



## IV346 - December 2002

### Towards a European left party

14 December 2002, by **François Vercammen**



To this end, the PRC had put forward a document, 'Contribution of the PRC to the discussion on a European Alternative Left', which approached the problems under discussion in four chapters: 'For a Europe of peace', 'For a Europe of economic, social and environmental rights', 'For a democratic Europe', 'The alternative left for Europe'.

A number of organizations from the mainstream Communist Party tradition were present at the meeting: from France, the PCF; from Portugal, the PCP; from the Spanish state: the PCE, Izquierda Unida (IU) and Esquerra unida i alternativa Catalunya; from Greece: the KKE, Synaspismos (a split from the KKE) and Dikiki (a split from the 'nationalist left' of PASOK); from Germany, the PDS and the DKP; from Austria, the KP; from Luxemburg, 'La Gauche'; from Holland, the Socialist Party (of Maoist/Marxist-Leninist origin); from the Czech republic, the CP of Bohemia and Moravia; from Cyprus, AKEL; and finally the Israeli CP (it should be said that some of these organizations have attended meetings of the Conference of the European Anti-capitalist Left: the PRC (member), La Gauche (member), the Dutch SP (participant), the IU and DKP (guests).

Also present were a range of organizations from the radical left; the Bloco de Esquerda ('Left Bloc' - Portugal); the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (France); the Socialist Alliance (England) and Socialist Workers Party (Britain); the Scottish Socialist Party (Scotland); and the Red Green Alliance (Denmark). Both the agenda and the participants were exceptional. For the first time in history, organizations from the CP tradition agreed to debate the radical left on the basis of a political text with the perspective of a new European party of the alternative left.

### The PRC: the bridge

Only the PRC was in a situation to take such an initiative. This party holds a position as intermediary - 'bridge' as they put it - between the two currents that exist inside this 'alternative left'. Originating as a minority split from the break up of the old PCI in 1992, it succeeded in distancing itself from the heritage of the PCI through the big struggles of 1993-95 and the experience of the Prodi government, at the price of two splits. Subsequently, the battle of Genoa and the emergence of a 'movement of movements', the strongest in Europe, have led to a veritable refoundation of Rifondazione, at its congress in April

2002. [1]



This refoundation is reflected in the new Party programme (and the discourse-programme of Bertinotti), which breaks with Stalinism, including the rightist aspects of Togliattism. At the same time, an internal reorganization has allowed radical currents (like the comrades of 'Bandiera Rossa') to participate in the leadership of the Party, creating a genuinely pluralist party. This political transformation of the PRC is one of the determinant elements serving to sharpen differentiation within the CP tradition.

A sort of triangle has emerged, with the other poles represented by the PCF, which supports a social-liberal politics, including participation in government, and the KKE, which is attached to the Stalinist heritage and the domination of the CP over the social movement, combining a social radicalism in the struggles and a 'blind' anti-imperialism (pro-Milosevic and pro-Saddam) with the rejection of the new radicalization incarnated by the global justice movement.

This radical evolution of the PRC has allowed its leadership to adopt a new approach to the radical left, still very much a minority current, but very

active in the social movements and making progress on the electoral front.

Responding to the results of the French elections, the PRC newspaper commented: 'these elections have definitively closed the history of the centre-left in Europe and in the world. (...) In France, as in Italy and Europe, refoundation is on the agenda'. [2]

## The debate

In general, the parties present intervened in the discussion, without engaging in debate, although the opinions held are firm and the contradictions strong. For the CP tradition debate of this kind is not a habit, unlike in the Conferences of the Anti-capitalist Left.

The interventions were similar enough: 'a tip of the hat' to the PRC, a presentation resting on their analyses and activity, a verbal agreement on the dual proposal of common lists for the European elections of June 2004 and a European political party of the alternative left. However, the document prepared by the PRC, which is supposed to be the basis of a political agreement, was effectively forgotten.

The only 'dialectical' moment of the second day was the debate between the LCR and the PCF concerning the government of the plural left. Our viewpoints are known: the dynamic of the situation is determined by the politics of war and neo-liberal offensive with the EU as institutional structure. It is necessary to oppose it radically through political campaigns, social mobilizations, a break with the EU and the fight for another Europe.

That presupposes an alternative programme, social and democratic, which involves throwing the EU into crisis. There is certainly a space to act together; we can align around convergences. The political test is that of government: to participate in a government dominated by social-democracy on a social liberal

programme is incompatible with an overall strategy which seeks to break this offensive and force through a programme entirely favourable to the exploited and oppressed classes.

The tension in the room mounted several degrees: the spectacle had no precedent. However there was no clash; on the contrary, the PCF representative argued point by point against the LCR, defending the line of Hue and the experience of the PCF in the Jospin government, while entering some corrections for the future.

## Radical left and social-liberal left



The dynamic in the workers' and social movement points very clearly to the polarization between the social-liberal left, with European social-democracy as its motor force, and the radical left which defends an anti-capitalist alternative. That is not entirely the end of the problem, however.

The emergence of the global justice movement profoundly affects analyses of society, political line, modes of organization, and behaviour on the ground. It throws down a challenge to all the political parties, as across the world millions of the young and not so young occupy the street and hundreds of thousands are engaged in building 'new' organizations. A broad reorganization of the workers' and social movement is underway.

The social-democratic parties today are in difficulty after their expulsion from government (and even in government in Britain and Germany!), will try to rebuild in opposition, without abandoning the neo-liberal programme. Unity of action with them around concrete demands is not to be ruled out. For the 'moderate' CPs the temptation to 'prepare' the advent of a new 'centre-left' is very strong. That is what is happening with the IU in

Spain. It is not ruled out that it will happen in Greece (PASOK + Synaspismos). The test will continue, manifestly in a political situation which will be much more tense and under the pressure of social mobilizations, massive strikes, citizens' and ecologist struggles, and so on. The process of clarification - social-liberal left versus radical left - will deepen in the light of these new experiences. We must follow the behaviour of the CPs attentively.

On the other hand the political party/social movement relationship is affected by the strength - still very unequal from country to country in Europe - of the 'movement of movements', its mobilizations and political potentialities. One aspect of this, and not the least, is the (re)conquest, by a new generation, of the political sphere. That tends to relegate political parties to their most basic function: offering lists at elections. The activists in the 'movement' consider it as a 'political entity' in itself (a 'political subject', as the Italians say) and are not ready to delegate their votes and opinions to the political parties of the establishment. That also goes for the 'revolutionary parties' or rather the nuclei of such parties, often tiny and sectarian. To work now on building a pluralist anti-capitalist 'party' which can approach this new 'subjective' situation implies a new approach.

The experience of the PRC - in the country that constitutes the centre of gravity in Europe - is of great interest: a party that positions itself in parity with the social movement, without seeking hegemony or manipulation. Its activity around the European Social Forum (ESF) and in the 'demonstration of one million' was exemplary.

This is a challenge not only to the CPs but also to the revolutionary left. If the PRC has started down the road to a European party, there is still a lot of hard ground to cover. The Conference of the European Anti-capitalist Left in Copenhagen (in early December) will be the next stage.

# "If not now, when?"

**14 December 2002, by Rifondazione - PRC**

This puts in question 'all the political equilibria, the international institutions, the conception and the exercise of democracy'. In this context, the European Union (EU) has not been able to play a decisive or effective role. On the contrary, 'never has it been so obvious that, in such a difficult situation, the EU - an economic giant - is from every point of view a political dwarf'. Having enumerated the setbacks of the EU and the contradictions which exist, the PRC 'opposes the establishment of a European army, which can only have offensive objectives. The current anti-war movement, unlike that against the war in Kosovo, aspires to express a hegemonic representation, a majority in Western society'... It is in the process of forming a system of alliances which involve the non-traditional pacifist sectors and collaborates closely with workers' organizations (...). One of the main reasons for this change of tendency is certainly the emergence since last year of a new movement against globalization (...). Thus, opposition to the war is growing and involves social and economic, as well as political, aspects'. After having noted that 'the process of economic integration' is currently in deep crisis and that there is 'an intrinsic fragility of the institutions of political sovereignty', the PRC 'cannot avoid expressing an extremely negative judgment of the Treaties'. It denounces 'the privatization of strategic public sectors (electricity, water,

telecommunications, transport and so on) and harsh cuts in social expenditure (pensions, health, education, employment policy)'. 'These policies have not only been applied by the traditional conservative forces, but also with the support of the forces of European social democracy over the last 15 years'. The opposition can only come by mass mobilizations of the trade unions, ecologist associations and so on as well as the 'movement of movements'. These mobilizations do not have a clear political representation; in particular, the new movements are not represented by the political forces who have formed the various centre-left governments in Europe. The PRC proposes two axes; 'a Europe of economic, social and environmental rights' and 'a democratic Europe' concretized in a series of demands and proposals.

An alternative left for Europe can be built on the basis of 'a political space to the left of social democracy which allows the reproposal of the issues and themes that have been abandoned for a long time by the moderate left. For the moment, it lacks a truly organic vision of the world, and the defeats of recent decades have given this alternative left a feeling of marginality. In reality, it potentially possesses an enormous capacity for transformation, symbolic and concrete, faced with the crisis of civilization that faces our continent.

We can deduce from this that a political Europe is possible under the impulsion of a great battle based on the general interests of all in recuperating the best traditions of the workers' movement. To this end, a broadly shared initiative should be prepared around themes of social justice and an alternative economic policy, which could be an essential step towards an alternative platform for the next European elections in 2004. The second consideration is motivated by the fact that on the list of forces that constitute the new alternative there are not only political parties.

The movement of movements is a fundamental actor for change in this historic phase and the themes that it proposes largely coincide largely with our priorities. We know also that to avoid remaining in a minority in relation to the moderate left it is absolutely decisive to remain in the movement, both in terms of political project and concrete opportunities to enter into contact with the diverse social realities (...). An open and non-bureaucratic approach, which would respect national particularities, - including in relation to the perspective of the next European elections - could create such a 'political entity. The task that faces the alternative left is, then, ambitious, but it should no longer be put off.

Moreover, 'if now is not the time to do it, when will it be?'

## **Birth of a new European social movement**

**14 December 2002, by François Vercammen**

Before any analytical consideration, we should recognize the scale of this event: the 65,000 people who for three days (November 7-9) filled the 'Fortezza da basso' (the 'fortress from below' - an appropriate name!) the 400 plus spaces of discussion, a profusion of documents, articles, books, leaflets, pamphlets; a multitude of informal exchanges and networking; proposals, actions, campaigns. The ESF: a joyous fair, a popular university, a constituent assembly, an international and internationalist community, a new movement which is organizing itself: a dizzying birth full of triumphant energy.

The demonstration: an unforgettable show of strength, an aspiration to utopia, and a youth which seizes hold of politics. Thousands of placards, banners and red flags; 'a million' voices that shouted their opposition to war, and beyond that their desire for another world and another Europe, another life for the whole planet. But not without concerns: the joyous perspective of 'another world and another Europe' was overshadowed by the war that is being prepared and the economic catastrophe which is threatened, the unbearable irresponsibility of the dominant classes who do not hesitate to repress, imprison and kill.

## The battle for Florence

Before speaking about the ESF itself, let's review the immediately preceding period. During the weeks up to the demonstration on Saturday afternoon, the risk of a violent repression 'like Genoa' had hung over our heads. The Berlusconi government had demanded and obtained suspension of the Schengen agreement from the other governments of the European Union [EU]: the ability to bar foreigners from access to Italian territory. The ESF, it was said, should be 'cancelled', then 'postponed' for some weeks, then 'moved' to another town apart from Florence... the more the fateful date approached, the more the campaign of criminalization orchestrated by the Berlusconi government intensified. The fact that 'Corriere della Sera',

which thinks of itself as Italy's most serious newspaper opened its pages to a hysterical diatribe by Oriana Fallaci where all the anguished nightmares of 'Western civilization' were deployed (Islam, terrorism, the Black Block, the return of Communism, the sacking of Florence, historic capital of Western civilization... everything but the 'yellow peril'!) was a sign of the repressive scenario openly unfolding. As was the bringing of charges against 40 activists for their participation in the demonstrations in Naples in April 2001 and Genoa in July 2001 (on the basis of a Mussolini-era law concerning the 'establishment of a subversive organization'!)

It should be concluded that the attempt to smother this immensely popular movement through legal or violent means has not succeeded. Hence, another approach is adopted: to integrate or co-opt the movement, through the agencies of social democracy and... the state subsidies.

A lesson should be drawn for the next meeting of the ESF, and the one after that; to exist, meet, and demonstrate as a European movement will be a test of strength. The Europeanization of the social, political and citizen's movements will obviously take place against the EU governments, which shows what they are really thinking when they speak of the 'European Union'.

## A genuinely European movement

The Florence meeting undoubtedly marks the birth of a new European social movement.

The ESF was genuinely European in its composition, leadership, elaboration, themes, social and political pluralism, as well as in the diversity of its committees, associations and movements. The preceding counter summits had certainly attracted participants from all EU countries, but it was the host country which had largely taken the initiative and the bulk of the organization, agenda, participation,

speaking duties, respective weight of movements and so on. Thus, the very successful counter summit in the Spanish state (in early 2002), with its multiple mass demonstrations (200,000 in Barcelona) was very marked by the national, indeed regional context - with foreign delegations very much in the minority.

It is not by chance that the meeting in Florence was not a 'counter summit', but the first meeting of the ESF. The latter was the result of long preparation and systematic work from March 2002 onwards, on a Europe-wide level and calling on all the know how and strength accumulated over the years. A real 'European coordination' was thus set up through a process of collaboration on the basis of movements and activists who had shown their worth. Meetings took place in Brussels, Vienna, Thessalonica, Brussels again, Rome, Barcelona and Florence. The Internet allowed all those interested to follow, communicate, influence, and intervene. Parallel to this, the Italian coordinating group carried out impeccable work both on the political, organizational and infrastructural levels. Above all, that meant systematically creating a consensus, which could not be flabby at the risk of mortgaging the implementation of decisions.



