



## IV340 - May 2002

### A political earthquake

16 May 2002, by **François Duval**

#### Bankruptcy of the traditional left



This unexpected situation should not hide some other lessons of the 21st April election. First of all, there was a high rate of abstention (27.8%), the highest since the introduction of direct elections for the president. Second, we saw the collapse of the Communist Party, which has been in the government led by Jospin for the last 5 years: it got just 3.7% of the vote. Third, a historic phenomenon: the CP was overtaken by two revolutionary far left candidates. Arlette Laguiller for Lutte Ouvrière got 5.7% of the vote and Olivier Besancenot, candidate of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR-French section of the Fourth International) got 4.3%, that is 1.2 million votes.

Widespread abstentionism, like the collapse of the parties that had been in government (with the notable exception of the Greens who succeeded in bringing out their differences with social democracy), bear witness to a widespread phenomenon. There is a clear rejection of the policies of austerity and social injustice implemented over the last few years, and discredit of the

parties that implemented this. Opinion polls published during the campaign showed that three quarters of the electorate had difficulty in telling the difference between the political programmes of Chirac and Jospin.

The EU summit in Barcelona a few weeks before the election deepened this inability to tell the difference. Chirac and Jospin, in partnership, accepted the privatisation of the Electricité de France (a state company which still has the monopoly on the supply of electricity), the raising of the retirement age by five years, and a commitment to reduce the public deficit, which means budgetary austerity in the years to come.

This confusion, already very strong on social and economic questions, worsened with the eruption into the election campaign of the "law and order" or "insecurity" question. Chirac made it his central theme in order to highlight his difference with the left, supposedly more "lax", at least so he thought. But most of the candidates, right and left, rushed onto this slippery slope.

Jean-Pierre Chevènement was not slow to up the stakes. But very rapidly Jospin followed him. During the campaign only Noël Mamère, the Greens' candidate, and in particular Olivier Besancenot, refused to give in to this pressure and abandon the defence of democratic freedoms or

criminalise young people.

What was the result? There was a huge wave of law and order demagoguery under the slogan "zero tolerance", young people from the underprivileged suburbs, in particular of immigrant descent, being implicitly or explicitly held responsible. Le Pen, whose linking of law and order to immigration has been his stock in trade for thirty years, only had to pick up the winnings.

Both the elimination of the parliamentary left from the second round of the presidential election and the strengthening of the racist far right, are obviously defeats for the workers' movement in France. They will obviously encourage wide-spread soul-searching and a discussion on future perspectives for the entire left: the parliamentary left parties, trade unions, associations and the radical left: how did we get here; how can we prepare the fightback, on a political and social level; how can we regain ground?

#### LCR chooses its candidate

These elections also showed that, despite the failure of the free-market left, another left exists, not only in the social movements and in the electoral arena. That is the starting point for

rebuilding. This presidential election also showed that the radical left, the non-free-market left, the left that defends the interests of workers and different layers of oppressed in society, exists mainly through two organisations: Lutte Ouvrière and the LCR. The LCR was always conscious of this situation and the responsibilities of activists who identify with a revolutionary perspective. This is why the LCR proposed to Lutte Ouvrière to make a political agreement on joint candidates in the presidential and parliamentary elections, to offer the strongest possible alternative for people who did not want to vote for the traditional left. Of course, this was not to deny the major differences that exist between the LCR and LO but to make it possible for them to exist in a common framework that would not harm the political struggle on major questions that clearly differentiate revolutionary left organisations from the free-market left. This was achieved in the European elections of 1999 where a joint LO-LCR list led to the election of five revolutionary MEPs.

Conscious of the popularity of Arlette Laguiller, the traditional candidate of Lutte Ouvrière, the LCR proposed that Arlette be the joint candidate. Lutte Ouvrière did not accept this proposal and made their own sectarian choice without even agreeing to a discussion. A national conference of the LCR, in June 2001, then decided to present one of its own leaders, Olivier Besancenot a 27-year old postal worker, and trade-union and global justice activist.

The goal was to have a candidate who would put forward an action programme of urgent demands against the bosses' offensive, which is also relayed by the "pluralist left" government and the European Union. The LCR also wanted a candidate who, like the members of the LCR, is a real activist of the global justice movement, unlike Lutte Ouvrière. For LO this movement is simply a diversion from the "real" anti-capitalist struggle. The LCR put forward a candidate brought the struggle against all forms of exploitation of oppression and of discrimination created and strengthened by capitalism, particularly of young people, women

and immigrants to the centre stage.

Another goal was to propose the building of a new anti-capitalist party, to bring together not only revolutionaries but all those who reject the barbarism of capitalism, members of the SP, CP and Greens who no longer who identify with the governmental left and above all the tens of thousands of activists from the trade-unions and associations who today no longer have any party political reference point, after the collapse of the Communist Party and the betrayals of the Socialist Party.

Our goal in choosing Olivier Besancenot was also to bring a new element into political life, by offering millions of people the possibility to vote for someone who is not a professional politician but, like themselves, a wage worker, who has the same pay slip as they do, and who, once the elections were over, would find himself like them...back at work. It was also a question of speaking to young people, presenting somebody unknown but in step with their struggles, whether the mobilisations against capitalist globalisation or against casualised labour which are growing in France today in big retail firms such as the FNAC book and record shop chain or MacDonald's. This wager was in large part successful. It was among the youngest electors that Olivier got his best scores (13.9% of 18-24 year olds, and 6.3% of 25-34 year olds according to certain breakdowns).

This campaign, waged under the slogan "Our lives are worth more than their profits" enabled the LCR to speak to a far wider audience than usual. In a few months of campaigning, the European members of parliament, Alain Krivine and Roseline Vacchetta, and above all Olivier Besancenot, spoke at a hundred public meetings attended by more than 25,000 people, mostly workers and young people. We had not seen this for more than thirty years!

