusiastic reception for US and British forces did not occur, even in the south where the population is very violently opposed to Saddam Hussein. The population and the religious apparatus took what was, at best, a neutral position. They said "OK, we definitely welcome the prospect of getting rid of Saddam Hussein, so we won't do anything to prevent you guys from achieving it. On the other hand we are definitely not in favour of you staying in the country".

Everything that is happening now makes this clear. Day after day those so-called liberation forces are appearing for what they are - forces of occupation. This is a foreign occupation.

We now have the second major foreign occupation in the Middle East after the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Each day it is more apparent that they are both part of the same system of domination and are resented as such.

Therefore I think that major difficulties for Washington and London lie ahead rather than behind us.

One result of this is that they are starting to consider some so-called

multilateral solutions for the control of Iraq such as NATO. I wouldn't be surprised if Donald Rumsfeld on his last trip to the area has also discussed the possibility of Arab troops helping in controlling the situation.

As the situation worsens Washington and London will be looking for alternatives to their own direct occupation of the country. It would anyway be hugely difficult for them to maintain it in the long term. What Washington is considering is to maintain military bases in the country for the long term but outside of the populated areas. They definitely don't want to remain in the cities.

They have the experience of Beirut in their minds. When the Israeli army invaded Beirut, it quickly turned into a nightmare and they had to evacuate the city very soon. Their presence there led to the start of action by the resistance, by snipers and this panicked the Israelis.

We are already witnessing the unfolding of a resistance movement in Iraq. It is interesting that it is different from Beirut - because in Lebanon there was a popular defeat but this is not the case in Iraq. The Iraqis don't consider themselves defeated. Therefore there are reasons for more optimism in terms of the fate of the occupation than we had in Lebanon. In Beirut, when the Israelis invaded, they defeated a strong popular resistance. So the demoralisation was enormous at the beginning. Despite that, after two weeks you had the beginning of resistance actions and they had to leave the country.

Today, major segments of the Iraqi population do not consider themselves defeated, but consider Saddam Hussein defeated. The Shiite Islamic forces in particular consider themselves victors and so they are bold enough to organise mass demonstrations against the occupation.

What we are seeing now is demonstrations of both Sunnis and Shias and there is no religious rift. You have just as strong a demand for the end of the occupation amongst the Shia as amongst the Sunnis in some cities such as Mosul, Falluja - cities

where the US troops have killed people demonstrating against the occupation. Washington is in danger of getting bogged down in a real quagmire there: that is why they are very busy considering what possible solutions they can find to prevent this.

TC: *When you talk about the different political forces amongst the Shia, you talked about different degrees of fundamentalism. Standing back for a minute, what does the development of the anti-war movement and the resistance to occupation mean for the balance of forces between fundamentalists and a secular alternative? Clearly we are not talking about a return to Nasserism - the material conditions don't exist for that - but slogans for national liberation are being raised in a different way than they were in 1991 - and perhaps in a different way than they have been since Lebanon. What do you think about this?*

GA: Well, nationalist forces as such, distinguished from left wing forces, are rather negligible amongst the Arabs in Iraq today. Obviously amongst the Kurds they are very strong - and by the way pursuing very disastrous political options (again) - and allying with, or appearing as being in alliance with, the occupation.

In terms of the Arab population, there are some left wing forces. The Iraqi Communist Party has resurfaced - it has managed to maintain some members in the country, though in a clandestine manner of operation. It had the political sense to be the first to produce a newspaper and organised a means of getting it printed and distributed. It also organised some demonstrations and opened headquarters.

I'm sure that among the now dozens of political groups that are mushrooming in the country there are others that are left wing. But one should not fool oneself - the left is no match presently for the Islamic forces especially in terms of mass mobilizations. Obviously as progressive, left wing people, we should do what we can to support the left in Iraq. But we should also be absolutely clear that it is up to the Iraqi people to decide freely what sort of government and regime they want

to represent them.

It is definitely not the right of Washington to proscribe to them the kind of regime they should get. It's certainly not for Donald Rumsfeld to say, as he did recently, that an Islamic regime on the Iranian model would not be acceptable. The right of self-determination for the Iraqi people involves their right to choose what sort of regime they want. We should not allow any insidious campaign on the theme that US and British troops are stationed in the country so as to prevent a so-called totalitarian regime. We should remind any sincere democratic person who might fall for this that anyway the Iranian fundamentalist regime is definitely much less despotic, in relative terms, and much less anti-women than the closest ally to Washington in the region - the Saudi kingdom.

These people who have legitimated the invasion in the name of overthrowing a dictatorship, now try to legitimate their continued occupation of the country, in the name of preventing another dictatorship. We want nothing to do with this. We do not accept their hypocrisy. We need to launch a campaign with the central slogan for the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of US and British troops from Iraq, free elections without such troops or outside interference.

TC: *Mentioning the relationship between Washington and Saudi Arabia, what lies behind the fact the US is withdrawing troops from there and moving to Qatar?*

GA: They have moved the central co-ordination of their operations to Qatar. They have built a new base there - which, as in all these cases, is subsidised by the local potentate.

TC: *And therefore the local population...*

GA: Yes in the end. This is also a confirmation of what some of us have been arguing for a long time against those who said that the war was another way that Washington could exert more pressure on the Saudis, bring them to their knees and transform the regime. On the

contrary, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein gave them an excuse to withdraw the troops from Saudi Arabia, because those troops had become a liability for their Saudi cronies.

Everyone knows now that Bin Laden's turn against his former sponsor and ally in Washington was due to the deployment of US troops in the Saudi kingdom. That has been a major argument for agitation against the US amongst the population there. It explains why 15 out of 19 of the 9/11 hijackers were people coming from the Saudi kingdom, Saudi subjects - I don't call them Saudi citizens because there are none.

The presence of US troops had become a political liability that was very much increased, aside from Bin Laden's agitation, by an issue that I point to in my book, which is the women's issue.

Due to the women's movement in the US, the US government was not able to send only male troops to Saudi Arabia. They attempted to impose ways of dressing and behaving - like not driving a car - on women soldiers which they wanted to do so as not to be too out of step, too shocking to the local ultra-sexist customs. And that became a real problem for the Pentagon. There was a woman pilot who sued the Pentagon over that and she won the case in court. So they were put in a situation where they would have eventually to accept women soldiers behaving normally, that is in such a way that it would have increased tremendously the problems for the Saudi regime.

So now that they have overthrown Saddam Hussein, they don't need to keep troops in the Saudi kingdom to protect it from any immediate foreign threat because there is no such credible external threat any longer.

TC: *No, the main threat is internal...*

GA: And US troops make it worse. Anyway they are not troops for internal repression - they are mostly air force people, who were monitoring the 'no fly' zone in southern Iraq which doesn't exist any longer. In the same way that Washington initially

deployed their troops to protect the Saudi regime, now they are withdrawing their troops to preserve the same Saudi regime. That is their main concern and all this talk about so-called democracy is pure mystification.

We can see that Iraq is just a terrible proof or further illustration of that famous law that really free elections in the Middle East will only produce governments hostile to the United States. Therefore the US government allies can only be despotic governments - involving perhaps some very cosmetic reforms. Basically what Washington is trying to consolidate in the area is a Pax Americana based on US-controlled despotic governments.



TC: *It seems to me that the third leg of what they are doing, and in some ways the most horrendous, is the so-called road map in Palestine.*

GA: In a sense we have a repeat of the 1991 scenario. This war has been the second major step in securing total US hegemony over the Arab Middle East. I don't need to elaborate the reasons for their interest in the area, which are obviously linked to the fact that this is the area with over 2/3 of the oil reserves of the planet. So it's of huge importance.

In order to have a complete Pax Americana, in order to consolidate the advances in their hegemony, they want to defuse the Israeli/Palestinian issue which has been the main, though not the only, source of anti-US resentment in the whole Muslim world. So they need to find something resembling a settlement.

And that is why in 1991, under 'George the First', a few months after the Gulf War, they started the Madrid conference. That involved exerting real pressure on Yitzhak Shamir, who was the Israeli Prime Minister at the time. Shamir, as the head of the right wing Likud party, did not want a settlement.

The hawks in Likud don't want any concessions to the Palestinians. So 'George the First' had to exert real

pressure on Shamir through economic means in order to get him to join the Madrid so-called peace process that started at the end of October 1991.

Now we have a repetition of this scenario. The US have achieved a second and even more decisive control of the whole region through getting control of Iraq after years of containing that country. And now they need, in the same way that they needed in 1991, to stabilise and consolidate what they achieved. That means that they need to defuse this Israeli/ Palestinian question. This is being pushed by Blair and by certain sections of the US ruling class who are saying: "come on, we don't want to lose what we have just won over this, this is the necessary price to pay."

It means two things: in order to move forward in the Pax Americana, they needed first of all to replace the Palestinian partner in this process. They reached this conclusion at Camp David in July 2000, when they faced a deadlock in the negotiations and Arafat could not be convinced to accept the dictates of Barak and Clinton. He could not be convinced - and he said so himself repeatedly - because he would lose his head since his people would be absolutely and violently against such a move.