Without the strength of Italian comrades - based on the incomparable rise of the movement and the political ambiance in that country and their experience on the ground - there would not have been an ESF on this scale, depth or national and European importance. Nor would it have been possible without the involvement, from the beginning, of the non-Italian movements. A systematically inclusive, often laborious approach was needed to 'Europeanize' the project. It has borne fruit and created a participatory international dynamic. Around 20,000 of those who attended the Forum came from outside Italy. That was unexpected, because if it is easy enough to arrange a multinational panel of speakers, the same is not true of audiences. Indeed, in the places of



discussion (lectures, workshops and so on), there was a great 'national' diversity (obvious from the earphones of the listeners and the booths for the translators). That was also apparent from the political material that was massively circulated in every language of the European continent.

Two weaknesses were apparent. First, the ESF was essentially an affair of 'Latin Europe' compensated to some extent by an extraordinary anti-war mobilization from Britain and a strong and representative presence from other countries. Geographical distance was not the sole reason. The youth and social radicalization is still very unequal in Europe. Even in the turbulent zone of southern Europe, the socio-political conjuncture and the state of the 'movement' are very unequal, Italy and Greece being the most advanced. Secondly, there is a considerable backwardness in the development of a political-programmatic position on the EU; it is striking that there does not yet exist any programmatic 'common sense' in relation to the EU as there is in relation to globalised capitalism and its institutions. The style of debate, with a plethora of speakers - following the legitimate demand for national and ideological pluralism - favoured neither the exchange of views among speakers nor intervention from the floor. However, this is only the beginning.

What has been established is a first structuring of the movement, a rare cohesion, a will to go forward, an already concretized perspective of actions and campaigns that can influence the political situation in Europe.

## **The hazards of European identity**

All the organizational efforts in the world (and Europe!) are vain if there is not a strong level of political conviction. 'European' identity (consciousness) has certainly been born through an accidental and often paradoxical process, but under the best auspices possible, those of mobilization from below 'for another Europe', breaking with the EU, its

institutions and politics.

The defeats of the traditional workers' and trade union movement in the 1980s and 1990s, the 20 years of quasi-total neo-liberal hegemony over society and state institutions, the active complicity of European social democracy; all this had sapped traditional socialist activity. Apart from this tradition, which is more than a century old, 'new' movements, weak but symbolic and very legitimate (like the movement for the cancellation of the Third World debt or the European marches against unemployment) have revalorized social action and critical thought, while an active and generous youth was captivated by themes of ecology and aid to the Third World.

At the same time, from the early 1990s, mobilizations began, on a reduced scale, to challenge the role of the international financial institutions. Big workers' mobilizations (notably the huge general strikes in Belgium, Spain, Italy, Greece) were not uncommon, but despite their massive and heated character, the workers' movement had lost both its propulsive and its attractive capacity in relation to the rest of society. The mass strikes in France during the winter of 1995 were a political turning point in that country, but with little European impact, except on the very politicized and very optimistic layers of the radical left. The European Marches against unemployment - a French initiative - brought people from all over Europe to the EU summit in Amsterdam in June 1997 and launched the first real European social movement of the new period. A 'new' social question emerged in this wealthy Europe, directly related to the conditions of existence of the poorest layers. It laid the keystone of the edifice that would be the ESF. But it remained very marginal in two senses: the workers' movement, under the thumb of social democracy, remained apart (indeed openly hostile) and the activist sectors of the ecological movement and Third Worldist movements were above all focused around the international institutions of globalized capitalism (the IMF, World Bank, WTO trio). The European 'centre' was by far the most active and organized, but it was outside of Europe that the new movement caught

the world imagination: the confrontations in Seattle (November 1999) and the Social Forums in Porto Alegre (in early 2001 and 2002).

## **From 'anti-globalization' to Europe**

Paradoxically, when the movement in Europe reacted to Seattle it defined itself in opposition to 'globalization' and largely ignored the EU (its role, politics and so on) and even if there was demonstrations and meetings at the Lisbon, Nice and Gothenburg EU summits, they were over-determined by the 'global' problematic. The real founding battle of the movement on the European continent concerned a meeting of the G7+1. The confrontation at Genoa (desired, planned and applied by Berlusconi) in July 2001 would mark forever the consciousness of the young and less young of the movement. First, by the attempt to break the latter through levels of state violence unseen for 25 years. The moral victory that followed has spread across the continent beyond actively engaged or politicized activists. However, another decisive awakening took place: that the EU governments have policies that attack the living conditions of people in Italy and in Europe. The problematic of the EU as supranational state is transforming the movement. First because in Italy, and uniquely there for the moment, a dynamic interaction between the 'movement of movements' and the traditional workers' movement exists and the latter is drawn to participation in the social struggles. Secondly, the new social movement and the classic trade union movement are being pushed into demonstrations against the EU. At Brussels, in December 2001, there were 20,000 in the street, the ETUC having mobilized 60,000 workers the previous day. The movement survived September 11, despite the media steamroller - don't demonstrate or raise demands when we are at war, when the West is threatened by 'barbarians'! In Spain in spring 2002 there were an impressive series of mass demonstrations - all under the threat of violent repression. Nothing

came of it. In Barcelona, we were 200,000 strong! And the élan of the movement was not misplaced, given the complete success of the 24-hour general strike and the fact that the Spanish trade union movement had dared to call it.

It is 'our' dominant classes, and the neo-liberal and social liberal parties, who have taught the movement how and why to transform the European anti-globalization movement into a movement of social combat in our countries and against the EU. A concrete European identity for the movement has been forged through a series of battles to exist and survive and the decision by the World Social Forum (WSF) in January 2002 in Porto Alegre to organise 'regional' Forums was timely.

## The rediscovery of the EU

In decentralizing the WSF towards the different continents, in this case Europe, the Social Forum changed its nature: from a propaganda movement, it became a movement of action intervening, alongside others, in the everyday life of workers, youth, women, immigrants... with all the consequences that flow from that.

This first happened at the Italian Social Forum (in Genoa). All of a sudden, it became the centre of gravity in Europe of the revival of the workers' and social movement as a whole. Very quickly after the events of July 2001, the Italian SF spread and rooted itself in hundreds of towns and municipalities across the country, creating links and convergences between the nuclei of the movements, participating, initiating, and strengthening the various struggles; anti-war, anti-authoritarian, for civic rights, as well as workers' mobilizations. It amounts to a veritable centre and a political laboratory for the whole continent. It is alone, for the moment, in its scale and depth. But the tendency is the same everywhere: the ESF and its movements are caught up in the thread work of society.

More precisely, the 'movement of

movements' - as it is called - faces the social question - that of the living and working conditions of the mass of the population - and the political question - the range of means to impose themselves on the state-institutional structures. This is a problematic of another dimension and order. This passage is complicated: the 'movement' as such is not prepared for this (even if the leaders and activists are!); and 'the movements' which compose 'the movement' are still less so, because of their heterogeneity (in terms of themes, organizations, functioning, behaviour, immediate and fundamental objectives, formal and informal links with society, sociological nature, material base and so on): the big/subsidized and small/self-sufficient NGOs; the movements for the defence of human rights, Amnesty International, ARCI (Italian Cultural Association, of Catholic origin, with a million members), the Social Centres, the trade union structures... It amounts to a genuinely complex dialectic. Formally, 'the movement' - general - is nothing other than the sum of the component movements. In the concrete, it is supported by cadres and activists who are deeply involved and who in fact commit 'their specific movement'. They often identify 'intuitively' with the strong programmatic ideas ('another world is possible', 'the world is not for sale') and the large-scale initiatives (like the appeal of the social movements). In other words, they practice politics in the strongest sense of the term: all the basic questions of life in society are approached. They constitute de facto 'political entities' ('political subjects' as the Italians say) which concern themselves with the entire public sphere, apart from that of elections and political parties. But nobody is fooled: the links between the movements and the politicians (parties and governments) are multiple and continuous. And the most 'anti-party' actors of the movement are not averse to making contact, 'on an individual basis' and 'without committing the movement' (sic) with the political-politician world.

More complicated still is the eruption of 'society from below' faced with a movement which developed 'from above', often starting from small

nuclei, around determined themes and group methods of work - with a certain type of mentality which goes with all that. Bertinotti, the secretary of Rifondazione Comunista, says correctly that 'the movement' "is highly 'self-centred'": its practical priority is its own development and reinforcement. It amounts to a process of establishment of a new socio-political movement. The leading layers reason on the basis of this priority: the mastering of internal contradictions, that is the unity of the movement, is determinant. It is not artificial for it embodies considerable gains which have made it a political factor of the first level on a world scale. But the unavoidable necessity of intervening directly into society, "in the day to day", raises all the questions around strategy, tactics and demands. The wage earning class, with its struggles, mobilizations, demands and organizations, is moving into action. It reminds the 'movement' which, starting from Seattle/Genoa, has unblocked the historic impasse of the workers' movement, that without a majority social force one cannot change the relationship of forces with the dominant class and its state. More than that: 'the movement' needs help in order to realize its own demands. The meeting between the 'movement of movements' and the 'real movement' of the wage earning class will regenerate and reorganize the social movement overall on an anti-capitalist, internationalist, feminist and ecologist basis.

## Radical left vs. social liberal left

Speaking politically, Florence was the theatre of a clash not seen since 1968, between the radical left and the social democratic left.

The second meeting of the WSF in Porto Alegre (January 2002) had heralded the fact: social democracy could not continue to ignore 'the movement'. The appearance of the political leaders of the Second International in Brazil was a first attempt at rapprochement with the aim of regaining credibility, notably among the young generation.

Florence went further: the European trade union movement, the ETUC and several of its trade union organizations, 'demanded' to participate. Thus, in accordance with the rules established by the ESF, they organized several spaces of discussion, participated in big debates with the currents of the trade union left, and sent delegations to the mass demonstration. It was the CGIL, the main Italian organization, which demanded to lead a contingent of 200,000 of its members in the demonstration, and contributed to its stewarding! The (main) French, Spanish, Greek, German, and Belgian leaders spoke and many of the cadres and activists were either sent by their leaderships, or came under their own steam. Moreover, the political wing of social democracy had asked to participate in the central debate (5,000 participants) where 'the representatives of the social movement question the political parties', each European current being represented: Besancenot (LCR, France, anti-capitalist left), Elio di Rupo (PS, French speaking Belgium, social democratic), Rosy Bindy (Christian left), Bertinotti (PRC), a German deputy (Greens)... as well as Cassen (ATTAC), Nineman ('Globalize Resistance') and so on.

Two remarks can be made. First, something unprecedented: the radical left (in the broadest sense of the term) has - in political debate and in the streets - imposed a 'united front' on social democracy, still largely in the majority in the workers' movement, itself very much in the majority inside the working class. It amounts to a real victory, contrary to what the ultra-left currents think (they wish to expel the social democrats from the ESF). Symbolically, first: these people did everything in their power to boycott and break our movement. When the social democrats dominated the governments and institutions of the EU, between 1998 and 2001, they attempted to stop European demonstrations. Jospin, D'Alema and others had blocked the frontiers. They allowed police to fire on demonstrators (Gothenburg); the European Council of Interior Ministers

drew up a tactic to crush the movement in early 2001 (implemented in Naples, Gothenburg, Genoa...). In Florence, they came to 'Canossa', to make honorable amends! More importantly for the future, in going themselves to the ESF the social democratic leaders (political and trade union) could no longer prevent 'their' militants from getting involved also, and deeply; that goes for the trade union sectors, in the minority in their Confederation, and delegates and militants: the perspective of a 'European trade union left' is thrown up.

Hence the battle between a radical left, strengthened, and a social liberal left with weakened hegemony, is put on the public agenda at a European level. It is fundamental. It is immediately pertinent. With the probable war against Iraq in the short term, an economic recession, with governments in Europe of the aggressive right and some weighty social liberals (Blair, Schröder, Sweden, Greece): political clarification to will advance at a high velocity, including 'in the street'. In such a conjuncture, and such a relation of forces, the fight to refound the workers'/social movement on an anti-capitalist basis is on the agenda.

## In perspective

For the radical (social and political) left, the first priority is deploying itself within European society, starting from the ESF: its campaigns, initiatives, networks, and co-ordinations. Besides the anti-war movement, a campaign for social rights is a priority (not the only one) for stopping the uninterrupted neo-liberal offensive. It is a huge political issue, because such a campaign, waged in every EU country over several years opens a unifying field of social activity. The fight for rights directly draws in all the parties, singularly the social liberals and the governments, obliging them to take a position. That poses the question of the relationship with the EU, as state structure, and the obligation on the movement to define a programme that deals with all the questions of a

European/internationalist alternative.

The EU has passed to a new imperialist-neo-liberal offensive, very concentrated in time, from now until June 2004 (the date of the next European elections). That will lead to a convergence between the political parties and the social movement; more precisely, it will push this latter to concern itself with politics.

It is on the basis of these coordinates that the revolutionary left must conceive its construction. If this analysis is correct, the crisis of the social liberal programme (which remains the line of European social democracy) should free the live forces until now dominated by the social democrats, the trade union bureaucracies and the associated left parties (some CPs and Greens). The 'movement of movements' can be the spearhead, the pole of attraction and can strongly influence the political dynamic - firstly in the most advanced countries.

However we should not misjudge the stage we are in. It is an intermediary stage that requires intermediary solutions. If the revolutionary left seeks, legitimately, to strengthen itself, that should not cut across the potentialities which will open at another level. The first solution is to revive and structure the trade union/social left, immediately and internationally.