In the last three weeks, after the 500 sponsorships were deposited and Olivier was at last invited by the major television channels, this unknown candidate made a breakthrough. The

numbers attending meetings reached record levels, hundreds of messages of support and encouragement and asking to join the LCR were received every day. This increased after the results of the first round were announced.

The electoral success has obviously changed the LCR's relationship with the workers' movement, the social movements and with the other organisations on the left and far left. First effect: LO has agreed to meet the LCR to discuss the possibility of an electoral agreement for the parliamentary elections in June. It is too early to know if the outcome will be positive. But the mere fact that there will be such a meeting shows that something has changed on the far left.

## Building a leftwing of the left

The current situation, shaped by the crisis of the traditional left, the threat of the far right and the rise of the far left, confers new responsibilities on revolutionaries. First of all we must be the spearhead of the mobilisation against the far right, which has been growing notably among young people since the 21st April. The LCR has been at the forefront of these demonstrations. Then we have to prepare the conditions for a massive response to the offensive that is in preparation, whoever is going to constitute the next parliamentary majority, against social security, public services and democratic rights, particularly for immigrants.

Then we must develop a perspective for emerging from this unprecedented crisis, a perspective that gives a new hope to a traumatised workers' movement. Moving towards a new party capable of responding, refounding a fighting left, rehabilitating the project of revolutionary transformation of society, will not be easy. The results of the far left in general, and of the LCR candidate in particular, do not in themselves resolve this problem. But they make the conditions a lot more favourable than in the past. This is the task the LCR sets itself in the period

to come.

## Olivier Besancenot ?

the youth vote and scored best with 35-49 year olds, of whom 9.1% voted for her.

### Who voted for

Young people. In the 18-24 age group Besancenot was the second most popular candidate with 13.9% of their votes to Chirac's 15.7%, and unlike Arlette Laguiller who got only 1.8% of

He did best with white-collar workers, teachers and other public service employees (around 6% in all these categories) and his electorate was fairly evenly divided between women (4%) and men (4.7%).

## The streets erupt

16 May 2002, by **Dominique Mezzi**



According to AFP, 100,000 people demonstrated on the Monday following the first round election. The demonstrations continued in the days that followed. Typically, actions were initiated from a high school, technical college or university faculty and spread from there: that was the scenario in Lille, Lyon, Rennes and elsewhere. In the evening, the two components merged, the youth and the networks of activists, trades unionists, Besancenot voters, or those who had voted for Mammère, Laguiller, Hue or even Jospin.

In Paris, Ras l'Front called the first action, on Sunday at 10 p.m. Supported by the LCR, the young

socialists, the Greens, the gathering had swelled to 20,000 by the time it reached the place de la Bastille. The CP and Lutte Ouvrière were absent on this occasion although they supported the Monday evening demonstration (15,000). Demonstrations have taken place in cities, towns and even villages up and down the country, often on the initiative of the LCR, with varying support locally from political organizations (the far left, the Greens, the PCF, sometimes the Socialist Party), trade unions, anti-racist organisations and feminist groups. The culminating point was on May Day where a massive demonstration in Paris and other in cities all over the country mobilized almost two million people in a clear rejection of Le Pen from a clearly left and trade union standpoint.



In some towns, a slogan is raised which expresses a widespread sentiment: **Votez escroc, pas facho!** [Vote for the crook, not the fascist] The media have tried to focus attention to those who say: 'I voted Besancenot for fun but now I regret it.' But the overwhelming sentiment is to stop Le Pen, including by a vote, but to maintain the mobilizations. And all parties on the left, including even the Socialist Party, but notably the LCR, are receiving a flood of requests from people who want to join, rejoin, or in some other way be linked to organized political activity. This massive reaction is the first step in a new wave of radicalisation that will have an important impact in France.

## Statement by Olivier Besancenot

16 May 2002, by **Olivier Besancenot**



This is the result of the campaign waged by Chirac and the right - and accepted by Jospin - on the question of 'insecurity'. It is also the result of the

policies of the governing 'plural left' which has dramatically cut itself off from the popular classes.

At the same time, these elections indicate a change in the relationship of forces on the left, with more than 10% for the far left: Lutte Ouvrière

and the LCR. I would like to thank the 4.3% of electors who voted for my candidacy, the candidacy of somebody who shares their concerns and their hopes. The multiplicity of candidates on the left is not responsible for the rise of the far right; it is rather the

policies followed by successive governments for some years that are responsible.

Now we have to re-establish hope on the left. First by relying on the forces of renewal which have expressed themselves, in the candidatures of LO

and the LCR - organisations which have special responsibilities in this new situation.

Hope lies also in the youth who are massively resisting capitalist globalisation and fascism. I ask all the

electors of the left, Socialists, Communists, ecologists, but also the community and trade union activists, to organise a popular resistance to the rise of the far right, all together against fascism and the employers.

*April 21, 2002*

## Historic breakthrough for the far left

**16 May 2002, by Leonce Aguirre**

The mobilisations against the far right and the preparation of a response to the coming attacks on pensions and public services, as well as the upcoming parliamentary elections, present the opportunity to consolidate and build on this result.

Two political earthquakes took place at the first round of this presidential election. The first is the presence of the Front National in the second round. It has relegated to the second level the other earthquake; the fact that the results of the far left exceeded 10%. And if the presence of Le Pen in the second round is effectively the major political element of this election which upsets the traditional political chessboard, and demands a unitary and immediate mobilisation to bar his road - we should not minimise the achievement of the far left and its political impact.