So after the failure of this last attempt of the Clinton administration, both the US and the Israeli administration reached the conclusion that they had to quell the resistance of the Palestinian people with planes, tanks and bulldozers. If Arafat wouldn't play ball they would have to remove him.



So this offensive was launched, first under Barak, with the provocation by Sharon at the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem in September 2000 which started the so-called Second Intifada. Barak had already increased the repression to a qualitatively new scale. Sharon took this further after he won the election in Feb 2001. In a sense Sharon's victory reflected the fact that the Israeli establishment wanted someone who was able to implement the harshest methods against the

Palestinians. And Sharon did so in a coalition with Shimon Peres and the Labourites until recently. So this consensus expressed the desire of the Israeli establishment and all its tendencies to break the bones of the Palestinians. And to a great extent they achieved it. The US came to the conclusion some months ago that they had to complete the process by having someone other than Arafat and so they imposed this designation of a Prime Minister along with a man of their choice in charge of internal security.

So on the Palestinian side, they had put together the key prerequisites for moving forward in this so-called peace process. And so what remains is the Israelis.

And it is obvious to me that Sharon is not really willing to deliver. He cannot openly reject all the US demands but he is acting tactically - incidentally just as Shamir did before him in 1991. When Shamir went to Madrid he maintained such a stubborn and intransigent position that it all failed and then they had to go for the Oslo accords - which was after having Rabin and Peres in the Israeli government rather than Shamir. So I think - given what Sharon is - that it is not unlikely that we see some tension arising between the Bush administration and Sharon.

To what extent this is the case will also depend on the tactical ability of Sharon. I think he will try to gain time, betting on the fact that next year is election year for Bush. So he will temporise and practice obstructionism - it's a classic tactic - putting all kind of conditions and so forth so the Bush administration will be faced with the dilemma between exerting strong pressure - as 'George I' did - or not.

I don't exclude that as a possibility - just because, contrarily to what some people believe, the tail doesn't wag the dog. It's not Israel that drives US foreign policy - Israel is just a strategic asset for the US. US foreign policy is driven by US capitalist and imperialist strategic interests.

These require a settlement now and it can only come to fruition if they revert

to something like the Barak-Clinton model of 2000, which was rejected by Arafat. But this is unacceptable - utterly unacceptable to Ariel Sharon. So we will see.

It also depends on the situation in Iraq - because if the situation there becomes very troubling for the US they won't be in a position to exert very strong pressure on Sharon. If they succeed in stabilising control over Iraq, then they will need a settlement and then they will move to exert strong pressure on Israel. If they don't - Iraq, rather than Israel/Palestine, will remain their main preoccupation.

TC: *I'm taking for granted that there is unlikely to be another major military campaign by the US in the next 6-9 months.*

GA: No I don't think it is likely that there will be such a campaign before the next US elections. That's extremely unlikely. It would be tremendously risky and costly both in economic at the whole of Iraq, which is a hugely difficult task. They are definitely not in a position to tackle North Korea or Iran, or Syria or any major issue of this kind. It's not on the agenda now and, for Britain at least, they said themselves that the armed forces are exhausted...

TC: *And broke.*

GA: Yes, exactly. So I don't think Washington is planning anything. Obviously if it is an emergency situation arising from something unexpected such as Iranian troops massed on the border - then they would defend their interests. But they won't take the initiative of launching a campaign of aggression in the short term - aside from possible limited strikes.

TC: *Given that scenario, what do you think the anti-war movement should be focusing on over the months ahead, and how easy do you think it is going to be to transform a movement launched to stop a war, then campaigning to end a war, into one demanding an end to occupation?*

GA: I think the movement has already responded to what is the central need of the period by switching slogans from "No blood for oil" into "No blood for Empire". I believe this is a good description of what is needed - which is not only to transform the movement against the war on Iraq into a general anti-war movement but also to transform it into an anti-imperialist movement because that is what is at stake. And I think this should even have been more centrally the focus while the war in Iraq was going on.

I was one of the people who argued that, due to the fact that this war would be launched before April, for climatic reasons, and given the fact that only the mass movement in the US would be decisive enough to stop Washington - especially in the light of what is at stake in the Gulf - there was no realistic prospect within this timetable to prevent the war from taking place. To be sure, the movement had to be built with the idea, yes, of trying to prevent it; but in any case, the aim should have been that, if the aggression happened, the political costs would be as high as possible for the warmongers. In this sense the recent electoral setback for Blair in Britain is a good first result. Secondly, it was necessary to wage the campaign while explaining that this is not a mobilisation against just this war, but against a whole pattern of domination involving war as its central axis - a pattern which has been dramatically escalated after 9/11. We have had the Afghan war, the Iraq war - and we are also having low-intensity interventions in the Philippines, in Georgia, in Colombia, aside from the pressure and threats against the countries designated in Washington as 'rogue states'. So it is a whole pattern, and this is what we should be building the campaign against; and the only way to do this is as an anti-imperialist campaign. This aspect of the campaign should be deepened and developed as the necessary corollary of the movement against neoliberal globalization - in the same way, actually, that militarism and imperialist wars are a necessary corollary of neo-liberalism on a world scale.

We are the majority

10 June 2003, by **Terry Conway**



The key reasons for this success were:

- The movement was organized around a restricted number of demands: Stop the war - Oppose the racist backlash - Defend civil liberties
- There was a conscious and successful attempt to involve significant sections of the Muslim community.
- A number of new trade union leaders had recently been elected who were critical of the government generally including over its war drive.

The strength of the antiwar movement on a world scale since 9/11 has been built on the back of the global justice movement which mainly focuses on challenging the economic and (anti) social policies of neo-liberal capitalism. The anti-globalization movement in Britain had begun to develop support, particularly amongst young people who saw no difference between the traditional political parties, as New Labour hitched its wagon ever more to the horse of neo-liberalism.

Two thousand activists met together in London just days after the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers. The meeting was called by activists in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), in the broader Socialist Alliance and by a number of individuals on the left more generally. Veteran Pakistani activist Tariq Ali made a powerful speech which captured the mood of the meeting. People understood the need to act quickly to launch a broad anti-war movement.

Even this far back, there was a strong awareness that what was almost certainly going to happen in Afghanistan could be repeated in Iraq.

Everyone involved knew that the Taliban were not the greatest democrats in the world, any more than those other US creations in Iraq were. But the majority view was that we should focus on preventing the war rather than making a detailed analysis of the Taliban which would reduce the numbers willing to get involved.

500 people attended an organising meeting the following week. It was decided to stick to three simple goals: stop the war, oppose the racist backlash and defend civil liberties. Some people wanted to add other demands such as opposition to imperialism. Most felt that the three demands would enable the building of a broadly-based alliance which would have the best chance of uniting the left with sections of the Muslim and Asian communities and with large numbers of trades unionists. And that is what was achieved to an extent that no-one dreamed was possible in those early days.

There was another debate going on in these first weeks with the SWP. Their initial position on 9/11 itself had been obviously not to support what happened, but also not to condemn it. Of course, it was very difficult to get this right in a situation where there was so much hysteria in the media. But the consensus was that it was important to use the phrase 'condemn' if we were to reach out to the biggest base of support. And after a lot of discussion, the SWP accepted this should be in the founding declaration.

At this point, the SWP were by far the largest single force involved in the campaign. The Socialist Alliance was broader but had only existed as a real national force for a short time. It certainly didn't (and doesn't) have the same material resources that the SWP has. More importantly, the two major forces that had launched such initiatives around previous wars and previous international solidarity

campaigns - the Labour Left and the Communist Party - were much weaker than they had been: for example, at the time of the last Gulf War.

That isn't to say they have been absent. There have been a number of left Labour MPs at the centre of the Coalition from the beginning. Many local Labour parties have also supported the Coalition and brought their banners on the demonstrations. But there is no way that today the Labour left, which has been decimated more and more as Blair moves New Labour to the right, could be a key organising force on the ground in most localities. Similarly with the Communist Party of Britain, the key organisation involved in producing the daily newspaper, the Morning Star. Today, more than 10 years after the fall of the wall, this organization is a shadow of its former self.

However, it does still have influence particularly in a number of important trade unions and also in the leadership of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) - which although it has been relatively quiescent over the last decade, still has the capacity to mobilise significant numbers. And the SWP understood this all this, which is why they were happy to have CPB member Andrew Murray as Chair of the coalition.

But the relationship of forces on the left in Britain had shifted significantly to one where neither the CP, nor the Labour Left, nor even the two together, had the political weight to dominate such a movement in the way they would automatically have done ten years earlier. There was a massive opening, a huge necessity to act - and revolutionary socialists were in the driving seat.

Everyone knew that Bush would use 9/11 to drive forward his project for the new American Century: that when he talked about an unending war on

terror, this was his cover for an unending war against progressive forces across the globe. The stakes were enormous.

At this time there was a growing desire to discuss and work together on the left. Key to this was the fact that the SWP, who for a whole period had been really absent from united front work, had made a major positive shift in approach.

This was demonstrated by their decision to come into the Socialist Alliance in 1999. This was extremely significant because by this time the SWP were by far the largest group on the far left, outstripping the Socialist Party [51] - who a few years earlier had probably been of similar size - by a considerable amount.