Secondly, to offer a political framework adapted to the 'new' militants and affiliated to their consciousness, receptiveness, culture, behaviour - in short: a 'political education' which is anti-capitalist and pluralist, where they occupy the centre of gravity. Thirdly, faced with the aversion felt by the militant layers of the social movement towards the radical political parties, we must put forward proposals for electoral campaigns which guarantee an effective participation. That implies that the existing parties renounce any hegemonic pretence but on the contrary participate on a basis of equality in the organizational forms appropriate to common action - before, during and after.

# Final documents of the European Social Forum

14 December 2002, by **European Social Movements**

## CALL OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS (12/11/2002)

We have come together from the social and citizens' movements from all the regions of Europe, East and West, North and South. We have come together through a long process: the demonstrations of Amsterdam, Seattle, Prague, Nice, Genoa, Brussels, Barcelona, the big mobilizations against neo-liberalism as well as the general strikes for the defence of social rights and all the mobilizations against war, show the will to build another Europe. At the global level we recognize the Charter of Principles of WSF and the call of social movements of Porto Alegre.

We have gathered in Florence to express our opposition to a European order based on corporate power and neo-liberalism. This market model leads to constant attacks on the conditions and rights of workers, social inequalities and oppression of women and ethnic minorities, and social exclusion of the unemployed and migrants. It leads to environmental degradation, privatization and job insecurity. It drives powerful countries to try and dominate the economies of weaker countries, often to deny them real self determination. Once more it is leading to war.

We have come together to strengthen

and enlarge our alliances because the construction of another Europe and another world is now urgent. We seek to create a world of equality, social rights and respect for diversity, a world in which education, fair jobs, healthcare and housing are rights for all, with the right to consume safe foods produced by farmers and peasants, a world without poverty, without sexism, without racism, and without homophobia. A world that puts people before profits. A world without war.

We have come together to discuss alternatives but we must continue to enlarge our networks and to plan the campaigns and struggles that together can make this different future possible. Great movements and struggles have begun across Europe: the European social movements are representing a new and concrete possibility to build up another Europe for another world. We commit ourselves to enlarge our networks for the next year in the following mobilizations and campaigns:

- Against neo-liberalism
- Against war
- Against racism
- Against sexism and homophobia

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## ANTI WAR CALL (12.11.2002) : TO ALL CITIZENS OF

## EUROPE - TOGETHER WE CAN STOP THIS WAR!

We, the European social movements, are fighting for social rights and social justice, for democracy and against all forms of oppression.

We stand for a world of diversity, freedom and mutual respect. We believe this war, whether it has UN backing or not, will be a catastrophe for the people of Iraq - already suffering because of the embargo and the Saddam Hussein regime - and for people across the Middle East. It should be opposed by everyone who believes in democratic, political solutions to international conflicts because it will be a war with the potential to lead to global disaster.

There is a massive opposition to war in every country of Europe. Hundreds of thousands have already mobilized for peace. We call on the movements and citizens of Europe to start continent wide resistance to war, and to:

- Organise massive opposition to an attack on Iraq, starting now
- If war starts, to protest and organize actions immediately and call for national demonstrations the next Saturday
- Start organizing enormous anti war demonstrations in every capital on February 15th.

**WE CAN STOP THIS WAR!**



# Europe: a new phase

14 December 2002, by **Flavia d'Angeli** , **Olivier Besancenot**

*It's been a long road from Seattle and Porto Alegre to Florence. What conclusions do you draw from it? In particular, do you see here the basis of a new internationalism?*

**Flavia** - It seems clear to me that we are entering a new phase, where we are seeing an upturn in social struggle and also in the contesting of the established order and dominant, free-market capitalist thinking. Since Seattle, Porto Alegre, and all that came after them, the social movements of resistance to neo-liberal policies, which had been seen throughout the nineties, have taken on the necessary worldwide dimension imposed on us by the enemy, that is, by capitalist and warmongering globalization.

After more than ten years of the offensive of free market thinking, of the law of the market, we can now at last see a very real rise in social and political conflict. The movements naturally bear the weaknesses born from the defeats of the last century, but are also at last free from the hegemony of Stalinist or social-democratic thinking. I think that for the moment it is still a dynamic of resistance, rather than a strong offensive movement. But the fact that thousands of people, networks, trade unions, political parties and other organizations all around the planet are beginning to move into action and feel the need to unite their struggles across a continent or across the world, must give us hope that we are seeing the beginning of a new cycle of international struggle.



**Olivier Besancenot**

**Olivier** - The growth of this many-headed movement against capitalist

globalization is a fantastic development. Seattle was only three years ago. Of course, there were precursors. There were the NGOs, and the demonstrations against the Third World Debt. As well as the intergalactic conference which took place in Chiapas in 1996. All these prefigured today's movement, a movement in which different struggles against the globalization of exploitation and exclusion converge. Everybody remembers the declaration of Marcos: 'Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, Asian in Europe, Chicano in San Isidro, anarchist in Spain, Palestinian in Israel ... Jewish in Germany, feminist in political parties, pacifist in Bosnia ...' He was absolutely right and very far-seeing.

Since Seattle, there hasn't been a single meeting of the WTO, the World Bank, the IMF, the G7/8 or the inter-governmental conference of the EU without those who are excluded by the system, the workers, youth, women, environmental campaigners and small farmers turning up to tell the rulers of the world that they don't want their policies, and to demand a radical redistribution of wealth. There has also been the World March of Women, perhaps the biggest feminist demonstration in history, whose importance has been widely underestimated (I wonder why?) - which brought together women from more than 140 countries. The struggles of women in Afghanistan, Africa, North America and Europe are an integral part of the struggle against capitalist globalization and for a different world.

Women are the first victims of the crisis, the first to lose their jobs, the first to pay the price for the policies of economic austerity. They are also still victims of patriarchy whether in the form of fundamentalism or in the more

subtle forms you find in the West where they continue to bear the brunt of domestic tasks, suffer from discrimination at work, receive lower salaries and are victims of violence in the home and the workplace.

*Can you explain to us what has been happening in Italy since the huge demonstrations in Genoa in July of 2001?*

**Flavia** - Genoa sent a real political and social shockwave around Italy. And it didn't only affect the Right wing government who had been the main people responsible for the conscious choice to repress and criminalize the protesters in the hope of stopping the movement.

Genoa was a shock too for the parliamentary Left, who had been responsible for ten years of neo-liberal policies, dismantling the welfare state and social rights. This Left is finding it more and more difficult to come to terms with the power and the radicalism of the movement.

What the demonstrations of July 2001 did was bring together a traditional-style protest of the 'anti-globalization' movement against the illegitimacy and the injustice of the G8, with the first protest against the Berlusconi government who had just won the elections on the 13th of May. But the protests were very different from those which had forced Berlusconi to resign in 1994.

Because of the cruel repression which rained down on thousands of demonstrators, the absence of the moderate Left, particularly of DS (Left Democrats) and the absence of the CGIL in Genoa, led to a sharp break between the movement and this Left. In this way there was no possibility of the movement being 'co-opted' and used in a 'moderate' way within the

political institutions.

Lastly, I think that Genoa, and the ability of this movement to continue and to become more dynamic, have reinforced (not created of course) a greater willingness to fight in the biggest Union confederation, the CGIL. Today the CGIL, without fundamentally breaking with its line of 'getting round the negotiating table' at any price, has nevertheless been able, on its own, to mobilize a large section of the working class in two general strikes. Naturally we can't say that all that is because of Genoa, but I do think that the Social Forum movement has fertilized the ground for a wider upturn in workers' struggles.

*What do you think is the importance of the European Social Forum?*

**Flavia** - The European Social Forum in Florence is a 'historic' meeting-up. Perhaps for the first time this century, a huge number of movements, unions, parties, and individual citizens from all over the continent will get together to debate and confront their ideas, but also to coordinate present and future struggles.

And the fierce campaign of criminalization and societal 'alarm bells' run by the Italian government over the last few days just shows how important and powerful the forum is.

At the moment when the building of the European Union seems to be reaching a crucial phase of 'statification', with the drawing up of its constitution and its plans to bring in new member countries, the ESF wants to give a platform to the real owners of this construction, the citizens of Europe. It is they who suffer the most from its free-market and repressive orientations - women, workers, young people, unemployed and casual workers....

And the very idea that there might be a 'European Society' which can demand its rights and demand to be heard, throws the system into crisis. It's paradoxical that the Italian government is considering suspending the Schengen agreement on free circulation within Europe, in order to be able to stop the ESF from taking

place. And in this idea, the other European governments support the Italian government. So one of the pillars of their propaganda about a unified Europe with no frontiers between member states, is negated. There is a Europe then which cannot tolerate any form of participation or of citizens' democracy. And that is why it's essential that Florence should be a time to reinforce significantly the building of European networks of political and social struggle. In this way we can be ready for the key date in 2004, when the European Constitution will be approved, a constitution which completely ignores social rights and workers' rights.

**Olivier** - The programme of the European Social Forum is impressive. The 18 conferences, dialogues, windows on the world cover a wide field of subjects, all the aspects of neo-liberal policies. And when you add the 150 seminars which will take place in the afternoons ...: Nothing has been left out.

Of course, it's not an accident, it's because the Forum brings together all the social movements which exist in Europe. As Flavia said, it will make it possible to create and strengthen the networks and co-ordinating committees so we can begin to think on a European level (and not just within the EU) about the sort of fightback we need against the neo-liberal offensive of the European Union and all the governments of left and right. It can also help get over the problem of sectional and local movements, and avoid the risk of corporatism and nationalism.

Finally, one of the goals is to come out of these three days of debate with two declarations - one against the war planned in Iraq which could be the founding charter of a European anti-war movement. The second, coming out of the social movements, could be the first Europe-wide platform against the neo-liberal offensive. It is also important to make sure that these two questions are the central themes of the Saturday afternoon demonstration which everyone expects to be massive.

*Flavia and Olivier, you'll both be taking part in a meeting entitled 'The Left of the Future - young people*

*between the anti-capitalist Left and the social movements.'* How do you analyze the radicalization of young people, particularly clear in their participation in the movement against capitalist globalisation?

**Flavia** - It seems to me that one of the characteristics of this new phase in global struggle is exactly that - the appearance of a new generation of activists. Young people all over the world are one of the sections of society the most under attack from the dogmas of the free market, pushed into precarious jobs and precarious lives. And for the first time, in the countries of the North, they are faced with a significant fall in their standard of life compared with that of their parents. These young people in revolt are therefore obviously massively present in the demonstrations of the movement, as we saw in Seattle, in Genoa, in the streets of Buenos Aires or in the 'Carlo Giuliani' camp at Porto Alegre.

But at the same time, this new generation is not 'leading' the movement, which is too often the preferred role of 'old' activist cadre. This kind of division between old and new is also present in the political parties, all the parties, and also in the trade unions and other large organizations. Naturally, every new generation looks for and finds its own ways of being radical, its own language and its own forms of political action. But it seems to me that now there is something more. We are seeing the first great wave of social movements after 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of so-called 'really existing socialism'. This new generation is both a child of the historic defeat of the nineteen nineties and also 'virgin' with respect to Stalinist discourse. It is a generation of which at least the most conscious section is not only seeking 'another world' but the very words to define it. It is a generation which is both very radical and 'illiterate' about strategy.

Of course, it won't be enough to give them lectures in socialism - that would be absurd. But it will be necessary, within and along with this new generation, to build the tools and the methods to look for this alternative: the ESF can be one of them. This

alternative will necessarily call itself by a different name than it has in the past. It won't be enough to preach the difference between 'communism and Stalinism.' We will have to show proof, temporary but real proof, that socialism is possible: democratic, self-governing and self-determined, libertarian, participative, respecting both genders...

Then afterwards, we will give a name to the alternative!

**Olivier** - The arrival of a new generation on the social scene can be seen in different ways. In France, it's young people who have taken the first significant lead in the fight against precarity, especially in firms like McDonald's, Pizza Hut or in the telecom sector. And they have invented new forms of organization and struggle. We've seen a cohabitation - which hasn't always been easy - between mass meetings, strike committees, support committees and unions. Young people have also been present at all the anti-capitalist globalization demonstrations like Millau and Nice. And there was the huge and never-to-be-forgotten demo against the far right and the Front National between the two rounds of the presidential election. It was young people who were the detonator and the active part of the movement from the evening of the first round. The high point was the 1st May, when the different contingents taking part were the biggest since 1968. Those who say these demonstrations were a flash in the pan are wrong. They are the first signs of the inevitable emergence of young people on the political and social scene.

I don't usually make bets, but I'm ready to bet ten to one that the youth will be there to build an anti-war movement in opposition to the imperial policy of the United States and to prepare the mobilization for the Ascension weekend in 2003 when the G8 holds its summit in Evian.

*In Europe, these last 20 years have seen free-market policies and attacks, produced sometimes by left wing parties and sometimes by right wing ones. How can we move forward in*

*building a real anti-capitalist alternative capable of contesting the hegemony of social democracy in your country and across the whole of Europe and how do you see the relationship between this anti-capitalist left which we have to build and the workers' movement?*

**Flavia** - I think it is in the social movement, and particularly in the movement against this globalization that there must be the space, which needs to be strengthened, to build an alternative anti-capitalist Left, nationally and at a European level. The movement is constantly pushed into occupying a political space because of the vertical crisis of the social democratic Left which has followed neo-liberal policies in almost every country in Europe. So we have to be able to keep the openness and the broad unity of the movement so as to be able to build opposition fronts such as the one against the war. At the same time we need to be absolutely determined to maintain the radical nature of our demands and programmes, by linking, for example, a broad 'moral' opposition to the war with a general contesting of the social economic and political system which breeds war, and needs war, as a response to its own crises.