With 10.4%, its results were more than triple those of the PCF and almost equivalent to the sum of the PCF, Green Party and Movement of Left Radicals vote. This electoral influence was not limited to certain departments or regions but was nationwide in scope. With the exception of the DOM-TOM [France's overseas territories] the scores in every department were higher than the 5.3% obtained by Arlette Laguiller in the 1995 presidential election. In 16 departments, the far left exceeded 12% with the best results in Haute-Vienne (13.42%), Seine-Maritime (13.55%), Pas-de-Calais (13.56%) and Puy-de-Dôme (14.10%). In a general manner, these scores are in line with

the deep phenomena of recomposition of the workers' movement that has been going on for some years.

### Plurality of the far left

If some polls indicated that the far left could reach or even exceed 10%, the division of the electorate between the LCR and LO, up until three weeks before the ballot, indicated a relationship of between 1:5 and 1:10.

The two last weeks of the campaign substantially modified this relationship, to the extent that Olivier Besancenot received 4.23% of the vote and Arlette Laguiller 5.72%. And even if the respective electorates of the two far left organisations do not coincide exactly, it is obvious that a substantial part of the 10% of voting intentions that the polls had called for Arlette Laguiller went to the LCR candidate.

The breadth of this phenomenon is all the more important in that the latter was totally unknown - the LCR had not contested the presidential election in its own right since 1974 - whereas Arlette Laguiller was candidate for the fifth time, benefiting from the start from popular recognition, electoral capital and substantial goodwill.

This result shows, if it was necessary, that the far left is plural. Any attempt at hegemonism is not only vain but constitutes an obstacle to the unity of the diverse components of the far left. Lutte Ouvrière's decision to reject a

common candidacy was certainly in part determined by the appreciation that this campaign could allow it to exert a political hegemony on the far left, either because the LCR would not succeed in gaining the 500 sponsorships or because there would be a substantial electoral gap between the two organisations.

Neither happened, and in the immediate it would be better to return to the spirit of the European electoral campaign of 1999 rather than seek false justifications concerning the allegedly petty bourgeois nature of those who voted for Besancenot (as implied in Arlette Laguiller's statement following the first round). For our part, we rejoice at the score of our candidate but also that of the whole of the far left, because it clearly expresses a rejection of the policies followed by the government of the plural left and the search for an anti-capitalist alternative.

That goes also for at least some of those who voted for Daniel Gluckstein, [candidate of the (Lambertiste) Parti des Travailleurs], although in the case of this organisation, its total absence from the social movement or any framework of unitary mobilisation, together with its manipulative and sectarian political practices, render any unitary approach more problematic.

## A major political



## responsibility

The success of the far left should not lead us to fall into triumphalism or smug and sterile self-satisfaction. Some hundreds of thousands of workers and youth look to us today. The LCR and Lutte Ouvrière have immediate particular responsibilities that will be discussed in the framework of a joint meeting scheduled for the coming days. Our tasks: to be the spearhead of the

necessary mobilisation against the Front National and the far right without falling into the trap of the republican front; to prepare the conditions of a massive unitary mobilisation to counteract the anti-worker offensive that is being prepared by the Medef [the employers' federation] and the next government on social security, pensions, the dismantling and privatisation of public services; and the challenge to democratic rights.

Finally, the unprecedented crisis of

the traditional workers' movement and the Communist Party in particular, poses objectively the question of the construction of a new anti-capitalist workers' party. There is no royal road to advance in this direction, but politics abhors a vacuum and if we do not seize all our opportunities, the reformist leaderships will take the initiative and occupy the terrain.

These are the stakes, and they are sizeable.

## LCR Statements

**16 May 2002, by Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire**

### Bar the road to Le Pen in the streets and in the elections!

### On May 5, vote against Le Pen!

For a week now demonstrations against Le Pen and the Front National have continued. Hundreds of thousands of young people are expressing their anger against the far right.

- Le Pen is a fascist. He claims to be the defender of the 'small people' but he is a millionaire demagogue who defends the rich and powerful. He wants to increase the givebacks to the bosses, liquidate social and democratic rights, send women back to the home and expel immigrants.

- Le Pen's score is the result of the campaign around 'insecurity' unleashed by Chirac and the right and accepted by Jospin, but it is also the consequence of the policies followed for 20 years by successive governments. The plural left, by

adapting to neo-liberalism and capitulating to the Medef, has turned its back on popular aspirations.

#### The right prepares its attack

- Le Pen's road must be barred by any means possible, through mobilisations and in the elections; but a radical political change is also needed in the country. Among wage earners, among the unemployed, in the popular neighbourhoods, among all those who feel themselves despised, laid off, without a decent income, without rights, too many setbacks have been suffered, and too many promises have not been fulfilled.

- Chirac is not a rampart against the far right. Already, he is preparing the recuperation of Le Pen's voters by combinations with the ultra right, the likes of Millon, Soisson and company... He is preparing, from his election, attacks against wage earners, youth and immigrants.

#### For a new anti-capitalist force in the service of workers and youth!

The parties of the governmental left have been punished by the popular electorate. The leaders of the plural left cannot be relied upon to genuinely oppose neo-liberalism. It is necessary to rebuild a new hope for millions of

young people and wage earners.

- A new anti-capitalist political force is needed. A force of combat, intransigent against the far right, the right and the bosses. A force which draws the lessons of the bankruptcy of the traditional left.

- Millions of electors have voted for the far left, notably for Olivier Besancenot, the LCR candidate, and Arlette Laguiller.

- We are ready to open a new road, with all those who occupy the street, with the new generation which is often getting involved in politics for the first time, with the activists in the social, trade union and community movements, with the Communists, Socialists and ecologists who seek an alternative to the governmental left. We want a new political force, 100% on the left.

- Yes, we must bar the road to Le Pen, through demonstrations against the Front National in the street, the neighbourhoods, and the workplaces. On May 1, hundreds of thousands of wage earners and youth will demonstrate against Le Pen and for their demands.

**On May 5, vote against Le Pen!**

Through this mobilisation, we prepare a huge social movement, as in the strikes of May 1968 or winter 1995, all together against unemployment, poverty, inequality, for the defence of social and democratic rights, for another division of wealth, an anti-capitalist policy which is radically opposed to the bosses, a politics which is 100% on the left.