And it has to be said that overall the balance sheet of the role of the SWP, as the lynchpin of the coalition, has to be an overwhelmingly positive one. That is not to say there are not things that could have been done differently: that is always true.

There was a problem about whether the Socialist Alliance was built along with the anti-war movement. Obviously, the major focus of activity for the Socialist Alliance, as for the whole left, has since 9/11 been to build opposition to the war drive. But there has sometimes been a tendency to counterpose this to building the Alliance. This was reflected particularly in the fact that in the later national demonstrations, there was no speaker from the Socialist Alliance.

The Socialist Alliance as an organisation was important in developing the coalition to the success it became. It was militants of the Alliance who were running stalls, organising public meetings, booking coaches and so on, in many parts of the country. Some of these were people who also wore a different hat - that of a particular far-left group - and some were not. In many localities, Socialist Alliance speakers spoke on platforms with people from the Labour left, Communist Party, Greens and, in Wales, Plaid Cymru, without any difficulty. (While the Liberal Democrats participated in some of national marches, in most local areas

they didn't do much).

But the SWP were not ready to have this argument. The fundamental problem is that the SWP sees the Socialist Alliance as one of a series of 'united front' campaigns - which also include STW and organisations like the Anti-Nazi League. They do not fully accept the Alliance as a political alternative to New Labour, which needs therefore to be developed into a political party in the way that the Scottish Socialist Party has done.

However, a number of things are changing that will mean that the next time the discussion arises, the context will be different. The Socialist Alliance has an elected councillor for the first time, who won on a strong anti-war ticket and drew in forces from the coalition and the Muslim community into his campaign. At the same time, the Alliance itself recently decided [see next article] to launch a new initiative for broader unity on the left. So we shall have to see how all this plays out.

But despite the frustrations on this issue, it is important to take cognisance of what has happened. The revolutionary left in general, and the SWP in particular, have been at the core of the most successful campaign against the central project of imperialism ever. Of course some of the successes of the campaign are a result of favourable conditions outside the control of its leadership, such as the relationship of forces in the trade unions. But overall, the SWP have been impressive leaders of this powerful campaign.

Growing mobilization

As the threat against Afghanistan grew in the autumn of 2001, lots of militants were reactivated. The renaissance of the movement was reflected in the 60,000 strong demonstration of October 13. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament had called the demonstration against Bush's 'Star Wars' project, but the march was adapted to oppose the impending invasion of Afghanistan.

Since then there have been much larger marches, but at that time it was a huge turn out. By comparison, it was felt to be a huge achievement when the demo after the Srebrenica massacre had as many as 5,000 marchers. During the first Gulf War, the largest march was 10-15,000. So even then, it was obvious that something new was happening.

The development of the movement hasn't always been ever-upwards. The demonstration on November 18, 2001 was after the US had destroyed the Taliban regime, when the US and its allies had secured 'victory'. There were between eighty thousand and one hundred thousand people there, but they were difficult times.

For the first time here we saw the mobilization of a significant part of the Asian community. We made a conscious effort to include Muslims, particularly because these events were taking place during the holy month of Ramadan. So part of Trafalgar Square, [52] where the march ended, was set aside for prayer. An imam was on the platform for the first time. Dates were handed around at dusk, which is when people break their fast.

It felt strange because it was completely outside the traditions of the British Left. On the other hand, it has long been common for members of various Christian churches including priests and vicars to be involved in radical causes. So while some of the unease was a genuine concern that the movement remained inclusive and secular, some of it was undoubtedly islamophobic and racist. When we had rabbis and bishops on platforms, virtually no one on the left complained; but when there were imams, it was different.

So the coalition continued to make a conscious orientation both to the Muslim and Asian communities, and also the trade union and labour left. This united mobilisation was repeated in April and May 2002 after Israel's massacre of Palestinians in Jenin. It was important that activists could feel the new sense of community growing. People at the head of the coalition saw that it was time to build a new level of understanding. Teach-ins were

organised to discuss topics like the new imperialism.

Involving the Muslim community

The coalition's openness to Muslims was possible because its politics were centred on the main question: the resurgence of imperialism and colonialism, rather than the relationship between Islam and fundamentalists. Some people wanted us to say "Against Bush, Against Bin Laden" and some of them left the coalition's steering committee because they wanted to draw an equal sign between the dangers posed by imperialism and those posed by Bin Laden. These were people around the Workers' Communist Party of Iran, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the Weekly Worker newspaper: but they reflected a wider concern.

What was really at issue here was not whether anyone at the heart of the coalition wanted to work with fundamentalists, but other issues. Those who withdrew have in general an analysis of fundamentalism as a backward, feudal ideology. They do not understand that Al Qaeda derives its appeal today precisely from the development of neo-liberal globalization - and from the failure of the left, particularly in those parts of the world where it is strongest, to demonstrate that another world is possible.

Secondly, in terms of challenging fundamentalism, they thought the important thing was to write something on paper. Other people believed that the way to undercut the strength of fundamentalism was to build a movement with roots in the Muslim community, so that reactionary imams were less able to argue that the anti-war movement had nothing to say to or offer Muslims.

The same approach is also true of challenging any conflation between opposition to Zionism and anti-Semitism. In some of the early mobilisations, especially those specifically on the question of

Palestine, there were many placards showing an equals sign between the swastika and the Star of David. These were doubtless intended to imply that the Israeli State is fascist: yet given that the swastika is the symbol which Jews wore in the gas chambers, there is clearly a serious problem with such an equation. The highly visible participation of groups such as Jews for Justice for Palestine and the Jewish Socialist Group in the anti-war movement has opened up discussion on such issues - which anyway are an area that need challenging, not only with some sectors of the Muslim community, but more broadly.

The development of a strong and diverse anti-war movement has done more to radicalize young women and men from the Muslim community than all the slogans in the world. It has made socialist ideas accessible to young Muslims in a way they never where before. And it has done something to change the balance of forces within that community against the Islamists.

The most visible - and contentious - part of the relationship with the Muslim community has been the relationship with the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). This relationship developed because they were the people mobilising in response to Jenin. They called a demonstration after the massacre, which was twice as big as that called by the Palestinian Solidarity Committee. They were welcoming of the participation of the Coalition, and so things developed from there.

Other Muslim groups and individuals were confident to participate in a way they haven't previously - including in groups like the Palestine Solidarity Campaign organising around issues that are important to them - because we had sought a visible Muslim presence.

But there was no decision to say of MAB these are the people we were closest to politically in the Muslim community. They are also not the only Muslim organisation or current involved. For example, there is Dr Siddiqui from the Muslim Parliament, who has different politics; and the London Council of Mosques: both of

these have been affiliated from the beginning. There is Salma Yakoob, the driving force behind the coalition in Birmingham - probably the place where the mobilization of the Muslim community has been greatest - who has different ideas again. Certainly the participation of many young Muslim women, some of them wearing the hijab and others not, emerging as strong leaders as the movement has developed has been inspiring.

There have been other figures from the Asian community as well. As mentioned earlier, Tariq Ali spoke at the first meeting in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Suresh Grover, another well known activist from the anti-racist group the National Civil Rights Movement, with a long record of activism in West London, appeared on many platforms. Asad Rehman, a long-time anti-racist activist with a history of involvement in the East London Bengali community, has been a central figure in the coalition nationally from the beginning and calls himself a Muslim Marxist.

So it wasn't a case of saying "let's go and leaflet the mosques" in coalition meetings made up only of the white left. In some places, the key figures from the mosque were at the meetings, and would take leaflets away to mobilize their own forces. In other places they organised their own meetings and transport, but phoned to let us know what they were doing. Elsewhere, Muslim activists in the coalition asked for support from other activists to leaflet the mosques.

So the Asian community wasn't passive: it was a central part of the coalition. Of course the fact that the community is today organised on largely religious lines is not in itself a positive development at all, but represents the defeat of the previous secular leadership in the Asian communities. This leadership was not at all above criticism, given that significant sections of it tended to concentrate increasingly on personal advancement rather than challenging state racism. At the same time the growth of racism specifically directed at Muslims has resulted in the creation of a political identity as British Muslims which did not exist during the last Gulf War. This growth

of islamaphobia pre-dates 9/11, but has increased rapidly since then. Given this material reality, it is absolutely right for socialists to positively welcome and encourage the involvement of Muslims organised as such while at the same time:

- Retaining absolute hostility to fundamentalism

- Arguing for separation of church and state

- Retaining the right to criticise any particular actions/slogans by a particular Muslim organisation or individual as warranted - in exactly the same way as we would do any other political forces involved in the movement.

We are the majority

The whole climate was exceptional, especially for many activists who are used to being a small minority in society.

The attitude of the press had an enormous impact. The Daily Mirror, Britain's second biggest selling newspaper, was the most strident supporter of the movement: day after day it carried damning banner headlines, and devoted half the paper to sharp criticism of Bush's and Blair's war drive. One front page in December 2002 read: "There is a lunatic with weapons of mass destruction 'ramping up' for a war that will imperil the whole world - STOP HIM". This was next to a picture of George Bush, which had been crossed out in the same style that anti-war badges cross out pictures of weapons. The message couldn't be clearer.