My opinion, at least based on the situation in Italy, is that this anti-capitalist Left must either be inside the movement and useful to the movement, to all the movements, or it won't exist at all. After the errors and defeats of the previous century, but also because of the inspiring attempts at emancipation and liberation which marked the twentieth century, the 'political' left is today very weak. Only the continuous proof of its social utility will be able to give it mass credibility again. This doesn't mean that parties and other specifically political forces no longer have a role to play, or that the only important thing is day to day participation in the movements. On the contrary, it means that the strong and organized involvement of these organizations, if they are visible and at the same time modest, capable of listening to people

and working together with the movements without claiming to have the whole truth, should be able to be the way to the building of a new revolutionary anti-capitalist Left.

**Olivier** - The relations between the political organizations and what's usually called the social movement are complex and often related to the history of the working class movement in each country. The question can't be posed in the same terms in Italy, in Great Britain or in France. In France, ever since the beginning of the 20th century, the relations between the trade union movement, the social movement and the political organizations have always been complex and fraught with conflict. The hegemonic attitude of the Communist party and the CGT during several decades obviously didn't help. But today we're in a completely new situation and we have to be careful to avoid and to get rid of any sort of divide or mistrust between the social movement and the radical and anti-capitalist left.

We don't believe in a division of labour, with the social movement taking care of social questions and demands and political parties being interested in the question of political power. On the contrary, the social movement must debate and concern itself with all the political questions and take part actively in them but with a constant effort to maintain the unity of the movement and its pluralist organization. The role of a serious anti-capitalist left is to throw itself into the social movement while respecting its independence and unity, to help provide a political voice for the demands of the social movement and the big mobilizations, to give them coherent form through the elaboration of an emergency plan of anti-capitalist measures. It's also to show that we need to make a radical break with the system of capitalist exploitation and to defend a global project of social emancipation which takes into account the lessons of the failure of Stalinism and of social democracy. We don't claim to be that anti-capitalist left ourselves, now or in the future, but we do think we can participate, with others, in building it in the next few years.

# A popular victory

14 December 2002, by **Democracia Socialista**



## Lula in victory

On the other hand, although we got through to the second round in various elections for state governor, gaining significant votes and winning in Acre, Mato Grosso do Sul and Piauí, we lost in Rio Grande do Sul. Moreover, the PSDB and the PMDB have won the governments of the majority of the main states of the country.

The shift in the relationship of forces represented by the victory of the PT is also limited by the alliances with rightwing sectors and by commitments to continue central elements of the economic policy rejected at the elections, expressed in the acceptance, albeit critical, by Lula and the majority of the PT leadership, of a supposed 'inevitability' of the maintenance of the agreement with the IMF and its consequences.

Another important aspect is the absence of significant mass social mobilizations in the recent period, although the campaign did bring about a broad political mobilization.

2. The elections open a new political situation in Brazil. On one hand, we have adverse international circumstances for the continuation of neo-liberal policies - worldwide recession, growth of protectionism in the countries of the centre, US interventionism and unilateralism, proliferation of rightwing nationalisms. Neo-liberalism has led a range of countries into deep crises, most notably Argentina, and is increasingly being questioned internationally. On the other hand, we have the cumulative effect of a decade of application of neo-liberal politics in the country, with disastrous economic and social consequences, growth of popular dissatisfaction, relative

disarticulation of the elites through a period where a significant part of the national wealth changed hands and was denationalized, and disintegration of the block built around the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso

The election took place amid a scenario of open crisis and the exhaustion of the neo-liberal model, and this deep national crisis will remain for a long time in the coming period. Following the defeat of neo-liberalism, different sectors, with distinct interests, are fighting over the best way out of the crisis, with no clear outcome in sight. The likely continuation of the existing conflicts in Brazilian society and the renewed potential for mobilization of the democratic and popular sectors, opens the possibility of strengthening of the socialist left.

The hegemony long established by the ruling class has suffered a blow and conditions are better to work for the construction of a democratic and popular alternative.

3. The character of the Lula government remains for the moment a great unknown. It was elected on the basis of huge expectations of change in the country, as the incarnation of opposition to the government of Fernando Henrique. But, on the other hand, alliances established in the campaign, decisions that damaged party democracy and declarations seeking to offer guarantees to the elites and to the 'markets', all pointed to a worrying continuity in the country's political direction. We already expressed these worries during the campaign. The character of the Lula government will be defined in the course of a process of social and political confrontation. The PT administration will face the question of how to guarantee a parliamentary and social majority for changes, having as its starting point the

relationship of forces established by the electoral result and political struggle.

But, beyond tactical initiatives, strategic choices will have to be made - between strengthening the social base of the democratic and popular camp by applying our programme of structural reforms and making compromises with our adversaries; between governing on the basis of participatory democracy and governing in the traditional way; between moving forward to build a new hegemony or stopping, ambiguously and dangerously, half way along the road, with the risk of going backwards. Our challenge is to construct the choices that will be able to surpass the limits currently placed on the new government.

4. Conflicts central to the future of Brazilian society will be faced in the next period. The country has become very vulnerable to the speculative movements of national and international financial capital and the tutelage of the FMI has as its objective to preserve this situation, keeping the government hostage to the 'markets'. To regain autonomy of governmental action in the face of the markets and conditions for the exercise of national sovereignty must be the key strategic objectives.

This must be pursued on all fronts: deepening the shift in the relationship of forces through social and political mobilization, instituting mechanisms of participatory democracy and of public control over the movement of capital, confronting the situation of tutelage which the Brazilian State now faces. A series of strategic questions is already posed for the new government: agrarian reform, the affirmation of national sovereignty in the face of the FTAA, confronting submission to the IMF, regulation of the financial system and in particular the relationship of the Central Bank



with the new government, the question of taxation, among others. In these questions what is at stake is the defence of democracy and national sovereignty against concessions of power, either to the US imperial state, or to speculative capital, otherwise known as the 'markets'.

It is necessary to face them taking account of the new political conditions that have opened up with the victory of the PT. They cannot simply be questions of government. They must be questions for the whole of society. We have to build a process by which an electoral majority is turned into a political majority that can legitimize and sustain a path of democracy and sovereignty for the country. To defend national sovereignty is to defend the essential condition for the exercise of popular sovereignty and genuine democracy.

5. The idea of a new social contract, presented in the resolution of the last National Meeting of the PT in Recife (at the end of 2001), emerged as a central theme in the campaign. It was presented as a call to all sectors of society for a pact in favour of production, economic growth and the development of the domestic market. The PT had always criticized previous proposals for social pacts presented by different bourgeois governments, that implied the submission of the majority of the population, that is, the subordination of social conflict to a supposed governmental rationality, that would establish what could or could not be demanded.

What we can and must defend is that a new social contract must be founded on participatory democracy and the existence of democratic spaces for negotiating and solving the conflicts that will result from the obligation of the new government to put an end to the historical marginalization of the

interests of the majority. This is the process that can give a social character to the idea of nation.

6. The democratic and popular movement has embarked on an unprecedented historical experience that is decisive, from any point of view, for our future.

The Socialist Democracy tendency of the PT considers itself integrally part of this process, sharing the challenges faced by the PT and the Brazilian left. We will intervene in the process underway to push the PT to link this decisive experience to the fight for the overcoming of neo-liberal globalization, of the tyranny of the markets and parasitic financial capital, the inequalities, historical exclusions and injustices that mark Brazilian society. Our perspective is to integrate this experience into a process whose horizon is the replacement of capitalism by a democratic and internationalist socialism.

7. The make-up of the Lula government is the immediate challenge; through our intervention in the bodies of the PT, we will seek to ensure this is done democratically, on the basis of the most advanced experiences of the party. The strengthened PT is today the main political force in Brazilian society. It should have its own say in the composition of its federal government. We believe, at the same time, that it is necessary to undertake, in the coming period, a renewed defence of the resolutions adopted at the last national meeting of our party. These have at their centre the ideas of breaking with the neo-liberal model, of development based on national sovereignty and the redistribution of income and power, and that the experience of a Lula government should contribute to the renewal of

socialist values. They expressed the capacity of the party to formulate a strategic point of view that could unify it on the eve of a great political change. Preserving this capacity is more important still at this new historic moment.

8. The electoral result qualitatively changes the relationship of the PT to the state and affects the entire process of party building. The PT is growing, but is also becoming a more politically heterogeneous grouping. Its debates are followed by every sector of society. If governmental responsibilities demand prudence in the conduct of certain discussions, this should not hinder the democratic processes of debate and decision.

The Socialist Democracy tendency will intervene in the party's debates expressing its positions in a responsible, but clear, manner, conscious that diversity can and must be a source of strength in the construction of a movement that aims to challenge for power at all levels of Brazilian society. An even closer relationship between the party's elected parliamentarians and the dynamic social movements takes on a strategic importance in this construction, as does the defence of the autonomy of these movements in relation to the government.

If the PT in the electoral campaign was subjected to strong pressures from the ruling elite, the 'markets' and the governments of the metropolitan countries, in particular the United States, these pressures will increase with the party at the head of the federal government. But it is also true that the mandate from the ballot boxes gives us the legitimacy to carry through deep changes in Brazilian society.

*Sao Paulo, November 3, 2002*

## **Towards the 3rd World Social Forum**

**14 December 2002, by Eduardo Mancuso**



Its basic programmatic document is the Charter of Principles and its method is participatory democracy and respect for diversity. After the extraordinary success of the first two editions of the WSF, its priorities are now to internationalize the process through continental, regional and thematic forums, and to develop the discussion on strategies and alternatives.

The main conferences at the 1st and 2nd Forums were organized around four axes: the production of wealth, access to wealth, civil society and political power. The 3rd Forum must try, collectively, to develop some strategic thinking, as well as continuing the discussions about the architecture of world power, militarization versus peace, rights and the fight against intolerance, culture, information and counter-hegemony, and the global movements' attitude to international institutions, economic interests and the question of power.

One of the fundamental questions here is the willingness of the different forces in the movement to develop such a strategy. The movements against imperialist globalization have not lacked enthusiasm and militancy. But we have to have a realistic grasp of the present world situation, in which the only superpower, the United States, thinks and acts more and more like an empire, abandoning the

concerns with multilateralism and human rights, and even the rhetoric of democracy, which it expressed in previous decades. We're talking about an empire with 800 military bases in more than 100 countries around the world, and with unparalleled economic and technological power.

Faced with a world situation dominated by neo-liberal globalization and the North American superpower, what can we do to democratize international relations and international institutions? How can we achieve and maintain peace, eradicate hunger and the epidemics that decimate the peoples of the third world, as well as the foreign debt that oppresses us? And how can we save the planet from the insane destruction caused by the capitalist system?

The World Social Forum represents radical opposition to imperialism's "total counter-revolution". It therefore has a revolutionary profile and dynamic. As Vittorio Agnoletto puts it, "we are a global movement against war and neo-liberalism, we are something new and radical, we are the only viable and democratic alternative to terrorism".

Stalinism is over, social democracy has turned into social liberalism and is going through an acute crisis, and the third way is simply not an alternative

to capitalism. An anti-capitalist, internationalist left, inspired by the spirit of Porto Alegre and generating a new political culture, has been growing in society and at the polls, both in Europe and in Latin America. We want the 2003 WSF to reach a new threshold in building this movement, and to begin overcoming its strategic deficit. For we badly need "strategies for reaching the world we want". We need answers to two absolutely fundamental questions: what does this other world look like, and how do we build it? We already have the kernel of a new strategic conception to guide us on the way to building this world of greater justice, equality and solidarity. It's a conception that is emerging from the "combined and unequal" development of the growing alliance between democratized political power (at local and regional levels of government) and the social movements (always maintaining their autonomy and combativity), both of them with a shared aim of "changing the world". This is the synthesis of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre.

For Ernest Bloch, utopia was really a "utopian horizon" - something we walk towards but never reach. This journey has meaning and direction, but never arrives at its destination. This is fundamental, precisely because it creates the movement, builds the road and, in the end, never gives up the struggle.

## The caudillo and the class struggle

14 December 2002, by **Corriente Democracia Socialista**



**Lucio Gutiérrez**

The triumph of Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez in the elections of October 20, 2002 has placed at the forefront the demands for which the popular movement has been fighting in recent decades.

1 The candidacy of Gutiérrez has been

sustained by three political forces: his own party, the Sociedad Patriótica 21 de Enero (January 21 Patriotic Society) made up fundamentally of rank and file soldiers and non-serving officers, in alliance with the Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutic Nuevo pa'As [Pachakutic Movement of Plurinational Unity New country] and supported by the Movimiento Popular Democrático [Democratic Popular Movement]. The

most important forces of the popular movement also endorsed this candidacy: CONAIE, FENOCIN, CEOLS, UNE, Seguro Campesino. This allowed a united front electoral force to be constituted in this first round.

2 This political and social support confers a clear class character on the vote for Gutiérrez - his votes came from workers, farmers, Indians, small retailers, retired soldiers, craftsmen,

teachers, students in universities and schools, employees, small proprietors in the countryside and the city, in sum, from the length and breadth of the world of work.

3 This electoral United Front is socially and politically dispersed, it lacks a revolutionary and popular leadership, it does not have a single political leadership, is not hegemonised by indigenous peoples or workers but is under the leadership of a military caudillo who affirms that he has no other ideology than his military training, and therefore who is located in a tradition of popular democratic nationalism

4 The most important decisions taken by the leadership of the Patriotic Society are presided over by Lucio Gutiérrez, with his advisers on image and close allies. This gives the electoral movement a hierarchical, none too democratic character and limits its possibilities of consolidation as a mass political movement with a democratic and revolutionary perspective of greater reach.

5 The electoral Program highlights as central elements production as opposed to corrupt banks, honest industrialists against the dishonest ones, and questions corruption and the system of political parties. But it does not touch on crucial questions like the FTAA and the foreign debt.