**Time for a general mobilisation!**

---

## Mobilise against

# Introduction

## 16 May 2002

At a moment when the old European Communist Parties are reeling from the rout of the PCF in the first round of the French Presidential Elections, a discussion on the way the PRC under the leadership of Fausto Bertinotti has

## the plans of the right

A huge popular mobilisation, in the streets and in the polling stations, has blocked Le Pen at the level of the far right votes of the first round.

This is not a plebiscite for Chirac's anti-social, law and order policies. Starting this evening we must prepare a massive mobilisation against the proposals of the right and the bosses' organisation, the MEDEF.

We cannot rely for this on the forces of the "pluralist left" whose governmental policies led us to this calamitous situation. Only a radical

left with a social action programme can offer a perspective of social transformation in opposition to the plans of the right and making a balance sheet of the 5 years of the "pluralist left" in government. This is also the only alternative which could put a definitive stop to the rise of the far right.

Candidates defending these positions will be standing everywhere during the parliamentary elections in June.

*Political Bureau LCR, 5th May 2002 at 8 pm*

(Unofficial figures at 8pm: 81% Chirac, 19% Le Pen 19 % abstentions 4% spoilt and blank votes)

made this shift could not be more timely.

In the pages that follow, **Livio Maitan assesses the key dynamics of the Congress** and we carry major **extracts**

**from Bertinotti's speech** together with shorter **extracts from the main Congress resolution**. We also carry **an article on the extraordinary general strike** on April 16, in which once again the PRC played an important role.

# Refounding Rifondazione

## 16 May 2002, by **Livio Maitan**



The choice of slogan for this congress - Refoundation - could at first blush appear as a tiresome cliché. In fact, it amounted to an admission and indicated a goal: refoundation had not yet taken place and it was necessary to undertake it now.

In 1991, when the party was born, it was necessary to reaffirm a primordial

demand: to continue the struggle of the workers' movement under the banner of Communism. However, in spite of the good intentions expressed in the new party's adoption of its name, and in spite of the analyses and concepts introduced in the texts of the four congresses from 1991 to 1999, a refoundation in the widest sense of the word did not take place at the level of theoretical and strategic definitions. Still less did it take place at the level of the political practice and

consciousness of a good part of its membership.

The PRC's subsequent political choices and divisions have been a striking confirmation of this.

The party's first major crisis came in early 1995 when, after the fall of the first centre-right government, the problem was posed of an eventual participation in the heterogeneous coalition led by Lamberto Dini, a former Berlusconi minister. On this

occasion the party lost a majority of its parliamentarians and its national secretary Sergio Garavini, who had been elected at the founding congress. After the 1996 elections, the party descended into sterilising support for the Prodi government - something it paid for heavily in electoral setbacks in the following years. Then, in autumn 1998, Bertinotti, observing the drift of the centre-left coalition, proposed that the PRC abandon the parliamentary majority. Armando Cossutta, the president of the party, then took the initiative of a second split, even more important than the first. It was a further confirmation that an overall reflection on the strategy of the workers' movement in an anti-capitalist dynamic had not yet taken place. Neither had a reflection taken place on the nature of Stalinism and the problem of the transition to socialism.

Fausto Bertinotti should be given credit for understanding that the party risked finding itself in a dead end, foundering, indeed suffering an irreversible erosion. He decided to open a campaign against Stalinism and at the same time stimulate a strategic reflection on the basis of an up-to-date analysis of the fundamental traits and the dynamic of capitalism in an epoch of globalisation. In principle, it could legitimately be said: the very fact that a campaign against Stalinism is launched more than 70 years after the struggle of the first Communist oppositionists to the bureaucratisation of the Soviet Union, is revealing of the prolonged drift of the workers' movement, in Italy and elsewhere. Nevertheless, as they say, better late than never.

Bertinotti's initiative is all the more praiseworthy in that it happened in a context where, at the international level, the reaffirmation of an anti-capitalist, socialist perspective remains difficult despite the growing contradictions of the system and the rise of new oppositional movements.

We will not go back over the themes raised in the texts submitted for debate at the congress. [1] We should recall that last November the National Political Committee (NPC) had adopted by a large majority, draft theses to which a historic minority had

opposed an alternative overall text. [2] But the new reality had been the emergence inside the outgoing majority of a significant differentiation leading to the presentation of four amendments by a notable minority of the NPC, the national leadership and two members of the Secretariat. These amendments concerned the question of imperialism (the minorities reject the argument of the theses that the classical notion of imperialism should be transcended); the characterisation of the movement against neo-liberal globalisation and the relationship between the party and the movements (the minority argue that the majority blurred the centrality of the capital-labour conflict and slid towards a dilution of the party in the movement); the assessment of the history of the Communist movement (according to the minority, the majority's verdict was over-negative); the self-reform of the party (the minority held, in the view of the majority, an over-traditionalist approach). [3]

It would be abusive to characterise the partisans of these amendments as 'Stalinist' or 'neo-Stalinist'; Stalinists in the strict sense only represent a completely marginal fringe of the party. We could more pertinently qualify them as 'continuists', for they identify above all with the traditions and conceptions of the old PCI. It is on this subject that the majority text has often been the target of criticisms. More generally, those who defended of the amendments adopted different attitudes in the debate, with oscillations in the course of a single meeting; they have sometimes tried to minimise their divergences with the majority; at other times they have vehemently denounced the supposedly liquidationist tendencies of the latter. [4]

## **Stalinism and communism incompatible**

At the national congress the different alignments did not change. It should nonetheless be stressed that Bertinotti has sharpened his critique of Stalinism, and advocated innovation still more vigorously. Replying to