The Mirror went on to produce many more covers and stories, and clearly called on its readers to march against war on February 15, printing a map of the route among other things. For the demonstration itself, they produced placards and sponsored part of the equipment for the rally. While their contribution was exceptional it wasn't unique on this issue. What was exceptional was for the left to have the

majority of the media behind it. This was apparent campaigning on the streets. A huge proportion of people stopped and took leaflets from activists on stalls. Many took material away to give to others and others signed up to get involved in more formal organising too.

Trade union involvement key

There has been an important change taking place in the trade unions, which has been going on at around the same time as the war on terrorism. During the whole period since the defeat of the miners' strike by Thatcher in 1985, there had been a real lack of perspective: trade union organization had been crushed and morale sapped.

But slowly new shoots of militancy started to emerge. More radical leaders were elected in a series of important unions, which reflected the fact that the membership was increasingly fed up with the class collaboration of their predecessors. This also coincided with the fact that the honeymoon of the Blair Labour government, elected in 1997, was rapidly coming to an end. Many trade unionists had expected that New Labour would deliver at least some of its promises in terms of defence of welfare provision, and also expected a change in the anti-trade union climate at work.

As a result of these developments twelve national unions have been won to affiliate to the coalition. [53] Trades union leaders like Mick Rix, Bob Crow, Mark Serwotka and Paul Mackney [54] have been personally supportive, and NATFHE also provided the coalition with office space. The T&G and Unison [55] also speak at our demonstrations.

The support doesn't just exist at the top. Hundreds of local branches of unions are involved, not just in supporting the big marches, but also in what's going on in their city, town, or even village. Trades unions are essential and integral to the coalition, unlike the movement against the Vietnam War which was not able to get the same level of support because

of the relationship of forces in the unions at that time.

But even so, this is a continual struggle. After the US occupation of Baghdad, there was a proposal from the right on the PCS executive to disaffiliate from the campaign. In Amicus, Roger Lyons [56] leads a campaign against the Stop the War coalition. It is only in a very few of the smaller unions that there is no right wing attempting to claw back our gains. And the crisis of workplace organization that the trade union movement faces has not been overcome. In this context it was not surprising that there was less industrial action on the day war broke out than some had hoped - although it was frustrating that some of the most high profile General Secretaries did not take stronger initiatives to call out their members.

But overall, it is remarkable that there was any at all, when overall numbers of days of strike action remain incredibly low. If people don't have the organizational capacity to fight the war against neo-liberalism at home, it is unlikely that they will do so over the war in Iraq. The fact that the anti-war movement was a majority in the country had a significant impact on people's confidence - and also in preventing management taking disciplinary action afterwards.

A new generation

A lot of the industrial action that did take place happened in colleges and schools where young people were also taking part in marches. In many cases it was the ebullience of the youth that gave trade unionists the confidence to participate. That was anyway the most extraordinary development in those last few weeks before the war against Iraq started. Young people had been supportive of and involved in the movement from the beginning, but the increase at this point was dramatic. School walkouts were organised in different cities by school students themselves. Marches, die-ins, blockades, were organised in no time at all - by email and word of mouth.

The demonstration the day war broke out was completely extraordinary.

People started arriving at Parliament Square in the early morning. But until around 5pm, people over 16 were in a tiny minority. The average age was probably somewhere around 14. Clearly this means something for the future of the anti-war movement - but also for the left.

International co-operation

The international network and coordination built against the war is completely unprecedented. Never in international history have 30 million people in every part of the globe taken action on one single day over one common cause. It is still hard to comprehend the enormity of what we achieved. The coalition sent speakers to meetings in Barcelona and Germany and to the first conference of the No Platform for War group in Turkey. The movement in Turkey had deep problems due to the left's isolation from the Muslim community. That's now overcome - and that's a massive development.

The first real steps towards formal co-

ordination came from the anti-globalization movement. There is a coordinating group, which grew out of the European Social Forum in Florence in November 2002. This was where the call for February 15 came from initially - and then it broadened out. John Rees [57] and the US anti-war group ANSWER went in November to Egypt to agree the Cairo Declaration, which shows that the sentiment has spread in the Middle East. Fifty Russian MPs have signed it. We met in London after the February 15 demonstration. People from very different organisations have now developed close working relations. There are 30 countries involved including ANSWER. The international coordination will continue and, at heart, it is an international movement.

The future

At the time of writing, the US occupation of Iraq is unravelling. There is still no clean water, no medicines in Baghdad or Basra, one month into the new colonialism. Suicide bombers are wreaking havoc across the region; the Israeli state continues its crackdown on the Palestinian resistance and those who

support it.

There is certainly plenty for the anti-war movement to do, even though there is unlikely to be a major military campaign in the next few months. It is possible as well as necessary to keep the core of the coalition together in campaigning for an end to the occupation of Iraq. Obviously we also need to campaign against the witch-hunt launched by both the Tory press and the Labour Party on George Galloway MP [58] because he was such a prominent figure in the movement. We must also use the relative lull to deepen the political discussion on the strategic options open both to our side but also to our opponents.

If we are successful in doing that, next time round we will be even better prepared to meet the new challenge. If a mass anti-war movement with ever-deeper trade union roots can combine with a serious political alternative to Blairism then perhaps the super-power of public opinion that Bush and Blair rightly fear can at last turn the tide of neo-liberal foreign policy. The war against terrorism is in reality a war against humanity.

The challenge facing the left

10 June 2003, by **Alan Thornett**

Such a process can happen in reverse, of course. The defeat of the British coal miners and success of Thatcherite ideology in the 1980s depoliticized a generation and put the ideology of the ruling class in the ascendancy. The result was the hegemony of the neo-liberal agenda, and a deeply defensive period for the working class.

That period of retreat was challenged by the mass strikes in France at the end of 1995, and by the emergence of the anti-globalization movement at Seattle in 1999. This crucially important new movement united the left, environmentalists, direct

actionists, and others against the advances of globalized capital, and the neo-liberal agenda, and initiated a new political movement around the idea 'think global, act local'.



September 11, 2001 gave the American Republican right the chance they had been waiting for to strike back at these developments. The result was the US 'war against terror'/'Project of a New American Century', the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, and then the invasion

and recolonization of Iraq.

These brutal acts of 19th century colonialism, however, dramatically created their opposite: the emergence of an unprecedented international movement against the war. This emerged from the anti-capitalist movement itself, which was now organized around the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and regional social forums such as Florence, in Europe, at the end of last year.

Britain, along with Spain and Italy (each with governments strongly supporting the US war drive), had the biggest and most impressive anti-war

movements in Europe. In Britain this was created by: a well developed and led coalition against the war; the absolute centrality of Blair to the US led war; positive developments which were already taking place in the unions; and a pacifist tradition going back to Vietnam.

This anti-war movement enjoyed the support of the majority of the population in Britain (at least before it started). It organized three of the biggest political demonstrations in British history: September 28th 2002 with 400,000, 1.5 million on February 15th 2003 and then half a million on March 22nd after the invasion of Iraq had started.

Now, in the aftermath of the war, we can see that these were events with the potential to change the political situation and shape the future of the workers' movement for the next period, possibly on the scale of the 1970s. It is an opportunity, which must be grasped, since it may not recur for some time.

Whilst the Stop The War movement was unable to affect the overall conduct of the war (other than contributing to the extraordinary decision of Turkey not to allow a land invasion from its territory) since its course was dictated by a prearranged military agenda, it was able to increase the political price that the war mongers would have to pay and affect the political conditions which would follow the war.

In Britain, the political fall-out and the opportunities created are clear. With the naked role of the US empire there for all to see, a new generation of school students came onto the streets, motivated at the level of international politics and with an increasingly anti-imperialist sentiment. The left has been strengthened, since it led a mass campaign, which in the past would have been led by the Labour left and by the CP. The influence of the left trade union leaders, who totally opposed the war and were an important component of the stop the war movement, has been strengthened.

The anti-war movement created an unprecedented crisis for Blair and new

Labour, with the biggest revolt of MPs in a House of Commons revolt ever. Bush was prepared to go to war without Britain if necessary, although in the event - partly due to the small number of senior Labour figures prepared to defy Blair - Blair was able to hold on by a reasonably safe margin.

Blair has survived the war with his opinion poll ratings intact, but he has been damaged by the experience. His success is partly based on the continued crisis of the Conservative Party, who were reduced during the war to cheer leaders for Blair, and the fact that new Labour's voting base (and general base of support) eats ever more into the Tory areas of society.

New Labour distanced itself still further from its traditional base. Large numbers of members opposed to the war have been resigning from the party. The crisis of the Labour left - who were marginal in the Stop The War movement despite the efforts of individual MPs such as George Galloway (who has been victimized for calling on the troops to defy orders) and Jeremy Corbyn - has been increased. If a breakthrough cannot be made under conditions of the invasion of Iraq, when can it be made?

At the same time the crisis of working class political representation, which has been developing since new Labour came into government, has become more acute. As a result the debate in the trade unions on the political fund (that proportion of trade union dues which fund the Labour Party) has been sharpened and the relationship between new Labour and the unions further thrown into question. Increasing numbers of trade union members resent funding a party which attacks them at every turn, supports the US Republican right in a brutal war, and aligns himself in Europe with Aznar and Berlusconi.