6 The vote for Lucio Gutiérrez expresses a broad amalgam of interests and feelings that are a clear rejection by the people of the traditional political system it holds responsible for crisis and corruption; the vote is also a reflection of the crisis in Argentina with the collapse of neo-liberal policies and the popular demand of 'out with the lot of them', the Venezuelan crisis and the rise of the popular movement in Brazil, Peru and Bolivia. Also it is an echo of the concern of the population about Plan Colombia. In this way, the electoral result reflects the range of resistance and the yearning for a life different from that being imposed by the ferocious dictatorship of financial capital.

7 In this sense, this democratic vote continues the democratic struggles

which emerged from the victory of the 'No' camp in the plebiscite on privatization and political reform called by the government of Durán Ballén; the growth of Pachakutic; the overthrow of the government of Abdalá Bucaram in February 1997; the fight for the Constituent Assembly in 1998; the uprising and overthrow of the Mahuad government in January 2000.

8 The vote for Gutiérrez also expresses a vision of power of a layer of popular and indigenous leaders that does not follow in an unrestricted way a military caudillo but which sees in the conjuncture a possibility of power expressed in the phrase 'there are possibilities with Lucio'. This draws into the electoral struggle a range of participants and sentiments that have been maturing for more than a decade since the indigenous uprising of 1990.

9 The unsatisfied demands and the oppression of an economic crisis deepened by the imposition of almost three years of the dollarised economy are a very important component in the electoral support for Lucio Gutiérrez. This set of immediate questions are raised: house, prices, credit, jobs and fundamental necessities of the indigenous movement and farmer like the defence of the plateaus, water and the fight for land.

10 The influence and authority that the military maintain in Ecuadorian society has been capitalized on electorally by Gutiérrez. Nationalism is a significant ingredient in the consciousness of important sectors of a population that yearns for a strong leadership.

11 This was a vote of indignation, a vote against the conditions of life, a vote of anger against the political system. It reflects the radicalization of important sectors of urban and rural youth who are entering for the first time in the political life of the country.

12 It is important to note that Gutiérrez, in spite of a significant vote in the most important cities, had greatest support in the peripheral areas of the country and especially in the mountainous central provinces where the indigenous peasantry is strong, and in Amazonia.

13 We have witnessed an encounter between the spontaneous conscience of the masses and the organized sectors. The challenge is raised of how to deepen it, to develop it and to give it continuity in a situation of crisis, aggravated by the policy of the government of Gustavo Noboa and the ever greater social cost of dollarisation for an economy that incessantly buys more and sells less, that lacks internal and external productive investment and that maintains an increasing inflation and fiscal difficulties.

14 The elections have already appeared as a political and class confrontation in the first round. This character will be much more evident in the second.

15 Most of the traditional political forces have declared their independence from the two candidacies. It is said that neither of the two candidates could last in government for more than a few months, that there will be an increased regional confrontation between the coast and the mountains. Beyond the consciousness of Gutiérrez himself there is a confrontation between the dictatorship of financial capital and the big exporters and importers who are trying to impose a neo-liberal free enterprise program, and the rest of the Ecuadorian society. This is clear in spite of the moderation of Gutiérrez's discourse and his call to seek consensus. A more acute class confrontation is opening for which the popular movement is not prepared properly, neither in its base nor in its leadership. But neither can the bourgeoisie count on a national party that can articulate its demands.

16 Niches of resistance have been opened that will persist in the immediate future whatever the electoral result. The organized sectors are not going to be captives of a possible Gutiérrez government and are going to confront a presidency of Alvaro Noboa. It means we are going to witness a reactivation of the popular movement. In this struggle the possibility will exist of recreating and of extending a popular and revolutionary program

17 Our task must connect with the

level of present consciousness and advance it, link immediate and present demands with those that question the heart of exploitation, domination and oppression.

18 The more advanced sectors must insert themselves in the struggle for electoral victory without resigning

their independence and contribute their own program, which cannot be left aside under the criterion of the search for consensus. The central elements of this program are those that allow an extension of democracy from the popular sectors; that confront the FTAA, Plan Colombia, the dictatorship of financial capital and

neo-liberal policies; that place in the centre demands for the end of structural adjustment, the non-payment of the external debt, the closing of the US military base at Manta; along with this the struggle for water, land and natural resources.

Quito, October 22, 2002

## "A period whose outcome is open"

14 December 2002, by **Corriente de Izquierda**



It is part of the Frente Amplio (Broad Front), a permanent united front structure of the left set up under the military dictatorship, inside of which the Socialist Party is today dominant. At the elections for the FA leadership last May, the CI list obtained nearly 6,000 votes out of a total of 200,000). *The congress approved a political document (113 votes for, 28 against and 11 abstentions) of which we publish extracts below.* [the document has been much shortened for space reasons - gaps in the text are indicated by (...) and the subtitles are ours]

"The decay of the 'model' shows reveals the most varied and eloquent signs of a total socio-economic catastrophe: unemployment, poverty, misery, expropriation of the most elementary human rights and workers' conquests, backward march in the field of democratic rights.

Simultaneously, indignation and popular resistance, however fragmentary, express the will to struggle and opposition to capitalist barbarism. The manifestations of revolt and disobedience as well as collective action, organized or spontaneous, weaken incessantly the pretensions of reviving an 'integratory social consensus' which is already dead and buried. The depth of the crisis and the uprising of those condemned to hunger by the system have more force than any attempt to

make the Frente Amplio play the role of social shock absorber.

The confluence of these explosive factors has deepened both the loss of political and ideological credibility of the coalition government and the weakening of its social and electoral base. That is why the period will be marked by political instability as well as a growing presence of the class struggle. We are in a period whose outcome is open, where one cannot, a priori, rule out any outcome and where popular resistance - in the framework of the social and economic crisis - will play the role of protagonist, albeit with inequalities and different rhythms.

The three key components which have underpinned the neo-liberal discourse (efficiency, stability and legitimacy) have collapsed. It is not simply a crisis of the paradigm presented as being the sole 'model of growth' possible, but a crisis of the state, the traditional parties of the bourgeoisie and the post-dictatorship political regime of domination, installed through 'representative democracy'. The capitalist crisis and the loss of legitimacy of the coalition government, political agent of the dominant classes, acquire a new dimension in the face of the gigantic confiscation of incomes, jobs and savings with the goal of continuing to pay the foreign debt, the programmed assault against the public bank and services and the operation to bail out private and foreign financial

speculators. The government has sealed and riveted dependence, erasing (through legislation) any vestige of sovereignty and national independence. As in a vice regency, the taking of economic and political decisions has been delegated to the US government, the Department of the Treasury and its international collaterals: the IMF, the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank. The Parti Colorado and the Parti Nacional (with the Nuevo Espacio Independiente as grotesque fellow traveller) have ended up signing the new colonial pact that involves total subordination to the project of imperialist re-colonization. (...)

## 'Culture of government' put to the test

Despite all the efforts made by the Frente Amplio to engage in dialogue, despite its desire to gain agreements to avoid 'chaos', the latter has arrived and it looks like staying. This chaos lays bare the strategy of 'democratic governance' and 'constructive opposition' predominant in the leadership of the Frente Amplio. The defeat of the strategy of 'social concertation' supported until now by the majority of the leadership of the PIT-CNT (the single trade union federation) has also been palpable.

The majority of the Frente Amplio (FA) leadership, who have moved towards

the centre, with its strategy of institutional alternation and left managerialism modelled on the municipality of Montevideo, must. before the breadth of the crisis, face the challenge to its policy of institutional 'loyalty' and its adaptation to the electoral timetable. The famous 'culture of government' is being put to the test now. Increasingly broad popular sectors now demand that this pro-imperialist, inept and corrupt government goes. They want to take a road leading to another 'project of country', that the FA assumes the historic commitment of presenting itself as the alternative to the right, without playing about or betting on a year 2004 (year of the national elections) which is distant and uncertain. The defeat and paralysis of the majority of the FA leadership, as well as the gravity of the socio-economic crisis and the loss of legitimacy of the right, strengthens the social and political legitimacy of the proposal of the Corriente de Izquierda (CI, - Left Current) 'Batlle and the IMF out of the government. Elections now!' [3] This proposal implies a perspective of rupture with the electoral timetable, with a radical democratic conception of the right of recall and the exercise of a participatory and direct democracy. It is the same conception that guides us when we propose a law of popular initiative so that the people, directly, decides and exercises its right to legislate on the economic, social and political necessities. The same sense motivates the proposal for a popular and sovereign constituent assembly, integrating the political parties and the social and popular organizations, which would discuss and decide on the societal project we want. This political proposal, radically democratic, implies a rupture with the idea of elections as instrument permitting the replacement of political personnel and also implies a rupture with the initiatives which begin to be floated around a 'government of national reconstruction' of class conciliation. (...)

## The camp of

## resistance

Recent months present a landscape of 'popular belligerence' that extends as far as the consequences of the crisis. (...) All this movement of protest, organization and resistance opposes - and this is true also on the concrete terrain of the class struggle - the ideological myth held to by the bourgeoisie of the 'Uruguayan exception' and 'social peace'. In this context, the 'shock absorbers' lack time and space given the necessity of recuperating basic social rights, unless one expects the Three Wise Men to arrive bearing in their sacks the present of a productive country. It is the working class (wage earners and unemployed) that is the protagonist of these demonstrations. It is a 'mass of wage earners', public and private and thousands of social 'subjects' who form part of a process as broad as it is heterogeneous of popular reorganization.

In this sense, we can say that the camp of resistance and protest is broad and varied. That there is no privileged point for social accumulation and the intervention of left militants. That the tendencies towards self-organization are strengthening. That this vast ensemble of collective actions of struggle is the response to socio-economic transformations and the disintegratory effects of the neo-liberal counter-reforms on traditional social links. A camp of resistance and protest which does not confine itself to the structures of organized trades unionism or those of the radical 'classist and combative' opposition. There has been a change in the culture of the popular struggle as well as in individual and collective strategies of survival.

The crisis has developed an intelligence and an elementary class identity, opposed in practice to the hybrid formulae of 'civil society' and the 'multitude'. This class identity has come to confront the abusive use of the category of 'citizen' (or 'citizen-worker' and also 'citizen-entrepreneur', where rich and poor are 'citizen-neighbours'). Precisely, it is impossible to deny and reject the class struggle because the conflict is

inside the very system of exploitation and it broadens because of the current turn of capitalist globalization and 'market democracy'.

## The anti-capitalist left

The need to strengthen the radical political identity of the CI, as well as its organizational bodies and its functioning, responds to the acceleration of the political tempo imposed by the socio-economic crisis and by popular resistance. The 3rd congress cannot then ignore these fundamental challenges.

The first challenge is that of organizing a 'class struggle' left, revolutionary and socialist, capable of articulating an ensemble of emergency proposals (democratic, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist) so as to ensure that the adjustment plan, the unemployment, the poverty and hunger so not impose a defeat on the popular and workers' movement. This 'programme' should be in harmony with the basic social needs, capable of halting the process of expropriation led by the bourgeoisie. The second challenge is that of articulating, in action, the accumulated political and militant experience of this revolutionary and socialist left, both in the Frente Amplio and in the movements that support the broad and plural social resistance. The radical camp goes beyond the CI. Nobody can deny it, just as one cannot say that the CI is the 'only radical left in the country'. Indeed, in the social movements and in the FA, and even in the sectors which are not part of the organic framework of left unity, there exists a radical, class practice and in some cases a reflection which orientates towards a perspective of revolutionary unity.

This perspective informs and traverses different groups and identities. These 'transversal sections' are today more significant than ten years ago. The landscape of spirits and faces of the insurrection is multicoloured and thus more broad also, which contradicts any determinist vision. All these activists can be found as much in the Movement of National Liberation

(MLN, Tupamaros) and the Communist Party as in the Movement of March 26 (26-M, left Castroist) and the Party for the Victory of the People (PVP, a left current of radical origin), and even in the Socialist Party (PS, social democratic).

The 'transversal sections' are not the fruit of 'subjectivity' but of objective conditions, of a political process expressing the modifications of the 'social tissue' (fragmentation, reorganization) and the exhaustion of political experiences and of organization, obliging the militants to reformulate several things. Thus, not having a policy of alliances towards the 'left of the left' amounts to attempting to play a messianic and sectarian role.

In opposition to the tendency to integration in the system of the majority of the FA, which privileges institutional action, there is a left which proposes another road: a democratic radicalization involving 'structural reforms', opposed to the neo-liberal counter-reforms; it proposes initiatives tending to associate the everyday 'anti-neo-liberal' struggle with an anti-capitalist struggle, knowing that these struggles are in relation with a strategy of revolutionary accumulation and a socialist programme (although this socialist programme is not the logo of presentation); a left which fights the ideology of 'useful' concepts which justify proposals to 'humanize capitalism' or which preach the inevitable and insurmountable character of 'globalization'; a left, finally, which seeks to demystify the 'sociological' formulae (like those of the 'war of the poor against the poor') whose goal is to erase any class vision of society from the memory and collective consciousness.

## Articulating a political and social left

It is, then, about rethinking a strategy of accumulation of forces in the political and social struggle that does not fall into peripheral sectarianism or institutional opportunism. A strategy

where resistance (or, better said: the necessity of resistance) summarizes and translates the reflections and experiences of struggle of the social movements. What are the tensions that we must now confront? Those of placing in their true tactical dimension (which does not mean tacticism) the demands associating, in the social imagination, the concrete everyday needs with the need to transform society.

We are for an organized popular mobilization. But in what sense and around what proposal? In the sense of a new creation and a democratic reappropriation of the conquests stolen by the capitalist offensive. A mobilization where the conflict opposes the rights of society to the 'right' to private property. A left which defines itself as anti-capitalist cannot fail - under the pretext of the next referendum, the next strike, the events of tomorrow night - to work on the dimension of (revolutionary) rupture which exists, albeit sometimes in a confused manner, in the perception of a broad sector of 'social combatants' and of a sector of the mass movement.