Claudio Grassi, a member of the outgoing Secretariat and a supporter of the amendments, he affirmed that Stalinism was incompatible with Communism. He also rejected the theory of socialism in one country and, in relation to the criticisms of Stalin made at the 20th congress of the CPSU, he recalled that other currents had opposed Stalinism much earlier. [5]

The election of the new NPC was marked by two difficulties: its size had to be reduced from more than 350 to 135 members - a completely rational reduction, but problematic - while respecting the statutory quota of at least 40% women. There was another complication: while the proportional distribution of seats between supporters of the majority text and partisans of the alternative was obvious enough, things were much more complicated concerning the representation of those who had put forward amendments. Finally, the list was adopted thanks to some draconian measures - like the exclusion of parliamentarians (although the presidents of the two groups will be permanently seated at all levels) - with 350 votes for, 120 against, and 12 abstentions (out of 549 who were able to vote). Bertinotti was re-elected secretary by the NPC, with 105 votes against 13 for Ferrando, candidate of the alternative text, and two abstentions. [6]

The majority who supported Bertinotti enjoyed an undoubted political success, which should also have international repercussions. Nevertheless, it would be a great error to underestimate the gap between the adoption of a line by a congress and its translation into practice. Bertinotti himself stressed once again the persistent and grave weaknesses of the party. In addition, it is a negative note that, for such an important event, only a little over 30% of members attended their local congresses to vote. Moreover, our own direct experience allows us to note the extent to which the majority which supports Bertinotti is heterogeneous, leaving aside differences which have long been out in the open. So the majority is far from relaxed: all the more so in that this majority current only enjoys a relative majority in two

of the four most important cities (Milan and Turin).

The renewal of the PRC embarked upon at the congress can only be realised on two conditions. The first only depends partially on us: this is, that the so-called movement against neo-liberal globalisation maintains itself, indeed develops, under its

current forms or under other forms, which today seems very possible. The second condition is that the composition of the party changes substantially through the influx of the new generations. Recently the PRC has recruited many youth: in the near future, these new recruits must acquire a determinant specific weight, and mature in and gain experience

from the mass movements. What is more, it is crucial that the youth are immunised against the insidious poisons produced by the perverse mechanisms of functioning which have subsisted, despite everything during the preparatory congresses and in the national congress itself. This is the key political-organisational question, which is in the last analysis decisive.

## Motion adopted by PRC congress (extracts)

**16 May 2002, by Rifondazione - PRC**

This task is today possible precisely because the challenge of being communist in the present age has already been won.

The whole of humanity finds itself at a crossroads between the return to barbarism and the construction of an alternative society, that we continue to call Socialist.

This development and innovation in analysis and political theory are only possible if at the same time we put into effect a serious, brave and also a harsh balance sheet of the history of the communist movement of the last century and the experiences of constructing socialist societies.

Those ideas, those conflicts, those struggles, those revolutions have indelibly marked the history of humanity as for the first time the masses have been protagonists of their own destiny in this way. But in this history, that therefore we do not want to put to one side or to fossilise, mistakes took place and also horrors - those of the Stalinist age - that we must look at in order to avoid them happening again - in the present or the future.

This is an indispensable and also a possible task today, because we are facing a world-wide movement against globalisation that is fighting for 'another possible world', and that therefore raises questions about the nature and the characteristics of a new society - one without exploitation,

alienation and wars. This search, on the basis of a return to the basic elements and foundation of Marxist thought, must continue and be expanded and our conference is a definite contribution in this direction.

With this conference, our party proposes and effects a turn to the left. This has been made necessary by the present crisis in the process of globalisation, which it is an economic, cultural and political crisis and a crisis of legitimacy, to which the capitalist system responds with a permanent state of war.

It is necessary in order to be in tune with the growth of the movements when, in our country in particular, we see more and more a meshing together of the movement against globalisation, war and neo-liberalism, and the extraordinary upturn in the combativity of the working class movement itself.

It is necessary because of the defeat of the political project of the Centre left and the so-called third way put forward by the moderate left, which not just in Italy but on a European level, has demonstrated its total inability to face and defeat the right wing, its neo-liberal policies and its wars. We commit ourselves to these fundamental aims on all necessary and possible fronts, whether social, political, cultural or institutional, working inside the movements for their growth and participating politically at an international level.

(...)

This congress reaffirms that the strategic objective of our party in the current stage is the construction of the alternative left. This objective is today possible precisely because of the growth of the social movements; the alternative left then can only be built by an interaction with and in liaison with the movements. It is not about putting together the fragments of an old political layer, but of bringing together, at the level of thought, an alternative politics and practice, from experiences of parties, associations and movements, that is of various forms of aggregation.

That is why we launch the invitation to open a constituent phase of the alternative left, by the construction of a network of stable relationships between multiple and autonomous subjects. It is a task that is all the more urgent in that the constituent phase of the movements is under way for some time. It is necessary to project different and contemporary levels of initiative, going from that of intervention in society to that of political action and theoretical reflection which will contribute to the transformation of our current scientific committee. The construction of the alternative left is a task which imposes itself already, including at a European level, where it is realistic, not just necessary, to fix concretely, on the basis of the experience of the European United Left, the objective of



the construction of a new European political subject bringing together, in their political and organisational diversity, the communist and alternative forces. It is in this framework that the strengthening and innovation of the party should progress. This congress confides to us

an important task: to innovate our way of thought, to act, to ensure a broader opening to society and the movements within it. (...)

We must change our modes of functioning, overcome hierarchical

conceptions and practices of separation, we must privilege political initiative in relation to a simple action of propaganda or reaffirmation of identity, we must privilege in our ranks the culture of knowing how to do things rather than how to say things.

## 13 million strike against Berlusconi

16 May 2002, by **Flavia d'Angeli**



The initiative, which had become increasingly urgent in a climate of social mobilization, was inevitable (despite the moderate leaderships of the big union confederations) after the decision of the Berlusconi government to continue its ultra-neo-liberal reform of the labour code and in particular to pursue the abolition of article 18 which lays down the right to be re-employed for any worker wrongfully laid off.