This is now being debated in a number of unions in this year's conference season. One of the media unions, BECTU, has just decided to ballot its members on disaffiliation. The rail workers union, the RMT, is proposing changing its rules to allow for support to candidates other than Labour.

There is huge pressure from the rank and file to go the same way in the fire fighters union, the FBU.

This new radicalized political situation was reflected in the results of the elections, which took place on May 1st for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, and in some local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales (only a proportion of local authorities are up for election each year).

The most spectacular was the gains made by the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) in Scotland, where a socialist alternative is most developed. The SSP increased its representation in the Scottish Parliament from 1 to 6. This spectacular result - further enhanced by the fact that four of the six new SSP representatives are women - was directly connected to the campaign against the war in which the SSP was central in Scotland - although the SSP has been increasing its influence over a longer period of time. This breakthrough opens the opportunity for the SSP to become a major force in Scottish politics. It also, of course has important implications for the left in England and Wales, and even at the European level, where it will also have an impact.

In England the Socialist Alliance won its first local council seat by getting 38% of the vote in a seat in Preston in the North West. The Alliance was able to draw the support gained in the stop the war campaign into the election and gain - in particular a substantial vote from Muslim anti-war activists (a local imam supported the Alliance and attended and spoke at its conference).

The Alliance also scored several results of around 20%: although its average was very much lower when the poorer results are taken into account. These results were a confirmation of the radicalization which was taking place, but which was still (particularly in England and Wales) only partially reflecting its self in a socialist vote in elections.

The Scottish Parliaments and the Welsh Assembly have proportional elements in their electoral system, whilst the local elections across Britain are on the first-past-the-post

system, which puts the smaller parties at a huge disadvantage. The SSP for example only won one local authority seat - although it has to be said that they gave an almost total priority to the Parliamentary election.

Not all of the anti-war votes went to socialists, either. The Liberal Democrats benefited from their anti-war stance, winning many new seats. They opposed the war until it started, and then backed 'our boys' who were in action. (Interestingly the Liberal Democrats in Scotland have forced the Labour Party in Scotland to support proportional representation for future local authority elections in Scotland as a part of their coalition deal. This could give the SSP over 100 councillors in future elections).

The conclusion, however, is clear. The movement against the war has created the conditions for a wider left unity than has been possible until now. This cannot be done by the Stop the War Coalition, which is a single issue campaign, which should continue in opposition to the occupation of Iraq, and the wider so-called war against terror. It is an initiative, which the Socialist Alliance is best placed to take, since it is the most successful left coalition to date. This posed a sharp challenge to the Socialist Alliance - whose conference took place on March 15.

The issue at the conference, therefore, was not so much how the Alliance could be turned into a party like the SSP - which many of us have rightly been arguing for some time. The issue now posed is whether the Alliance can recognize the opportunities, which have opened up, and if so can it translate them into a new broader and stronger realignment of the left in new political conditions? The issue of the party will still be crucial, but the first task is to create a broader alignment than the Socialist Alliance represents at the present time.

With this in mind the conference adopted a resolution calling for the widest possible discussion on the need for a wider and more effective united left alternative.

The appeal is addressed to the activists of the anti-war movement,

including the Muslim activists that evolved to the left during the campaign. It is addressed to those who have left the Labour Party in disgust at Blairism and the war. It is addressed to the left in the trade unions, many of whom have been responsible for the higher levels of trade union struggles over the past few years. It is addressed to the radical new trade union leaders who have been elected in recent years in a number of unions are a reflection of all this and have potentially an important role to play.

It is also addressed to the left organizations that are not currently inside the Alliance; in particular the Communist Party of Britain, the main ex-Stalinist fragment, which produces the daily newspaper 'The Morning Star'. To join such a new alignment would involve a strategic shift for them, since currently they do not support challenges to Labour in general elections. But they are divided on this and they worked successfully with the far left in the Stop the War Coalition, and may be prepared to make the break. The involvement of the CPB, however, would open doors to the left in the unions, where they still have an influence. It also involves the Socialist Party, who walked out of the Alliance on a sectarian trajectory in 2001, but could be attracted to realignment.

This is not simply an appeal to others join the Alliance, as it is. It proposes to keep an open mind on the organizational form that could emerge from such discussions. It could be the Alliance as it is, a relaunched Alliance, or a new organization entirely. The Alliance would insist only that any new formation is open, inclusive, democratic, and of course socialist.

The idea is to shape a new left alignment around the various elections, which will be coming up over the next two years. Next year there will be the elections for the London Assembly, which has a proportional element. There are also the European elections, which have a proportional element. Then the following year there will be the next general election, which will be fought under first-past-the-post. It proposes the target of a socialist candidate in

every constituency by that time.

This means opening up a period of discussion on the approach of the left to these elections. Success is not guaranteed but the opportunity is clearly there.

It is not just the war, of course, which defines the nature of new Labour and alienates its traditional support. This is the government that is prepared to use the law against the firefighters' strikes. This is the government that introduced tuition fees, that is privatizing our schools and letting profit dictate what happens in our health service. It is the government which has stoked up racism, and strengthened the far right, by its continuous and scandalous attacks on immigrants and asylum seekers and its social and industrial policies.

The young people who are joining the anti-war movement are turning towards politics, in particular anti-imperialist politics. The last thing they are going to do is join the Labour Party, the party that is carrying out this war. But an organization that puts forward a principled alternative to the policies of new Labour, which supports the anti-war movement and the struggles at home can win many of that new generation to its banner.

The situation, however, is not all one of opportunity for the left; there is a dangerous side as well. The far right British National Party increased their representation in the local elections, particularly in the Northern industrial towns. Last year it won three seats in Burnley in Lancashire. This year they took five more seats in Burnley but also added two seats in Sandwell in the West Midlands, one in nearby Dudley, one in Calderdale (Halifax), one in Stoke on Trent, and one in Broxbourne in Hertfordshire.

The door has been opened for the BNP, not only by factors like the industrial decline in Lancashire, which is a factor in Burnley, but also by New Labour's state racism as expressed in their attitude to asylum seekers.

These successes of the far right, however, only give more urgency for the left to respond to current opportunities and form a more

effective coalition. The left has to make sure that they are opposed on the streets, but also opposed in the

ballot box - where there is always a socialist alternative on offer and a socialist campaign which can target

their politics, defend asylum seekers, and advance a working class perspective.

Trade unions and the left

10 June 2003, by **Patrick Sikorski**

AT: *So Blair stands alongside George Bush in an invasion of Iraq, and we have had resignations of Labour ministers including Robin Cook. What do you think the implications of all this are for New Labour? How deep a crisis do you think they are in?*

PS: I think it is the biggest political crisis Labour has been in since the last world war.

What I think is open to debate in the movement is exactly how this is going to work out organizationally. What has happened is that the neo-liberal and imperialist project of the Blair faction has come brutally out into the open, and it has dragged the Labour Party into an international far right coalition.

The problem is that this project has taken place on the back of so many defeats for the labour movement that whilst there have been heavy hearts in some quarters there has been absolutely no success in halting its progress.

I believe that we can contrast this crisis with the crisis in the Labour Party back in the 1930s, over the introduction by Ramsay MacDonald of means testing for the dole.

Labour split. But MacDonald only took a very small minority of the party with him into the national government. However, in the current context, it seems to me to be certain that Blair will continue to lead the vast majority of the party; and that it's very much an open question as to whether or not the small socialist current that remains in the party at Westminster and in the country, will make the necessary break with Labour, or will continue to insist on its line of

'reclaiming the party'. That, by the way, is a forlorn hope.

The radicalization which is taking place now around the anti-war movement and in the unions is outside of the confines of the Labour Party, is not being structured by the Party. Neither is it being structured by the TUC. There is no national lead whatsoever on any of the key questions facing the labour movement today.

This is the problem that those wishing to re-found the socialist alternative are facing at the moment.

AT: *Do you think that the huge radicalization which is taking place around the anti-war movement and the new generation which is coming onto the streets opens up a new opportunity for something new to be built to the left of Labour?*

PS: Well of course it does open up that opportunity. The clearest example of this is the impact of the movement on the prospects for the Scottish Socialist Party in the May elections.

Because the SSP have already made the crucial breakthrough by achieving the election of Tommy Sheridan as an MSP, they now have a realistic chance of gaining enough seats to form their own group inside the Scottish Parliament. They are polling support in double figures.

In England we are somewhat behind these developments. The Socialist Alliance could benefit from the explosion of the mass movement but it is an open question whether they can convert this into any electoral breakthrough.

I don't think the Alliance is seen as being anything like the SSP, not just because the SSP has an MSP, but there is something about the Socialist Alliance which conveys a narrowness which is not conducive to achieving an electoral breakthrough.

The SSP got it right by setting itself up as an individual membership party campaigning consistently in the housing schemes and the communities: on bread and butter economic issues, as well as on the issue of the Faslane nuclear installation - all of which have allowed it to benefit politically and organizationally from the present anti-war movement.

The Socialist Alliance is not able to relate directly to the new movement. It is a federation of far left groups, which of course is de facto dominated by the SWP - by far the largest among them. But it is quite rightly the broad-based Stop the War Coalition that is seen by millions as organizing the mass movement. It is not clear to me where the Socialist Alliance is in all this.