These latter are conscious of the uninterrupted expropriation of their most elementary rights as 'citizens'. Is the question of another political legitimacy and another 'model' of society completely absent from popular consciousness? Do 'the people' only think of immediate demands? Do they fight only for reforms? Has the 'tepidity' of the discourse of the FA finally put consciousness to sleep? Could one be underestimating popular intelligence? The sacrosanct respect for the 'state of law' and of private property is not a blank cheque for life. The process is slow, molecular, but it exists. Still in the framework of perceptions and levels of class-consciousness which are intertwined and often diffuse.

To misunderstand this process can only lead to a verbal sectarianism that falsely claims to be revolutionary. The challenge of politicizing struggles, articulating social resistance with organization and political perspective will avoid an absurd division of labour between 'reform' and 'revolution' 'Revolutionary accumulation' is

unthinkable outside of a framework which should be capable of integrating reform and revolution in order to 'transform the established order', as Rosa Luxemburg put it. The militant component of this anti-capitalist left, the potential of struggle for socialism, is in the organizations and social movements as well as in the FA. It is for this reason that the construction of a revolutionary alternative must articulate the social and political left and thus guard against any institutionalization, any dispersion of forces, contributing at the same time to fixing a common horizon.

This moment of accumulation in the perspective of a reorganization of the anti-capitalist left, that is the CI, is still weak, and this despite the fact that the right and its reactionary press ('El Pais', 'BÃ"squeda', 'El Observador Economico'), as well as the majority sectors of the FA leadership, allude constantly to the 'radicals of the CI'. For them these 'radicals' are the main factor of destabilization, throwing spanners in the wheels of 'democratic governance'. The 'radicals of the CI' are the false note in the reformist concert disguised as 'realism' and 'ideological updating'. (...)

This weakness is explained by political reasons and the 3rd congress has debated them collectively and deeply. The congress is the framework composed by militants engaged fully in the real movement of political and social struggles: from the smallest union or the smallest town on the border, far from the capital, to the activity of local elected representatives or members of 'neighbourhood councils'. These are the organized militants who think and act, who share political and social experiences with thousands of comrades in different posts of combat.

Thus, the 3rd Congress has discussed successes and errors, with the perspective of strengthening the CI as a unitary and plural organization that fights to 'make the revolution'. In the sense that it is clear that the revolution will never come at 'the right moment'. Without risks and without surprises, the revolution will only be a laboratory caricature. Precisely, the revolution is by its nature 'premature' or, as Che said, it



is a creative imprudence.

# Solidarity across the Rhine

14 December 2002, by **Alain Baron**



This company, which specialises in mobile telephone services reselling activity, is also number two in the field of Internet services. In August 2000, MobilCom had moreover won an operating licence for the third generation in mobile telephony (UMTS) for the astronomical price of 8.4 billion euros. After having taken over the company at 28.5% in spring 2000, the management of France Télécom now wished to disengage from it, placing 5,500 jobs at risk. An eventual declaration of insolvency for MobilCom was on the agenda of the Board of Governors of France Télécom on September 12. It was necessary to act quickly. For SUD-PTT [4] the attack against the employees at the German subsidiary was only a stage in a future 'rectification plan' which would make the employees of the whole company pay for their employer's negligence. Three years after its flotation on the stock exchange, France Télécom's transformation into a multinational has led it to indebt itself unreasonably on the basis of a gamble that the ever-rising share prices of the 'new economy' would last indefinitely. Establishing links with the workforce at MobilCom was in no way an obvious move. Ver.di, the German trade union affiliated to the Union Network International (the international telecommunications trade union) had no presence at MobilCom. The fact that the French unions organized at France Télécom - FO, the CFDT and the CGT - were, like Ver.di, affiliated to the European Trade Union Confederation and the UNI was not, then, much help.

## The effects of Porto Alegre

It was, finally, trades unionists from the SUD-PTT federation who came to establish links with the workers at MobilCom. Alain Baron, SUD-PTT representative on the Board of Governors of France Télécom, tells it like this: "We had naturally begun by entering into relations with Ver.di, the main trade union at Deutsche Telekom. However, as Ver.di did not have any contacts at MobilCom, we also approached activists in IG Metall, with whom we had made links at the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre. We then learned that IG Metall had a presence at MobilCom. We were then able to enter in contact by email with the relevant people in IG Metall and the representatives of the staff at MobilCom.

"The staff were in a state of shock: like many 'start-up' companies, this one had for a long time experienced a euphoric and rapid development. The announcement of probable insolvency in the case of the withdrawal of France Télécom had been a real thunderbolt. The union's presence was recent and fragile with few members by German standards. Without a tradition of struggle or militant experience, the workforce at MobilCom were also confronted for the first time with the French trade union scene, which is so different from what exists in Germany: representatives of four different unions sit on the Board of Governors of France Télécom." [5]

IG Metall and the representatives of the MobilCom workers sent a letter to the seven employees' representatives on the France Télécom board asking them to oppose the ending of financial

support for MobilCom. Part of the letter read: 'Dear Colleagues, we turn to you, to ask you for your support and aid. The Board of Governors will decide on September 12, 2002 on the fate of the Group MobilCom, and thereby the future of more than 5,000 jobs in Germany. We, the trade union representatives at MobilCom and the trade union IG Metall, follow with great interest the decision that the Board of Governors of France Télécom will take... we ask you, to the extent that it is possible, to plead personally before the Board of Governors...'

This letter facilitated an agreement between the French representatives and their trade unions, who opposed all the plans put forward by management at the Board of Governors meeting on September 12.

Alain Baron continues: 'It was the least we could do - it's obvious that trades unionists should oppose layoffs, but it had great importance in Germany and got big headlines in the newspapers. That also gave confidence to the employees at MobilCom. On the day of the Board of Governors meeting, a rally of around 1,500 people was held at midday in front of the MobilCom office. In a workplace of around 5,000 people, with little tradition of struggle, it's enormous, that effectively represented nearly 100% of the people at work that day in the region where the office is situated. The fact that the German trades unionists could announce that the representatives of the French workforce would vote the same evening against insolvency also contributed to the pressure on the German government, which then intervened with the French government. Then, Schroder - it was a week before the elections - finally announced that the banks linked to

the German state would grant 400 million euros credit to MobilCom. Immediate insolvency and thus the dismissal of all the workers was averted. That had a great importance for our German colleagues because it would have been difficult to pursue the struggle, above all in a sector where some of the jobs are quite dispersed geographically. This danger being ruled out for the immediate future, they then sought to obtain the best conditions possible concerning the number of jobs to be axed and the social plan. MobilCom had announced its desire to quickly axe 850 jobs through the closure of three centres in the regions of Munich, Frankfurt and Kiel, as well as the freezing of its UMTS activities, which affected from 1,000 to 1,200 jobs. Nearly half the total jobs are still threatened, then. The union did all it could to save as many jobs as possible, while seeking to negotiate the best redundancy conditions for the people who will be finally laid off."

## **'Nothing can replace direct contacts'**

The German trades unionists were enthused by this experience, new for them, of unitary action across frontiers. This strengthened their belief that, faced with the internationalisation of capital, it is high time to create international solidarity based directly on the trades unionists affected. On September 24, three German union officials attended the Federal Committee of SUD-PTT in Paris that meets three times a year with around 250 departmental representatives present. Kai Petersen, who heads the regional bureau of IG Metall in Rendsburg and who, in this capacity, is directly involved in the organisation of trade union activity at MobilCom, told the meeting: 'What I see now is something miraculous that I can not even describe, despite my experience of more than 20 years in our union. It began with an email from activists in SUD who wanted information from me on the situation at MobilCom. It was the evening of September 9. And from that was born a marvellous cooperation between five

European unions to fight for jobs... This process has taught me that the international departments of the unions are important and necessary, but that direct contact by Internet is more powerful... The initiative from the SUD activists is priceless. Without them, there would have been no coordination with the comrades of the other unions. Without them, we would not have had the possibility of establishing useful contacts with the French media. In addition, without them there would not have been this big headline in the German press during the announcement of the separation of France Télécom and MobilCom: 'The representatives of the French employees vote against the France Télécom plan.' Your commitment was not, and is not something we could have predicted and that has given a lot of courage to your comrades at MobilCom... We were in a position, with the resources and the logistic resources of our union, to create an efficient network between the government, media and cross-frontier unions, which has enabled us to protect 5,500 jobs. For the moment, MobilCom has not gone into insolvency and there have been no dismissals. We have gone through a formidable experience of trade union resistance. In a short time, the union has become an accepted and respected institution at MobilCom. In short, we are now taken very seriously both by our collaborators and by the management. We are in large part indebted to you for the road we have taken".

This enthusiasm is shared by James Ford, an employee at MobilCom and workers' representative on the workplace council ('Betriebsrat'), who says: 'The involvement of the French unions showed me - and that makes me confident and proud - that we, as human beings, are really on the road to a united Europe. And now I have really lived it: we, the trade unions, are one big community. We no longer think at the national level. We pay attention to each other'! It is not possible to describe what your solidarity has led to at MobilCom among my comrades. For that, I would like to thank you cordially. We defend together everywhere in Europe the right for workers to be able to discuss as equals with the representatives of

capital. Your support and your 'yes' to MobilCom at the Board of Governors of France Télécom have given us great courage and strength".

The cross border unity established in the France Télécom group is indicative of a new social climate. The attacks of the multinationals on jobs, their ability to relocate, do not often meet with an adequate response from the unions. Enclosed in their local, routine interests, bogged down in inter-apparatus negotiations, the traditional unions often find it hard to establish contacts which can mobilise employees in several countries against the same employer. The international structures of trade unions, when they exist, are in general too distant from the union activists on the ground.

## **Internationalists for a long time**

Since its creation, SUD-PTT has always sought to establish international contacts at every level. For example, SUD activists are involved in the 'European Marches against Unemployment', ATTAC, The World Women's March, the World Social Forum, the European Social Forum, and so on. Building international links between unions is not obvious, because the traditional unions call the shots for the existing international structures. These are, moreover, cumbersome bodies sometimes cut off from the reality on the ground. For the new unions it is difficult to fit in. SUD-PTT has, for example, been asking for some years to participate in the UNI which brings together most of the telecommunications unions in the world. But that has been delayed for a long time, since prior agreement is needed from the French post and telecommunications unions already affiliated to the UNI: FO, the CFDT and more recently the CGT. Alain Baron continues: 'This stops us from having links with many unions around the world. That's been shown with MobilCom. In the same way, SUD was the only European union to participate in late September in the USA at a conference of call centre employees organised by the Communication Workers of America (CWA), who with

740,000 members are the biggest telecommunications union in the world and thus the main member of the UNI.



"In January 2002, SUD was the only French union present at an international meeting organised by the Cuban posts and telecommunications union. We were in Tunisia in spring for study days organised by a Tunisian union on the planned privatization of Tunisie Télécom. During our respective congresses, there were exchanges of delegations between SUD and the telecommunications union affiliated to the CTA in Argentina. The same goes for Zachtchita, a newly created Russian trade union. SUD seeks to work with all trade union organisations whether affiliated to the UNI (like the CWA), or not, like the CGT in Spain or the Cobas and the SinCobas in Italy. Progressively, SUD-PTT has thus established bilateral links and exchanges with trade union organizations in many countries: Spain, Italy, Sweden, Germany, Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, South Korea, USA, Senegal, Tunisia, Russia, Bosnia, and so on. If we believe the comrades of MobilCom, our support has helped them a lot."

"This is also the case with Senegal, where France Télécom controls the operator. In 1996, colleagues at SONATEL could not win some of their demands. Three representatives of the unions came to Paris and met the Board of Governors of their company (as in the good old colonial days). At their request, some SUD and CGT activists came to support them with banners and leaflets at the entrance to the building where the meeting was held. Following this solidarity action, our Senegalese colleagues were able to win a considerable increase in pay. Two years later, at one of our meetings where we had invited a representative from SONATEL, they kept talking about the 'battle of Paris'. At the beginning we did not understand what they meant and then we realised they were talking about the completely basic solidarity that we

had shown them two years earlier. We would never have imagined that the few things that we had done on that day would have proved so effective.'

Baron adds: "A close link exists between our will to build international trade union links and our commitment to more global struggles. Our current links with IG Metall, for example, began at the meeting of activists in our two organisations at the WSF in Porto Alegre in January 2002. Thanks to this type of direct contact, we were able to act together around MobilCom. The easiest way to cross the Rhine was through crossing the ocean'.

## Workers unity, public service

Since France Télécom was floated on the Stock Exchange and began to transform itself into a multinational, its management is increasingly less concerned with the public service the company is supposed to provide, and increasingly focused on short-term dividends for the shareholders. In France, employees have until now managed to preserve a number of gains - 80% of employees have kept their status as public servants - and France Télécom must respect some of its obligations as a public service. However, this is far from being the case in other countries. Abroad, France Télécom is characterized by predatory behaviour like any other multinational. Alain Baron explains: "Telecommunications play an essential role in the equality of access of citizens to communication, the development of territory, jobs and economic development of a country. Decisions concerning them should then be taken at the closest to those affected, in the country itself, according to the needs of the population, the political and social debates that exist there, and so on. Such choices should not be made in Paris, on the basis of financial criteria. Yet this is what happens when France Télécom becomes the owner of a foreign operator. It does not respect the commitments made initially. In Poland for example, when it took control of TPSA, the historic Polish

operator France Télécom committed itself to no suppression of jobs until 2004. Then, last year, a reduction in jobs of 20% was announced and hence layoffs.

"It was the same thing in Argentina, where France Télécom and Telecom Italia control Telecom Argentina: the current total of debt built up by this operator corresponds to the sums that France Télécom and Telecom Italia have repatriated over ten years. And we were only able to know this thanks to the Argentine unionists with whom we are in contact: a representative of the Argentine union affiliated to the CTA came to our last national congress and a representative of SUD is invited to theirs this autumn'.