Once again, and in an even more significant manner, Italian society has shown its vitality and its capacity for mobilization, with this strike coming after an impressive series of demonstrations and movements throughout the past year: Genoa, opposition to the war, the mobilization of students against the educational reforms and anti-racist demonstrations.

All this has been accompanied by a resumption of strikes and labour struggles almost everywhere in the country. Thus the general strike and the more 'traditional' mobilization of the workers to defend their own rights can link up, almost spontaneously, with the 'movement of movements', organised in the Social Forum which had also participated in the big CGIL demonstration of March 23.

On April 16, alongside the workers and the trade unions, the global justice movement participated, with the idea of a 'generalization of the general strike', and a multiplicity of local initiatives, like the occupations of temporary job agencies, colleges or universities, and a very youthful and lively presence in the trade-union demonstrations. Now a new phase is opening, where the movement must take the initiative in social mobilization, given the uncertainties of the trade-union leaderships, which are once again disposed to reopen negotiations with the government

rather than to pursue the social struggle.

In this context, the idea of a referendum for the extension of article 18, to companies of less than fifteen employees, has been floated by the metalworkers' federation of the CGIL, and taken up by the PRC at the institutional level.

At the political level, the need to build a common front of opposition to the right wing government remains obvious, according to the proposal advanced by the PRC, but without losing sight of the idea that any alternative must involve a break with neo-liberal policies and war. In this context of huge social effervescence, the perspective advanced by PRC leader Fausto Bertinotti on the eve of the general strike, of the construction of a European anti-capitalist left based in the social movements, becomes more credible - with the European Social Forum in Florence in November being central to this.

## The Left Turn

16 May 2002, by **Fausto Bertinotti**



War is accompanied by neo-liberalism, so that capitalism marches forward unstably on these two legs. But at the same time an unknown and

extraordinary movement has been born and is growing, fighting against just this neo-liberalism and war.

The spirit of Seattle gave birth to the "movement of the movements", from which have grown fights, resistance, opposition and new social experiences, and alongside this movement a diffuse and diverse criticism of globalisation has taken shape.

These two contrasting currents are in conflict, with the first continuing to dominate while the second one, which contests and criticises, still has not succeeded in blocking the first or putting it into crisis or producing societal alternatives on a wide scale which could reverse the general tendency.

This is the political problem that we are facing. I am putting it sharply because we see a real possibility of transforming society, but also a serious risk that capitalist globalisation will concretise the destructive tendencies latent within it.

The problem in terms of the development of the movement is to be able to construct a new political project within the necessary timescale and that can win the space, in Europe and the world that is needed to meet the challenge.

The problem is how to reconstruct the critical strength and mass to restore effectiveness to alternative politics, a politics of transformation. The political project is born from our class-based criticism of capitalist globalisation and the experience of the movement. It proposes to construct an alternative social model and idea of democracy, which can also become governmental alternative, founded on the two distinctive principles of "no to war" and "no to neo-liberalism", in Italy and in Europe....

Recent attempts of reformism, so intimately connected as they are, and not coincidentally, with the dictates of capitalist globalisation, show that it is completely wrong and misleading to search for a left perspective tied to the problems of a political way out in the short term and to the search for a particular rigid pattern of alliances as the basis of an alternative politics. We have made a completely different choice, to restore the primacy of politics, and to rescue politics from a

subordinate role.

These two bench marks are a radical repositioning of the PRC on the left and making the social and political fight for the transformation of capitalist society a reality.

## **`No global' and the new workers' movement**

Our relationship with the movement is the main foundation. We want to help open a new chapter in the history of the class struggle, of the fight for the liberation of women and men from exploitation and alienation....

It is important for the movement that the party made this choice - which was an innovation given our historic tradition - of discussing with others in the movement as equal partners, contributing along with others to its growth. We put forward our political ideas, but at the same time operate in a unitary manner, putting aside every propensity to vanguardism.

We are not interested in the hegemony of the party over the movement, but in contributing to the hegemony of the movement in society....



The `movement of movements' - mass demonstration called by CGIL on 23 March

The March 23 demonstration was a great, extraordinary and new event. Without lessening the importance of the decisions of the different trade unions and the direct engagement of all the workers who took strike action, I would argue that this would not have happened in this way, on this scale and at this level of intensity, without the movement. The general strike was born out of the movement, and could not have taken place without the movement's growth....

This is not an explicitly anti-capitalist movement - at least, not at the moment. We will work for this, and we know there is a huge potential for this.

This is shown in the movement's approach to the great problems of the world: war, hunger, disease, the environment. It opposes the philosophy of the globalisation which it defines as neo-liberalism, and, if it does not unanimously see the roots of the problem in the capitalist mode of production, it certainly understands that they are imbedded in the social model and the system of power constructed by globalisation....

Our strategic objective is ambitious but clear: the birth of a new workers' movement. The PRC can help immediately by travelling the difficult but necessary road of finding the connections between immediate questions and longer-term perspectives, between the present and the future.

The construction of an alternative platform is a defining moment in this process. An ambitious task lies ahead for the alternative forces of the left, for the movement.

## **A constituent process for the alternative left**

The proposal that we have advanced, and which we are launching from this conference with a great sense of urgency, is to open a preparatory phase in building the alternative left in Italy.

We are not going to pretend we are the movement, whose autonomy, pluralism, ways of organising, diversity and political originality we understand as decisive for its history and its future. On the contrary the alternative left must come into being through its relationship with the movement, starting by opposing war and neo-liberalism in order to create itself as a political subject, and in an open and plural process, giving itself a visible identity and an organised shape.

We communists want to work with others who are not communist. We, as a party, want to work with those who are not in a party and do not want to become part of one, or who want one,

but do not yet have it,-mutually acknowledging our differences and sharing in a joint political project.