This is very important for all those wanting to see something bigger and more stable to emerge, because the most energetic supporters of the movement are massive numbers of young people, who couldn't give a fig for the trade unions or Labour or indeed any other political party. I mean what have we done for them over the last years?

In that and in many other ways they clearly are most heavily influenced by the anti - globalization movement.

In my view the Socialist Alliance is a very important development but it

does not see itself as the final answer to the problem of a left alternative. How can a new development come about which can go beyond where the Alliance is at the present time?

AT: *Do you see any way that the parts of the 'awkward squad' in the unions could be a part of a new development at the political level? Something which maybe could link up with the Alliance at some stage?*

PS: Here's my view. The situation we have got is that there is going to have to be a response from the unions to what is a major crisis of political representation.

At the same time there is a radicalizing constituency out there in the unions which has been shown in certain unions through the election of left-wing general secretaries.

They have been elected on a platform which is clearly anti-new Labour and anti-Blair. In fact you could not get elected now as a general secretary if you were identified as a Blairite. That's going to be even more the case after this war, there is no doubt about that.

The awkward squad spoke against the war in the TUC debate on the war. In fact most of them spoke definitively against any war at all, UN resolution or not. It was the right-wing who used the UN card to try and stop the anti-war amendment going through.

Then of course there are issues like privatization and the long-standing issues of the anti union laws which define the left /right divide in the unions at the moment.

All this is now going to have to be taken to its logical conclusion and the unions are going to have to start breaking Labour's monopoly hold. The unions are going to have to support those who support our policies.

They will emerge from the SSP in Scotland, the Socialist Alliance in England, members of Plaid Cymru in Wales, and others who will be to the left of Labour. Also it will involve socialists still inside Labour.

For instance in the RMT, we have annual conference decisions from last year which have mandated the EC to

bring forward rule changes this year, to allow the union to support socialist candidates outside of Labour. This has led logically to the need to get rid of the rule that stipulates that all branches must affiliate to the constituency LP in their area.

This only recognizes the reality, which is that the vast majority of branches long since ceased to affiliate to Labour.

What is being done here is the working out of a new method of political representation for the unions. This will include the unions looking in their own ranks for people to put up as candidates, as was the case at the time of the founding of the LP.

At the moment the debate can easily get bogged down by the view that in seeking alternatives to Labour there has to be a ready made party out there to which we must affiliate immediately. That's wrong. For now there has to be a mixed approach to find the best candidates.

But the thing about the early years is that the issue of labour representation and union backed labour candidates - with a small l - led to the formation of a party.

AT: *Yes that's right, that will be posed. That is the process which we think will emerge. But such a process would need a catalyst at some stage to move towards a party. Do you think there are those on the left of the unions who would come forward to propose a new Party?*

PS: Yes. But I think the experience of the Socialist Labour Party is a warning that you can't jump straight from a trade union base to forming a ready-made socialist party.

The new radicalizing forces won't automatically join a political party. The new young people for example won't go straight to a political party because they see political parties in the light of the traditional parties - and they see those parties as part of the problem and not part of the solution.

The RMT, for example, has dumped all our previous group of MPs and have a new group of Labour MPs who support

the policies of the RMT.

We told them they had to support rail re-nationalization, oppose the privatization of the Underground, be opposed to all the anti-union laws, and they had to take a stand against the effects of flagging out on our seafarers.

We will also support candidates of our own union. For example there is a long-standing militant of our union in Motherwell, John Milligan, whom we will support. We will be campaigning for Tommy Sheridan.

AT: *Whatever view you have about what happened to the SLP in terms of its politics, the fact is that we are now in a situation far more advanced than when the SLP emerged. None of this debate on the political fund, for example, existed at that time when Scargill called for the SLP. So we are in a much more fertile situation than was the case then.*

PS: Yes. There are many more radicalizing forces, and not only against the war. It would not have happened without the World Social Forum, the European Social Forum, and the whole anti-globalization movement - which has taken up new ways of doing politics and projecting politics on big broad issues.

In fact it is very interesting because they are not writing detailed manifestos, they are posing big broad issues which are in many ways the building blocks of the movement. In other words we are talking about refounding working class political representation. This therefore dictates a certain approach which cannot be pushed too fast and which has to be all inclusive.

Specifically I believe it's just plain wrong to propose for example that the next step for socialists in the European Social Forum is to wage a big fight to clear out the social democrats.

AT: *Let's go back to the issue of process, and obviously there is a process. But there is also the danger of missing the boat. The essence of politics is to grasp the opportunity when it presents itself. We have this*

huge movement now and if this subsides and nothing new has been built this will be a big problem.

PS: Yes, that's always true Alan. But look at the Italian situation. There Rifondazione - the Party of Communist Re-foundation - is pretty powerful. They have a daily newspaper, many local councillors and some deputies. Yet they do not confuse building the party with building the movement. They don't believe they can do either by 'driving out' or 'defeating' other political currents in the mass movement. They do not approach the mass movement seeking to 'clarify' it.

Their leader, Bertinotti, says the line of the socialists should not be to try and hegemonize the movement, rather they should ensure that the movement hegemonizes society - that is, to create the conditions for the building of equality and to effectively prevent wars and barbarism.

The problem is, I don't know whether or not the SA is up to doing something creative about this massive new movement when it is so overwhelmingly dominated by the SWP. Do the SWP want to open up the SA to this opportunity as opposed to recruiting directly to itself?

AT: *It is true that the SWP is numerically dominant in the Alliance, and it is true that some people are cautious in relating to it, but it does*

mean that they bring a lot to the Alliance as well.

The only way around this situation, however, is for new forces to emerge either as a part of the Alliance or as a part of a new initiative of which the Alliance would be a part which would create a new relationship of forces inside it.

PS: Everyone wants this in the Alliances as far as I can see, but I don't see that coming at the present time other than from the left sections of the unions. It would create a much more attractive situation, people would have more confidence in it, and it could more effectively take advantage of the situation.

I would say this about the process at the moment - this has not yet been decided on inside the RMT so of course it is a personal view: if a branch wishes the union to support a socialist candidate in a particular area, then they would make the proposal to the national centre and that would be looked at by the Council of Executives - the national leadership.

If the candidate agreed with the union's basic principles, then a consultation process would be started in the region concerned, to decide which candidate the union was going to support in that, and indeed in other, constituencies.

If there was agreement amongst the branches then it would not be a problem if that person was a member of the SSP, the SA, the Labour Party, Plaid Cymru, or no party - or simply a member of the union.

It would be important in this process to be sure that the person was well known and represented the struggle in their area. It would not be sufficient for someone to have a Socialist Alliance - or of course any other party - political label.

I think that is the practical way that we are looking to move forward within the next year or so.

Whether that would then lead to the union actually supporting another party, or taking a new initiative with other existing parties and with other unions involved - all that is some way off down the road. At the moment we are looking to broaden out who we support in elections, because Labour clearly no longer represents us.

Clearly any future involvement of unions in the Alliance or in any other of the smaller parties like the SSP, would open up a massive number of issues as to how that could be achieved constitutionally.

AT: *Yes, I'm sure the Alliance would be very interested in such a discussion.*

Scottish Socialists make gains in elections

10 June 2003, by **Gordon Morgan**

The 4 years of the media portraying the SSP as a one-man band, as Tommy Sheridan's party, are clearly over. Scotland has now officially a six-party parliament, with the SSP entitled to representation on all its committees.

Scotland since

1999

This was only the second election to the Scottish Parliament since 1707. A referendum in 1997 endorsed the creation of a new parliament with limited powers devolved from the UK government. Whilst the parliament has control over health, education, local government, transport, the police and the environment, the UK

government retains control over the economy, defence and foreign policy. It even controls the rules for the Scottish parliament, and limits its expenditure by means of grants and by preventing it from raising its own taxes.

The 1999 elections were held under a form of proportional representation. The results over-represented the Labour Party yet, significantly, denied

it an overall majority. Labour was forced into coalition with the Liberal Democrats, who have formed the government for the last 4 years. The 1999 elections also gave the Scottish Socialists and the Greens a single MSP each out of a total of 129 MSPs in the parliament.

The Scottish government has disappointed those who hoped it would start to reverse social deprivation in Scotland. Led by Labour, it has with few exceptions followed the UK government policies - particularly in privatising public services. Labour's junior partners, the Liberal Democrats, have been indistinguishable from Labour in terms of policy.

The main opposition party, the Scottish National Party, has moved steadily to the right over the past years, endorsing the 'enterprise culture' and seeking to cut business taxes. It remained pro independence, but within the EU and the Euro, thus expressing an aspiration rather than a demand. The final official party, the Conservative Party, often complains that Labour has stolen its policies.

In the run up to the elections we had four major parties who were all pro-business, and whose manifestoes were identical on most main policies.

The SSP to 2003

Scottish Socialist Party demonstration, Edinburgh

The SSP was formed from the Scottish Socialist Alliance in the lead up to the 1999 elections. It quickly consolidated most of the forces on the far left around a common programme, and targeted winning a seat in Glasgow in 1999.