'If SUD opposes the acquisitions of foreign operators it's in part because that is accompanied by a veritable explosion of the indebtedness of France Télécom: the current debt is almost the same as the amount of the acquisitions over the last three years. But it is above all because such a policy is opposed to our conception of public service. It places the foreign operators under the pressure of criteria of the short-term profitability of France Télécom. Also this policy is accompanied by the putting in competition of and the privatisation of foreign operators originating from the PTT [the French Post Office]. There is no question for SUD of accepting there what we oppose in France."

'The challenge we face is keeping ourselves informed about what is happening in the foreign subsidiaries, informing French employees about the behaviour of France Télécom abroad, and supporting the struggles underway around the world. Now France Télécom has its grip on these operators, it is the duty of French unionists to consider the employees of these enterprises as colleagues belonging to the same group, and fight shoulder to shoulder with them against our common employer. It is also what SUD seeks to do in relation to the other telecommunications groups around the world."

# A bitter victory

14 December 2002, by **Manuel Kellner**

Are we now to witness the revenge of social-liberal reformism? Nothing could be less certain. In fact, the SPD was the big loser at the federal elections of September 22, 2002. In comparison with 1998, it lost nearly 1.7 million votes and 2.4 percentage points. We were, then, correct to stress before the elections that the neo-liberal policies of the SPD and Greens had prepared the victory of the traditional bourgeois parties by disorientating and discouraging the wage earners and the excluded.



## Schröder

If the defeat that had seemed very probable was finally avoided, it is because of certain unforeseen circumstances and a rhetorical turn on the part of the Schröder leadership of the SPD only some weeks before the date of the elections. The flooding that hit Germany just prior to the elections offered Schröder the possibility of presenting himself as 'manager' of the immediate human consequences of the catastrophe (with a certain appeal to East-West national unity) and adopt a new tonality, stressing the ecological reasons for the catastrophe and the responsibility of 'industry', even if the in practical terms no real changes were proposed in terms of responsible production or making the employers pay.

In the same way, Schröder's statement that Germany would not participate in the war threatened by the US and Britain against Iraq reflected the feelings of a majority of the German population. Even if Germany in reality behaves as an ally of the USA (in terms of military logistics, the stationing of specialized troops in the Middle East and so on) and continues to build a Bundeswehr capable of interventionist initiatives, the public controversy with the Bush

government quickly proved popular. It should be said that this did not directly benefit the SPD, but rather its coalition partners, the Greens. The reason is that the hope of promoting a more responsible long-term policy in the area of ecology is above all associated with them rather than the SPD. The same goes for the need for a more independent policy in relation to the US administration. Even if the Greens have in no way conserved a pacifist or anti-militarist identity, it is precisely their combination of a certain critical spirit and the 'responsible moderation' which corresponds to the level of consciousness of a stable electorate which also identifies with certain political-cultural advances - modest as they might be - resulting from the pressure exerted by the Greens on the SPD (notably in the area of gay 'partnership'). On the other hand, a 'middle class progressive' stratum can identify itself still more with the Greens, since the latter are often to the right of the SPD on the question of the social conquests of employees and deregulation, which is portrayed as 'anti-bureaucratic'. It was then the gains registered by the Greens - they scored 8.6% of the votes (against 6.7% in 1998) - which saved the governing coalition.

## The 'Möller affair'

The liberals of the FDP, however, who were the projected coalition partners of the Christian Democrats, scored less than expected, increasing their vote slightly from 6.2 to 7.4%. Their 'project 18' (to score 18% of the votes) proved completely illusory. Their political line, combining a ferocious neo-liberalism with a superficial and often somewhat tasteless humour, verging on the populist demagoguery of the right. What confused and continues to confuse people in

Germany was the 'Möller affair' - Jürgen Möller was the FDP leader enjoying the highest media profile. Since this affair is complicated and replete with uncomfortable consequences for the small anti-capitalist left in Germany, we should dwell on it a little. [6] Möller, a long time lobbyist for German business interests in the Arab world, has always had a minority standpoint on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the bourgeoisie and the German political class. With the recent escalation of the conflict - while attacking Sharon, not incorrectly, as a warmonger - he entered into a polemic with the representatives of the leadership of German Jewry, who traditionally defend the Israeli viewpoint. In the framework of this polemic, he touched on anti-Semitic prejudices that are deeply rooted in German society (while being officially taboo, of course), accusing representatives of the Jewish community in Germany, like Michael Friedmann, of being themselves responsible for anti-Semitic feelings because of their 'arrogant and spiteful' attitude. This led to a counter-campaign uniting nearly all the German political class and largely penetrating the milieu of the radical left, isolating Möller (who, persevering in his attitude, has lost his post as vice-president of the FDP) and denouncing the FDP leadership as wishing to transform the party into a right wing populist force in the style of the Austrian Jörg Haider (not to mention a certain other Austrian - as Winfried Wolf has pointed out, the meaning of 'project 18' can be explained by the fact that the letters A and H in the German alphabet are the first and eighth letters, giving thus the initials of Adolf Hitler!).

Obviously in Germany anti-capitalist forces should react strongly every time that the demons of modern anti-Semitism agitate publicly. On the other hand the tendency to assimilate



any critique of Zionism and above all any challenge to the bases of the Israeli state with anti-Semitism are not only an obstacle to solidarity with the Palestinian people, but also to mobilizations against the coming war with Iraq. In the milieu likely to support such actions (for example around ATTAC) any proposals for mobilization raise debates on the dangers of 'anti-Americanism', which is quickly associated with anti-Semitism, above all if the interests of Israel are at stake. For example the fact that in Britain the second slogan of the big anti-war demonstration was 'Freedom for Palestine!' or that the revolutionary Marxist film director Ken Loach publicly asks why we talk about Saddam Hussein's so-called nuclear weapons without mentioning Israel's nuclear arsenal, has led to some somewhat frosty commentaries in German anti-capitalist left milieu (in the daily newspaper 'Junge Welt' for example): such an approach would not be imaginable (or acceptable) in Germany.

## Importance of economy

It was the results of the two small partners of the two big parties (SPD and CDU/CSU) which finally decided the result. Angela Klein, writing in 'SoZ' immediately after the elections, stressed the importance of the themes of the economy and employment for the political choices made by the electorate. It was the main theme of Stoiber's candidacy for the CDU/CSU, who tried to exploit the government's poor record in this area, above all in comparison with Schröder's promises four years ago ('Judge me on the fight against unemployment and I guarantee to reduce unemployment by one million'). 'In the domain of economic crisis and unemployment', wrote Angela Klein 'the governing left has nothing to offer, that is the bitterest lesson to draw from the election results.' The SPD/Green projects to combat unemployment are essentially directed against the unemployed and excluded, and their concepts of fighting the crisis are likely to deepen it and worsen inequality - we will come back on this point.

The most politically significant mobilization of the weeks preceding the elections. A demonstration on September 14, co-organized by five youth organizations of trade unions in the DGB (including those of the engineering union IG Metall and the services union Ver.Di) and by ATTAC. This attracted 40,000 people to Cologne - the majority were young trades unionists - under the rather general slogan of 'we want the good life'! A small split in the union apparatus was at the origin of this initiative - in spring 2002 a part of the union leaderships began to criticize the Schröder government for its disappointing social policies and on privatization. For the first time ever, there was speculation that the DGB unions were perhaps not going to campaign for the SPD and would begin to cooperate with ATTAC and the new social movements critical of neo-liberal globalization.

The SPD leadership reacted quickly and made a number of symbolic corrections to its electoral platform, bringing out a little more its social-democratic character; concerned for the interests of the workers and less well off. Posters were printed showing Schröder, with a grave expression, signing a document, with the subtitle: 'A modern politics means concern for social justice.' Immediately, the union leaderships swung back behind the SPD campaign. The September 14 demonstration was in a way a residue of the little split mentioned. In terms of content it articulated a fairly clear critique of the anti-social policies and policies of privatization supported by all the established parties, above all in health, as well as opposition to warlike adventures.

The leaderships of the union youth organizations even let it be understood in a prudent way that the positions of the PDS were closer to the union's demands than those of other parties, including the SPD. However, we should stress the very clear limits of September 14. After the demonstration - where the people mobilized by ATTAC and the small anti-capitalist left and those mobilized by the union youth organizations marched separately and heard different speeches - there was a big open air concert which was the

obvious priority for the trade union youth, refreshed by the local regional beer ('Kölsch'). Few among them came near the stands of the organizations of the revolutionary left, bought their newspapers, or took their leaflets. So we should not exaggerate the promising aspect of this event in quantitative or qualitative terms - it is at most a young plant that merits careful cultivation.

## Attacks on health and the unemployed

Christophe Jünke, writing in 'SoZ', emphasized the relative character of the negative political-cultural aspects of the electoral campaigns, personalization and the role of the media. 'The televised debates between the candidates for chancellor, Stoiber and Schröder ... do not aim to win new voters, but mobilize the respective traditional electorates.' For Jünke (and also for Angela Klein), it is not the aspect of 'demagogy and manipulation' which matters, but rather seizing the new tonality to mobilize the hopes and expectations - however modest - that can be harnessed: 'After 1998, this is a second mandate for a change of direction towards left social-liberalism and away from liberal conservatism in the area of social policy, and also a mandate against German participation in the coming war against Iraq.' The SPD has seen a visible erosion of its traditional vote, and Jünke shows that this process will continue if the SPD in government continues its policies of recent years and implements neo-liberal and antisocial measures.

In the area of health, the new SPD/Green government wants to implement the concepts of the Hartz commission to 'fight more effectively against unemployment'. Hartz, director of personnel at Volkswagen, is the head of a commission that has elaborated 'original' concepts of fighting mass unemployment, which were immediately adopted by the SPD leadership as a sort of 'miracle solution'. Now, it is determined to apply them. The essence involves increasing pressure on the



unemployed to accept any kind of work at any kind of wage under the ultimate threat of total disqualification from benefit.

These projects have the particularity of combining continuity in the policy of social austerity with increased public indebtedness; thus the public deficit will very quickly pass beyond the Maastrichtian norm of 3% laid down by the EU under German pressure! For fear of the predictable reactions from different lobbies, the SPD and Greens will neither make the rich pay nor meaningfully increase indirect taxes (above all there will be no increase in VAT). It adds up to a series of half measures, and this in a full recession. This policy, then, continues to pile up economic, social and moral contradictions that could explode in bigger mobilizations than we saw on September 14.

## A left to build

But the 'subjective factor' in Germany is weak in a number of ways, First - it is hard to imagine, but nonetheless true - the union leaderships are not opposing Hartz's ideas, on the contrary they are adopting them and claiming there is something positive about them if some nuances are introduced. This argument is absolutely Jesuitical and can only disorientate the trade union rank and file.

Moreover, the movement of the unemployed, which is opposed completely to Hartz's plans, remains a dynamic minority movement, much more limited than in it was in the last year of the Kohl government. In terms

of a political alternative, the PDS, with 4% of the vote and the loss of its Bundestag grouping, has been weakened. It is not at all certain that it can make up for its losses in points of institutional support and thus its media impact by its recent (limited and contradictory) opening to the extra-parliamentary movements and to radical reformist and anti-capitalist positions. Angela Klein, in the article mentioned above, quotes an analysis appearing in 'Neues Deutschland' (a daily newspaper close to the PDS) of September 25: 'The PDS lost votes firstly where it had been most strongly implanted, in the municipal centres and the small towns of the former GDR. This is true for the constituencies of Halle, Magdeburg and Altmark as well as for Bad Dobran-Güstrow, Schwerin and Rostock. This is also the case where the PDS is in opposition, in Chemnitz, Jena-Weimar, Dresden, Gera, Gotha, Potsdam and Erfurt.

The PDS is losing, then, inside the hard core of its electorate. It is primarily the milieus of the old layer of public employees, their offspring and those around them who are beginning to turn away from the PDS. The milieu of the party 'of succession' [7] is shrinking then, and probably definitively. The PDS has not been able to attract new layers supporting a left politics on a lasting basis. It was a long goodbye to the concept of the party of 'succession', but now its end seems inevitable.'

Angela Klein argues that the PDS should consciously organize this 'goodbye' and seek a new social base distanced from those layers for whom the State is at the centre of their concerns. This will be a long and

difficult process, she says, and the anti-capitalist left outside the PDS faces a similar task. But it is also intimately linked to a change of political direction, a clean break with the 'coalitionist' logic of participation in political power in the framework of acceptance of the capitalist system and the 'vocation' of loyally administering its crisis.

There remain the anti-capitalist forces in and outside the PDS, and inside that the revolutionary Marxist forces. They are weak and divided. The strengths and weakness of their various factions seem sometimes to be complementary: some capable of maintaining a small militant and propagandist milieu through all circumstances, others developing a spirit of initiative and a political influence which is sometimes much superior to the extreme modesty of their real forces.

In these conditions, the double battle to build an independent current, participate in the social movements and win new sympathizers and members, on the one hand, while participating in the development of a trade union left and influencing the evolution of the PDS left, on the other, will be a hard one. However weak, these forces are the only ones with the potentiality to 'make the ossified conditions dance by singing them their own melody' as Marx put it. The world revolutionary Marxist movement and more specifically the Fourth International should not ignore their weak forces in Germany - neither their difficulties nor their potential - for their development could change the relationship of political forces in Europe.

# Germany's election results

## 14 December 2002



Schröder and Chirac

For the CDU/CSU 38.5% was an improvement on the 35.1% it scored in 1998, while the SPD, who won 40.9%

then, lost votes in both percentage and absolute terms. The government's majority was based on the success of

the Greens, who, having won 6.7% of the vote in 1998, scored 8.6% this time. The liberal FDP also made gains, going from 6.2% in 1998 to 7.4% this time. Far right candidates largely gained less than 2%.