The alternative left, and ourselves as part of it, can stop being a minority and become a real actor in the public life of the country. So far, this perspective has come up against difficulties. But today it is posed anew from a twofold requirement: to exit from the crisis of politics, which will not happen spontaneously; and also from the growth of the movement and the accentuation of the social and political crisis....

## The refounding of the party

The party is being subjected to formidable strains. What was not possible yesterday is today becoming possible. Resistance has ended, a new cycle of politics has begun. An opportunity is unfolding ahead of us, but also, perhaps, an extreme challenge.

The debate at this conference is another step on the road of rifondazione. The debate serves to clarify the positions....

For my part I have noticed that on the ideological basis of "L'Ernesto", [7] this magazine legitimately supported a package of amendments as the expression of a determined political position. I also noticed that most of those speakers who supported that position, expressed ever more openly a global critique of the document that I strongly support. This led to a political choice which I do not support, because it seemed to me to be a total brake on innovation - in the name of a history which is behind us, and which we are supposed to share without criticism. But that is not the case.

I see that position as a weakening of the radical character of the left turn

that we are proposing. Such a weakening, a reduction, a brake, I believe, would condemn this turn to impotence.

The political choice that we propose consists, on the other hand, of radicalism and openness, exactly what is needed to seize the opportunity present in the historical moment we are witnessing today.

To put the question another way: if not now, when? I am convinced that this turn of ours, from what I can make out, has already been shown to be correct in more than one way. Without it we would not have gone through Genoa in the way that we did. With it we can now try to tackle the building of our future.

To construct it we need all the comrades, the whole of the party, its sympathizers, and also those who observe it with interest. Above all we need all the different cultures, tendencies and histories that live in the party, and we also need so many others who stand outside the party and who do not accept the existing order of things....

In this conference we have discussed everything including our joint history. We have done it not in an ideological conference, which in fact would be a good thing to do, not in a closed debate between the full timers, but in the circles, amongst the party membership, without claiming titles and science, which would not have corresponded to people's familiar cultural and political, individual or collective environment.

## Stalinism is incompatible with communism

"Why," someone asks "from Livorno [8] onwards have you

continued this profound and persistent settlement with Stalinism?" Because when the opponent resists, it is he who chooses the battleground and sets the hierarchy of problems, hence some negligence in the debate is always possible.

But when the chance comes again, when the possibility and the necessity to refound your politics is confronting you, then you cannot drag your feet. This time you must start from the movement itself, and seize this new opportunity with both hands as the movement has reached its highest level, posing the transformation of the society. Then you have to show that you can do both these things, showing which side you're on, how you react, the culture that you carry with you, and the idea of society that you put forward.

The movement of the movements, the idea that another world is possible which for us is socialism, rise up against this capitalist modernization in name of a process of liberation of women and men. Our communism can speak the same free language if it can free itself from a big defeat that is part of our history, if it can free itself from the burden that it carries along behind it. The comrades who witnessed it, far from the epicentre, but inside a story as unique as the Italian story itself, carry the marks of it in different ways, but all with the honour of people who fought for a great cause, the democratic Republic.

But this story cannot dazzle us. Stalinism is incompatible with communism. This critique of a part of our heritage, the eradication from our rules of every form of authoritarianism and the substitution of the power of the representatives for the liberation of women and the men. This together with the fight against the idea that politics is autonomous from life, from work and from society, is part not of one struggle in the 1930s in the East, but of the 20th century in the world.

# A destructive fury

16 May 2002, by **Michel Warschawski**



Ambulances and medical teams are fired on, as are churches and mosques, diplomatic convoys and journalists. US or European citizens who come to see at first hand the situation in the occupied territories are deported as if they were hooligans - and the same treatment is meted out to a European Union ministerial delegation. Men are killed by being shot through the head (at least six in Ramallah), entire streets are destroyed by shelling and missiles, with the inhabitants in their houses. Torture is practiced in the detention camps where thousands of civilians have been rounded up. How many deaths? 2,000? More?

In the refugee camp at Jenin, in any case, there has been a veritable massacre, like that in Kibiyeh in 1953, like in Sabra and Chatilla in 1982. All carried out by Sharon.

What lies behind this destructive madness? As far as the government is concerned, it is the result of an ideology that mixes ultra-nationalism, hatred of Arabs and messianic fundamentalism (the presence of Shimon Peres only confirms the confusion of those elements in international social democracy who believed the Israeli Labour Party were anything other than national socialists). Their war is a holy war for Eretz Israel, cleansed of Arabs. As far as the Israeli people are concerned, and in particular those hundreds of thousands of men and women who, for a time, supported the peace process, it has - very easily, it should be said - been mystified by the discourse of Ehud Barak, who stated that at Camp David he had succeeded in proving the Palestinians never wanted peace with Israel, and in fact was only engaged in a subtle manoeuvre to destroy Israel. Sharon's victory was the corollary of

such an argument.

It should be said and repeated: this is not a war between Israel and the Palestinians, for a war supposes two armies confronting each other, even if their forces are sometimes very unequal. Nor is it an anti-terrorist operation, because you don't dismantle networks with 30,000 soldiers, more than a thousand tanks, combat helicopters and fighter jets. What is it all about then? A punitive operation combined with a vast operation of pacification, two concepts which will be immediately familiar to all those who have experienced or studied colonialism.

The punitive operation is not a reaction to suicide bombings (it began at the end of September, well before the first such bombings), but rather to the refusal by the Palestinians and their national leadership to accept the diktats of Ehud Barak at Camp David in July 2000. To the generous offer of the Palestinians to content themselves with 22% of their historic homeland, Ehud Barak had responded with the demand to annex some 20% of Palestinian territory, to maintain a significant number of settlements and above all to impose Jewish sovereignty on the Haram al-sharif. [9] A proposal as absurd as it was unacceptable, it was seen by the Palestinians as an Israeli rejection of their historic compromise and more generally of their will for coexistence based on the realisation of UN resolutions and the principles of law.