Its success in getting Tommy Sheridan elected was due as much to Tommy's prominence in opposition to the Poll Tax and other working class struggles as the SSP itself. In 1999 the SSP had around 400 members and attracted 46,600 votes - 2% of the total. Fortunately, 18,600 of these were in

Glasgow - 7.25% of Glasgow votes.

Following the success in 1999, the SSP rapidly recruited members and strengthened its campaigning activity. Having an MSP greatly increased our profile, particularly by our success in (i) constructing a cross party majority in favour of abolishing Warrant Sales (a barbaric legal measure whereby debtors' household goods are publicly seized and auctioned) - a punitive measure inflicted on around 40,000 poor Scottish households a year; and (ii) moving a bill to abolish charges for meals in schools.

In 2001 the SWP members in Scotland joined the SSP, and the party began to reorganise its internal structures and constitution to reflect its growth. At the 2001 UK general election, the SSP got 72,500 votes - 3.1% of the total.

The new SSP constitution provided for the National Executive and standing committees to be fully elected by annual conference, and for a bigger National Committee consisting largely of branch delegates, to decide policy between conferences. Electoral systems were adopted to ensure 50/50 male female representation on most bodies, and as candidates in public elections. By the end of 2002, SSP membership was around 2,500, and we had about 70 local branches.

Throughout 2002, opinion polls showed SSP support at around 4% in the first vote, and above 6% in the crucial 2nd proportional vote for the Scottish Parliament. The SSP continued to be involved in every campaign across Scotland - most noticeably around the firefighter's dispute: significant numbers of firefighters joined the party at the beginning of 2003. The SSP has continued to take up international campaigns, and to participate in the moves towards left regroupment in Europe. Frances Curran, the international officer for the SSP and newly elected MSP, was an observer at the Fourth International's World Congress.

The Iraq War

After 9/11, the SSP founded the Coalition for Justice not War, and led

the opposition to the Iraq war. Groups were set up in every community - school kids went on strike. The Green Party were also opposed to the war, but they have only around 150 members across Scotland.

As the scale of opposition to the war became apparent, with 100,000 marching in Glasgow, the mainstream parties began to shift their positions. The SNP came closer to outright opposition to the war: their leader actually changed his stance whilst on the platform at the rally - as did the Liberal Democrats. Only the Labour Party and the Tories refused to oppose the war in the parliament. Labour support collapsed in opinion polls, and it looked as if they would lose the election. SSP support in polls peaked at 10%, and the Greens at 8%.

Fortunately for Labour, Baghdad fell 3 weeks before the election, and public opinion bounced back.

The election campaign

Because of the war, press coverage of the Scottish elections was confined to the last 3 weeks, and even then was limited in scale compared to 1999.

In Glasgow and Edinburgh, the SSP was the most prominent of any party in public campaigning. Overall the SSP ran its best organised campaign. 4 million leaflets were distributed, 2 to each household; 2 party political videos were produced to a high standard and shown on 3 TV channels; and funds were raised sufficient to cover the campaign.

The key immediate policies of the SSP were: against the war; abolish the regressive Council Tax and replace it with a form of progressive income tax; free school meals; oppose privatisation; for a £7.32 minimum wage and 35 hr week in the public sector. The main SSP slogan is for an Independent Socialist Scotland.

Because of the vagaries of the opinion polls - SSP support seemed to slip to 6% when Baghdad fell, then bounced back to 9% - and because of peculiarities of the voting system, it

was unclear how many seats the SSP would get. The actual outcome of the election surprised all commentators..

The SSP took 6 seats, the Greens 7 (both up from 1); independent campaigners got 4 seats.

The big losers were Labour and the SNP, who lost 6 and 8 seats respectively. Significantly, only 1.9 million voted - around 450,000 less than in 1999. The SSP vote increased to 128,000, (6.8%). Moreover our vote remained solid across the 2 votes for the parliament: there was little sign of the expected pick up of votes for the 2nd proportional list vote. 2% of voters who, according to polls, were about to vote SSP, seem to have voted for independents who took 9% of the vote. In Glasgow the SSP got 31,000 votes: 16% of the total votes. To put this in perspective, the SSP vote across Scotland was higher than any avowedly socialist party has got in Scotland since 1918, beating the Independent Labour Party vote in 1935.

The Greens, having barely campaigned, were big winners, getting 7 seats with slightly less votes than the SSP. Although the SSP has strong environmental policies, it was expected that many of these Green voters would reject some of the SSP's socialist policies. Many of the Green MSPs are socialist, and we expect to cooperate on many issues.

A strengthened SSP

During the war and the lead up to the election, the SSP recruited hundreds of new members. A key task is to consolidate these members and provide an internal programme of

education.

Having a team in parliament gives the party access to funds for offices and personnel, and this will raise the SSP profile across Scotland. More important, the MSPs will be able to take up issues affecting the poor and disadvantaged across Scotland.

The SSP is fortunate in that the 6 MSPs elected, 4 women and 2 men, include a wealth of experience in trades unions, and in environment and political campaigns. There are no illusions that parliamentary action alone can change society; however, the SSP has effectively combined community and direct action with parliamentary work. The challenge is to take this to a higher level of struggle and coordination.

The SSP has strengthened its base within the trade union movement in Scotland, so that a number of left union leaders supported us through the campaign. Over the coming period we are looking to break the trades unions' subservience to Labour policies - and break also their direct funding of the Labour party.

Towards a mass socialist party

The SSP leadership is well aware of the danger of assuming we will continue to grow and gain support. Up till now we have not been seen as a threat to the establishment or capitalism and so have been reasonably unchallenged. Already now we see campaigns of vilification in the media, and these are likely to intensify.

Whilst these attacks may affect the

looser parts of our support, the main defence is to strengthen the party's campaigning, its links to the wider community and its internal education of its members. Alongside this we need to improve our research and analysis into the workings of capitalism in Scotland and Europe. Part of the benefits of having the resources granted to MSPs is the ability to set up a research unit to advance this process.

The challenge of growing from around 7% support across Scotland to the 15% support we have in Glasgow and to directly challenge the capitalist parties - is daunting but exciting. There are clearly risks of setbacks along the way, but as yet the SSP remains a socialist organisation committed to the overthrow of capitalism. An open discussion will ensue over the summer amongst Marxists in the SSP as to how best, or indeed whether there is a need, to organise to ensure the party remains committed to socialist revolution.

The challenges facing the SSP are common to those faced by Rifondazione in Italy and other groups across Europe; and we intend to continue working with them towards achieving international socialism.

Alan McCoombes, editor of the SSP paper, sums up the situation as follows: " We are still a young party, challenging centuries of tradition and prejudice. Despite our breakthrough, we have at our disposal a bare fraction of the resources of the mainstream parties. But we have morale on our side. We know where we are trying to go, even though we have not yet worked out all the details of how we get there.

"We have a long road to travel. But at least we have begun the journey."

The end of a cycle?

10 June 2003, by Eduardo Lucita

These results indicate the end of the traditional bipartisanship and the prefiguration of a new party system reflecting the changes that are taking place in the employers' organizations in the country. A recomposition of alliances and the search for a new hegemony inside the bloc of the dominant classes is what is at stake.

The appeal for abstention made by some parties, smaller organizations, and 'assembleista' and 'piquetero' organizations suffered a signal defeat. Non-participation was 20%, less than the legislative elections of October 2001, but slightly superior to the presidential elections of 1999, confirming an upward tendency from 1983, but blank and spoiled votes collapsed to 2.5%, the lowest since 1983.

The parties of the left that presented candidates, IU (an alliance between the CP and the MST - it scored 1.7%) and PO (0.8%) increased their vote in relation to the presidential elections of 1999 (IU doubled its vote and the PO was up by 25%) but saw a substantial reduction in relation to the last parliamentary elections. These results did not seem to bear any relation to their participation and influence in the social movement.

What conclusion can be drawn from these results? Do they mean that the whole process that began on December 19 and 20, 2001 has been crushed by the mountain of votes? A priori, there is no doubt that this is a triumph for the dominant classes. The illegitimate and weak provisional government that emerged after the popular revolt has succeeded, not without difficulty, in guaranteeing governability and carrying through its proposed objectives. Nevertheless, do these results constitute a lasting political exit to the Argentine crisis?

In the first place, it is necessary to stipulate the objective for the dominant classes in these elections; to end the political cycle opened in December 2001, restore order, state control, and reconstitute the political regime.

Both questions, central to capitalist domination under a state of law and a regime of parliamentary democracy, had been left hanging after the days of December 19-20 and all the subsequent processes.

That popular revolt released tensions which had built up throughout the 1990s, harnessed the social expressions that had developed and allowed the appearance of others that gave form to a complex and contradictory social subject, that despite those complexities and contradictions has developed outside of the institutions and the established order, in a deep process of self-organization and autonomy in relation to the state and the governing regime.

It is this process which they want to put a stop to. The murders at Puente Pueyrredón, the imprisonment of piqueteros in the north of the country and the state offensive against the Brukman textile and the Zanón ceramics factories, occupied by workers, are part of this attempt.

A turn to the left took place in important sectors of society after December 2001. Nevertheless, neither the social nor the party political left could capitalize on it in these elections.