The big disappointment on the left was the score for the PDS. In 1998, it was able to establish a group in the Bundestag with 5.1% of the vote and 36 deputies, but this time it only won 4% of votes and it no longer has a parliamentary group. Only two PDS candidates were directly elected, both in Berlin. With a third direct mandate

the 4% would have been sufficient to allow the PDS to have a number of deputies corresponding proportionally to its vote. The Greens had a candidate directly elected for the first time in Kreuzberg-Friedrichshain; it was Hans-Christian Ströbele, a pacifist on the far left of the party who had been excluded from its proportional list.

The losses by the PDS (who won some 1.9 million votes, less than that of the 'Trotskyists' in France in the first round of the 2002 presidential election) were more serious in the East of Germany, while in the West it

stagnated around 1% of the vote. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, where the PDS co-governs with the SPD, it lost a third of its vote, falling from around 24% to around 16%. It will however continue its participation in this coalition - regional elections in this Land on the same day yielded similar results. In Berlin, where the PDS also participates in a 'red-green' coalition there were also losses, although less spectacular. A large part of the votes lost by the PDS (around 300,000) were lost through abstention - turnout for the election fell from 82.2% in 1998 to 79.1% in 2002.

## The positions of German Fourth Internationalists

14 December 2002

While both drew very critical balance sheets of the government's policies and stressed the adaptation of social democracy and the Greens to neo-liberalism, they differed in their analyses of the polarization between conservatives and liberals on the one hand, and the SPD and Greens on the other.

The RSB view is that the SPD has for a long time been a bourgeois party like the others, while for the ISL, the historical links of the SPD with the

workers' movement are not entirely exhausted, meaning that it retains a specific role in the application of pro-capitalist policies. All the same, neither the RSB nor the ISL called for a 'useful vote' for the SPD or Greens against Stoiber. The difference of approach emerged primarily in the attitude to the PDS. The RSB called for a vote for 'revolutionary candidates' (there were about half a dozen symbolic direct candidatures for the SAV, the CWI group in Germany)

and for the direct candidacy of Winfried Wolf in Mannheim because of the latter's consistent anti-capitalist attitude. The ISL called for a vote for the PDS, although 'critical', stressing its rejection of the dominant adaptationist line of this party and its participation in regional coalitions as junior partner of the SPD.

It should be said that some militants of the ISL are members of the PDS as part of its left, which remains divided and largely disorganized until now.

## Goodbye to Good Friday

14 December 2002, by John McNulty



The Stormont raid has however a significance all of its own. The police raid had all the symbolism of jackboot

rule. It was a travesty of democracy, indicating the harsh reality of British rule behind all the pretences of the Stormont assembly. It's only purpose was to pull the plug on the assembly, while making it clear that the republicans will have to concede even

more to earn a return of their ministerial seats. Howls about background IRA activity are neither here or there. The disbandment of the IRA was not a condition of the Good Friday agreement - now for the unionists, British, and Sinn Féin's

erstwhile friends in Dublin - it is.

This time it's for real. After a whole string of crises which have in fact been a permanent feature of the unstable settlement in Ireland the reactionary offensive by the unionists has guaranteed that the Good Friday agreement, in its present form, will not survive into 2003. In a pattern repeated over and over again during the many attempts by imperialism to settle the Irish question, the trickle of unionist opposition has become a flood, the flood has become a torrent and now the unionist leadership has effectively changed. Following the victory of dissident Geoffrey Donaldson at the Unionist council meeting of the 21st September, supporters of the unionist leader, David Trimble, are being deselected at constituency meetings and it was quite clear that the unionists would pull the plug on major structural elements of the Good Friday agreement in January. At the September meeting the party agreed to withdraw from the Stormont executive if the IRA had not effectively disbanded by January. This may not be enough to save the unionist leadership. Polls indicate that Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party are likely to overtake the Ulster Unionists in 2003 and become the major unionist party.

## The standard model

There is a standard explanation for this pattern within unionist politics. That is that unionism is split into reactionaries and progressives. Fear spread by the reactionaries or 'provocation' from nationalists tilts the issue under discussion towards the reactionaries. All the other forces in society, from the British Government in Sinn Fein, must join together to support the progressives.

Sinn Fein holds a left version of this theory. They demand that the Unionists find a leader - a De Klerk - who will represent their true interests and fully support the Good Friday deal. They accuse 'securocrats' in the state forces and civil service of blocking the real interests of Britain -

to bring peace to Ireland. The nationalist family and US imperialism must ensure that there is no backsliding by the unionists and British.

The truth is rather more complex. There has never been a moderate wing to unionism in this process. The so-called moderates were led by David Trimble, formerly a leader of the semi-fascist 'Vanguard' organisation, 'hero' of Drumcree after leading a triumphal march through the Nationalist Geravaghy Rd a few years ago. More recently he was strutting his stuff in East Belfast, standing in front of a besieged Short Strand and accusing the nationalists within of responsibility for the sectarian attacks launched upon them. Trimble's favourite tactic when under attack from the right is to immediately throw himself in front of the reactionaries, adopt their demands and lead them forward.

This tactic has led the Trimble wing, already composed of sectarians and reactionaries, to move steadily to the right and become more strident and absolutist in their demands for an unconditional Republican surrender. However at the same time the opposition has moderated its demands. Trimble's arch-rival, Donaldson, has never demanded the scrapping of the Good Friday agreement and has on occasions stressed his support for it. The DUP, once committed to the smashing of the deal, now want it amended to exclude Sinn Fein.

## Goodbye to Sinn Fein

This can all be predicted from the deal. What the Good Friday agreement offered in effect is a sectarian structure in which each group is given equal sectarian rights. Following its publication an academic think tank that advises the British government pointed out that it could not possibly work. There would be no point in equality of sectarian rights. One group would have to be dominant to ensure stability.

The unionists agree and have mounted a vicious and violent campaign, on and

off the streets, to ensure that the agreement is modified to recognise their dominant sectarian privilege.

## Holy Cross

Perhaps the key event in that offensive was the raw intimidation of Catholic schoolchildren by loyalist paramilitaries at the Holy Cross primary school in Ardoyne. Rather than meeting with the condemnation of 'moderate' unionism the unionist political organizations were quick to justify the attacks and advance the sectarian demands for apartheid - with Catholic families to be locked in ghettos and refused homes in 'Protestant' areas. A loyalist commission was set up involving the sectarian gangsters and leading advisors to the Unionist leader Trimble. Although the loyalist campaign involved a constant barrage of armed attacks and a number of brutal sectarian killings the politicians felt no need to keep their distance. One of its more striking statements from the commission was a 'no first strike' statement - this meant that the random sectarian killing of Catholics could be justified as long as the killers could point to some imagined provocation that preceded it.

In fact the unionist politicians now openly bid to outdo each other in their open support for raw sectarianism. David Trimble issued a statement in September accusing the nationalist victims of the loyalist violence of responsibility for the violence. He was quickly outdone by Peter Robinson, a government minister representing the Paisleyite Democratic unionist party. Robinson was interviewed by police after stopping traffic on the main road into East Belfast while the loyalist sectarians gathered for a street party to celebrate the imprisoning of the nationalist population behind a series of 'peace' walls. Needless to say, the walls were built by the British.

## â€Progressive' unionism

The sectarian unionist offensive knocks away one major element of the peace process - the assumption that

there was within unionism a 'progressive' wing anxious to build a new society in the North of Ireland. In reality the unionists have behaved as any sober analysis would have suggested - pocketing the massive gains for them built into the Good Friday agreement and pushing constantly to move it to the right and make it more sectarian. The difference between Trimble and his critics has been that he has been anxious to retain all the structures of the agreement while forcing the British to amend it, while his opponents are happy to collapse the executive in the expectation that what will emerge will be more to their liking.

It is Trimble's opponents who had it right. Again it was the Holy Cross attacks that clarified British policy. Initial horror at the Loyalist bombing of schoolchildren was instantly replaced by a definition of the situation as 'community conflict'. The role of the 'reformed' RUC/PSNI was to force the parents and children to run a gauntlet of sectarian hate and demand that the parents negotiate with their tormentors. The eventual outcome of this policy of managing 'community conflict' is that the unionist demands for apartheid were met and Holy Cross school faces closure, under siege and without any genuine protection from state forces.

## Appeasement

The desire to appease loyalism was far from local. In a major speech following Holy Cross British secretary of state Reid announced that the Good Friday Agreement had made the North of Ireland 'a cold house for Unionists'. The intent was clear. The agreement had to be bent further to the right and the republicans had to make further concessions. British Prime minister Blair issued a statement blaming Sinn Fein for the violence.

Reid's speech was followed by a wave of sectarian attack and killings from the loyalist gangs. Wave after wave of sectarians openly attacked Catholic areas while the RUC/PSNI looked on. The new Chief constable, Hugh Orde, announced blandly that the police were unable to act without the full support of the community - in other

words, if Sinn Fein wanted protection they would have to sign up to the new police boards. Days later the Chief constable announced that the level of violence was such that he would have to retain the almost exclusively Protestant RUC reserve that was slated for disbandment under the Patten proposals on the police. At the same time the British intensified a long-standing policy of encouraging moderates within the loyalist sectarian gangs. Unfortunately the gangs had moved so far to the right that the moderates were now 'Mad Dog' Johnny Adair and his henchmen. Not only did they keep up sectarian killings while talking to the British, they followed up with a full-scale loyalist feud.

## Torrent of reaction

By this stage the wave of reaction had become a torrent. Preparations were made by the Sinn Fein leadership to sign up to the new police boards, with a statement from leading figure Mitchell McLoughlin that the British had accepted many of their demands for reform but, given the level of police involvement in the sectarian attacks, this was leading to fist-fights at local Sinn Fein meetings. The leadership split the difference yet again - announcing that the main problem with the policing boards was that many of their members were unable to join because of convictions they had gained during their period of struggle against the British.

It was far too late. Trimble's policy of squeezing them until they bled inside the agreement was replaced at the September meeting of the Unionist council with a decision to collapse elements of the Good Friday structure and force them out.

## Analysis

Sinn Fein's analysis of the October 4th raid at Stormont is quite accurate. The arrival of an army of RUC members at their Stormont offices and the arrest of chief administrator Denis Donaldson was not an investigation into allegations that they spied on the British administration - something that the unionists have done routinely

throughout the troubles - it was a stunt to establish that it was they, Sinn Fein, who are to blame for the British suspension of elements of the local government and it is they who will have to make further concessions in the next round of discussions.



One of Derry's Bogside murals supporting the IRA

The problem for Sinn Fein is that it is not possible to blame this on low-level servants of the British state acting against the British interest. This is the state itself declaring its interest in the preservation of the sectarian unionist organisations as the basis for its rule in Ireland. The nationalist family, in Sinn Fein's eyes the bulwark against any backsliding by the British, stood alongside the British and the US in effectively demanding the disbandment of the IRA and the local representatives of Irish capital, the SDLP, supported the proposals to abandon the Patten reforms of the RUC. The fact that Dublin widely publicised the charge that a group, arrested in Bray and claimed to be planning a robbery were IRA members is a strong indication of the pressure the republicans are under and the total failure of their analysis.

The next period will be grim. Tony Blair set the tone in a major speech in which he demanded the absolute surrender of the IRA. What was even more interesting than the threats to the republicans was the carrot he held out to their leadership. Capitulation would ensure a stable Northern Ireland - precisely what the Provisional IRA was set up to prevent! The British and the Unionists are now able to bank all the gains that they have made from the Good Friday agreement. Some of the sectarian structures set up will be preserved. The current hysteria by Dublin and the SDLP is an acknowledgement that only the immediate disbandment of the IRA would be enough to prevent the complete collapse of the existing agreement. This is an impossible demand for the Sinn Fein leadership to meet, at least on any short time-scale. The upshot will be a re-negotiation of the agreement either



explicitly or implicitly around the core demands of unionism. These have nothing to do with the IRA. The main demand is for superior sectarian rights - a demand that can be achieved either by the exclusion of Sinn Fein and the retention of an SDLP rump within the existing structures or by changing the structures to retain an inner core of government for Unionism alone. In either case the RUC must remain their private army and any pretence that at some time in the future it will be made up of equal numbers of Catholics and Protestants must be brought quickly to an end.

The response of the Sinn Fein leadership has been pathetic. They can describe what is happening easily enough - they are simply unable to acknowledge who is doing it. They call upon the unionists to be the unionists of their imagination rather than the unionists of reality. They call on the British to protect the agreement as

the British tear it up in front of their eyes. Mitchell McLoughlin announces that the way forward is nationalist unity - as nationalist Ireland turns as one to demand the disbandment of the IRA. RUC chief Hugh Orde and Secretary of state Reid explain that the nature of the Stormont raid was a terrible mistake - and Gerry Adams thanks them for their gracious response! He responds to demands for IRA disbandment by saying that he supports the call! In statement after statement the Republican leadership made it clear that nothing will break them from the Good Friday agreement - plan B is to do plan A all over again even while plan A is in tatters!

The republican response indicates the extent to which the British remain in command of the situation. However in the long run this is a major setback. The Good Friday agreement involved the complete capitulation of the republican resistance. The British and their allies had massive popular

support. They failed to capitalise on this and an attempt to put together a more reactionary version of the current settlement will have a weaker base and be even less stable. Even now there is a sharp taste of dissatisfaction in the republicans working-class base in the North of Ireland. It will take some time for the working class supporters of Sinn Fein to walk away. It will take longer for them to leave behind the republican opposition who simply want to roll back the film to the situation that led to republican defeat. However long it takes there is nowhere else to go. There is nothing in the Good Friday agreement - Mark I or Mark II - for the working class but imprisonment in a sectarian hell. However unpalatable the vision that faces the workers, it is at least a vision of the real world - not a republican pipe dream where Irish capitalism and British and US imperialism combine to bring justice and peace to Ireland!