The left parties continued with their sterile disputes, privileging their policies of self-construction over the needs of the people, whereas the social movement seems to have arrived at a plateau. The piqueteros have maintained their mobilizations but are not spreading; the occupied factories stay occupied but the process has not extended; the assemblies did not obtain any of their great proposed objectives and many of them have taken refuge in mutual aid, understandable and solidaristic but depoliticized. The slogan "Out with the lot of them" is thus losing its social density.

What these elections show is that the movement has not managed the leap to politics and the party political left has the great responsibility of not having been able to offer the channels so that this leap might take place.

Nevertheless the reconstruction of the

political regime does not only involve ending the provisional government and installing a government legitimized by the voters, but also solving the crisis of the system of political representation that has led to a deep fragmentation in the traditional parties

In this sense these elections are no more than the beginning of an electoral process that will extend until next December when provincial governors and legislators will be elected and the national Houses of Representatives and senators will be partially renewed.

On the other hand the fragmentation is not only the product of the confrontations between members of the leaderships of those parties but also an expression of the dispute between distinct fractions of capital. This dispute is not about the neoliberal model, since the essence of that is not at issue, but on projects or variants of that model.

There are two processes here that go in parallel: on the one hand the resolution of the crisis inside Peronism, on the other resolving the question of hegemony between fractions of capital in a manner that allows the presentation of a unified bloc.

Both processes interact with each other and will play a decisive role in the new party system that is being developed.

Whoever is the next president, their government will be conditioned by the character of the crisis that traverses the country, by the 'inheritance' that it will receive, by the pressure that the IMF is exerting again, and by the perverse mechanism of the external debt. On this single fundamental point there are differences on the times and the amounts needed to make an ordered and sustainable transfer of resources applicable to the payment of interest.

Finally, the next government will have to govern with a lowered level of social consensus. That, judging by the indifference of the citizenship, will have a totally passive character.

A unitary May 1

Whether the electoral process that will culminate in December constitutes a political exit strategy for the country will be seen. All the evidence is that the immediate future will be subject to tension over which bourgeois fraction imposes its project in the context of a social and political movement that maintains its dynamics of mobilization and resistance but that will have to face new challenges and requires a process of debate and deep reflection.

For the first time in many years, a range of political and social organizations that identify with anti-capitalist politics and maintain resistance to neoliberalism put aside their factional differences to participate in a joint action on May Day. Only the CTA (Central de Trabajadores Argentinos) and the CCC (Current Clasista y Combativa, related to the Maoist PCR) refused to participate. The axis of the agreement was solidarity with the Brukman textile factory, occupied and managed by its 56 workers for 17 months and

violently evacuated a few days ago. The action attracted 20,000 people and was concentrated in the area near to Brukman where workers from the company, railway workers, piqueteros and workers from Zanón spoke. Then they left for the Plaza de Mayo where they heard speeches from political and social leaders, with a worker from Brukman speaking finally. The slogans were: 'Imperialism out of Iraq'; 'neither Menem nor Kischner'; 'Brukman belongs to the workers' and 'freedom for the piqueteros imprisoned for struggling'.

Big bang in slow motion

10 June 2003, by **László Andor**



The current enlargement round has been called the 'big bang' because it is taking place with ten states at once. However, this is a big bang in slow motion since, unlike the German case, it has been taking place in a multilateral and bureaucratic way, within a time span of more than ten years.

In the history of post-communist re-integration, there have been two major decisions that shaped the institutional framework for the Eastern bloc (apart from East Germany). First, in June 1993, the EU summit in Copenhagen announced that the former socialist countries could eventually become members of the union, provided they comply with particular criteria in both politics and economics. Second, at the end of 1999, the EU announced its readiness for a broad enlargement up to ten new member states in the East and the Mediterranean. Both decisions were made for good reasons.

In the early 1990s, the so-called transition to the market economy demanded a 20-30 per cent decline in GDP from the post-communist economies. The nations that freed

themselves from the hug of the Russian bear realized that soon they would drown in the stormy ocean of the global markets, or they would be drawn into those by the IMF and the World Bank. The London based EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) remained a shadow of its promised self under the presidency of first Jacques Attali and later Jacques de Larosiere, and Phare aid [the EU's largest non-refundable finance programme] never amounted to a level anyone would have called serious. A 'Marshall Plan' for the East was repeatedly ruled out with the argument that in our times private capital investment plays the same role. In addition, Brussels started to make free trade agreements with the governments of East Central Europe, which rapidly changed the trade balance of the two regions to the benefit of the West.

Having spent four decades in a bath of crocodile tears, and witnessing the dismal consequences of neoliberal economics in the East, Western Europe was unable to reject the demands that the Eastern gates of the Union should be left open, even if Eastern applicants would have to wait until Austria and the Nordic states settle themselves inside the fortress.

In the mid 1990s, the Eastern policy of the EU was based on the assumption that the promise of accession and the case-by-case measurement of country performance provided sufficient leverage to generate reforms, harmonization and adjustment among the applicants, and the early promise of Eastward openness could be fulfilled by just a couple of show cases. The factor that destroyed this strategy was the war launched by NATO against Yugoslavia, without the approval of the United Nations, in Spring 1999. Western governments realized that if they did not want to leave the job of stabilization to the US air force, they needed to do something region wide. Under the presidency of Finland, the EU came out with the policy of the big bang, which was of course an insult to the top performers of the Copenhagen criteria and legal harmonization, but more adequate to handle the general problems of East-Central Europe and prevent the total Balkanization of this region.

The motives in the East can be detected more easily. For a while in the 1990s, the new political elites in the East feared restoration and in order to consolidate the achievements of the transition they wanted to join everything Western. NATO or EU, it doesn't matter, whichever comes

sooner we join - that was the mood of the mid-90s. For a few countries in the middle of the region, namely Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, NATO came first. They were happy to take advantage of the 'window of opportunity' partly because they interpreted NATO membership as an advance leap towards membership in the EU as well.

The endeavour of joining the 'Euro-Atlantic community' has made much of the Eastern political elites blind to the emerging divisions between North America and Western Europe, and the repercussions of that came to damage intra-European confidence before and during the recent war against Iraq, in the period before the accession treaties had to be signed in Athens and put to referendum in the accession countries themselves. Nevertheless, it is clear that accession to the EU is not a deliberate choice between America and Franco-German Europe in the eyes of the new member states.



Another paradox of the enlargement deal is that by the time that the ten country accession became reality, the EU had locked itself into a situation where financial assistance to the new members must be kept at a minimum level. At the same time, the pro-European Easterners have also locked themselves into a situation in which they were prepared to accept virtually anything if accession can eventually take place. It is undeniable that the perspective of EU membership has generated business confidence in recent years, but it is also true that accession to the EU will manifest itself in hardly noticeable improvements in the coming years. Most people in the East do not see this as fair compensation for the losses, sacrifices

and adjustment of the 1990s.

The extremely low turnout in Hungary at the referendum on EU membership is clearly a judgment on what terms the EU offers in a material sense to this country that otherwise has always been the most enthusiastic of the candidates. This is also an expression of disillusionment with the whole transition process that started in the apparently euphoric year of 1989. The IMF or the World Bank have never exposed themselves to a referendum, and now much of the economic disappointment is expressed against the European Union, which is actually the only organization that holds at least the potential to rectify this decade long market failure. Short of tangible material gains, pro-Europeans in Hungary had to rely on historical arguments like "EU accession would undo the consequences of World War One", a story that would hardly be functional in Poland.

Of course, some arguments from the pro-EU camp itself have hurt the cause of accession. Some economic experts had claimed that joining the EU would demand an adjustment similar to the early 1990s, which obviously frightens the survivors of those times. It was not a good advert either when EU-enthusiasts who wanted to turn the weak negotiating position of the applicant governments into a virtue claimed that we should not expect ourselves to be able to influence the rules of the club we want to join. Such claims do not bring an allegedly democratic community closer to the hearts of people with still vivid memories of relations with another great Union.

In certain areas of integration, misconceptions are still in progress. Similarly to the failure to distinguish between the importance of joining

NATO and the EU, the political circles leading the new East-Central bloc are headed towards another failure which is the inability to separate accession to the EU from the introduction of the euro. The Maastricht criteria have caused long-term headaches to a multitude of ministers in the West in the 1990s, and macroeconomic adjustment is expected to be even more painful in countries where the economies are still catching up and a rate of inflation that does not threaten real economic growth is estimated to be higher than the Western average. A forced compliance with Maastricht and the stability and growth pact can easily result in a break down of economic progress in the region, with appalling consequences for the pro-European political tendencies and free supply of political ammunition to the anti-European nationalists.

The widespread ignorance about the monetary problems shows that the mismanaged unification of the two Germanys has not been sufficiently studied by other re-capitalized countries of the region, and some of those might as well be repeated in the coming years. In order to find a better way, therefore, one should see that German unification was not a pilot project for the coming Eastward enlargement. If the single market with the single currency is compared to the arrangements of the United States, one can argue that the Eastward enlargement is as if Mexico was adopted as the 51st state of the US.

The development gap between East and West can only be treated with a level of re-distribution at least twice as high as the current level. At present, such an idea looks like a non-starter in Brussels. At the end of the day, however, Europe will have to open itself to new economic solutions to handle the new types of problems that the newcomers bring with themselves into the enlarged Union.