However, the essence of the Israeli aggression is not the punitive aspect, but pacification: it is about bringing a whole people to its knees, to make it capitulate and accept the Sharon plan. For, contrary to what is often thought, Sharon has a plan: to enclose the Palestinians in the zones they inhabit, transform them into veritable Bantustans, put the finishing touches to the process of settlement in the

remainder of the occupied territories (50-60%) and annex them to Israel. These Bantustans (or 'cantons' as Sharon calls them) would be governed by collaborators, put in position after the neutralisation of Yasser Arafat and the destruction of the Palestinian authority.

A crazy objective, doomed to failure because of the obstinacy of the Palestinian people who, despite thousands of deaths and the destruction of the infrastructures of their society, show absolutely no sign of capitulation. On the contrary, with the determination of those who have nothing more to lose the women and men of the West Bank and Gaza Strip continue to heroically resist Israeli violence.

That is why the murderous violence of Sharon and the Israeli army will not stop until the Palestinians surrender or another force which is still more determined than that of the far right government which leads Israel obliges it to cease its aggression, begin a withdrawal from the occupied territories and dismantle the settlements built in those territories.

More than 10 years ago the former Israeli chief of staff, general Dan Shomron, said that the Israeli army, before deciding on what methods to employ to break the Palestinian popular movement, should take into consideration two factors: possible international pressure and the existence of a strong internal opposition. These two factors, said the general, fixed the limits of the means of repression available to the army of occupation. These two factors have been cruelly lacking in the course of the last 18 months.

International pressure does not go beyond verbal reproaches and vague threats in the case of Europe; while since September 11 the US has given a green light to what is presented as



the front line defence in the world crusade against terrorism. As for Israeli society, apart from a peace movement which is slowly waking up from a more or less active collaboration with the terrorist policies of Barak and then Sharon, it is for the moment united behind its government of national unity and its army, and genuinely believes that it is 'them or us', and that it is imperative to return to the behaviour and reflexes of the 1950s when Israel was entirely mobilised in its war against the Arab world. As if nothing had happened since the war of 1973, neither the coming of Sadat, nor the peace with Egypt, nor the Madrid Conference, nor the Oslo process, nor peace with Jordan nor the Saudi plan. A

schizophrenic and murderous, but also suicidal, psychosis.

The Geneva conventions are trampled underfoot, the laws of war are violated, the norms of international civility swept aside. With complete impunity: no serious sanction has been taken by the European states. As for the US, they support Sharon, who gives an example of how to lead the crusade of the civilised world against barbarism.

Certainly, civil societies have woken up, from Rabat where 2 million people demonstrated their solidarity with the Palestinians to Berkeley, California, from Brussels where more than 15,000 demonstrated against war crimes to Noumea in New Caledonia.

The European Parliament reflected this awakening in calling for economic sanctions against Israel, as did President Mubarak in recalling his ambassador from Tel Aviv. However, it is all too little and tragically late.

The murderous madness of the Sharon government and its army and the warlike schizophrenia of the majority of Israeli people demand a strong and immediate international intervention. If this latter is delayed Palestine will cease to exist, Israel will experience the fate of the combatants of Massada, and the whole Middle East will become a field of radioactive ruins. Apocalyptic exaggeration? No, it is enough to remember what happens to those who don't stop at red lights.

## Behind Israel's offensive

16 May 2002, by **Tikva Honig-Parnass**

A The current brutal military offensive of the Israeli army against the Palestinians, entitled **Defensive Wall Operation**', typical to Israel's Orwellian double talk, indicates the opening of a new stage in the long process that aims at destroying the Palestinian national movement embodied in the Intifada strugglers and liquidating the existence of the Palestinian people on the land of Palestine' (Haidar Abdel Shafi in an interview to Yossi Algazi, Ha'aretz, April 2). This strategic aim of the Jewish-Zionist state is in accord with the US imperialist interest in eliminating any independent nationalist regime or political movement in the Middle East (as well as in the third world in general) which by definition constitute a barrier to the capitalist globalisation project in the area.



The Oslo Agreement, initiated and

executed by a government led by the Labour party, which represents the Israeli capitalist class, was an attempt to implement these US-Israeli aims. However, the Israeli military operation which has begun two weeks ago, signals the end of the former stage of the Oslo process.. The central assumption upon which the Bantustan plan of Oslo was founded was that the Palestinian Authority headed by Arafat, would fulfil the function of repressing any opposition to this plan, thus abolishing the Palestinian national movement and bringing about the 'Kurdisation of the Palestinian question', as Azmi Bishara formerly coined the term. That assumption has proved to be wrong.

Palestinian resistance fightersThe Intifada has erupted precisely because the Palestinians refused to play the role assigned to them in Oslo and to accept the humiliating proposals of Clinton and Barak at Camp David and Taba. It indicates the awakening of the national popular forces that seemed dormant during the 7 years since Oslo. During this time, the entire **67 Occupied Territories** were

covered with settlements and split by roads, that have been the central elements for their fragmentation into a Bantustan state. The Intifada however, which is led by all Palestinian political organisations including Fatah and supported by almost the entire populace, marks the breaking away from the Oslo framework and the efforts to establish an alternative agenda to its peace negotiations', which proved to be but a cover for the continuity of the Israeli occupation. The entire people with their popular leadership which developed here and fought against the occupation, have now returned to the path of resistance, which at the same time includes critical positions towards the Tunis bourgeois, bureaucratic leadership and the authoritarian regime that has emerged under their rule.

It is this struggle for liberation that Sharon's government is determined to destroy in the current offensive. The professed aim of dismantling the

terrorist infrastructure' has nothing to do with the premeditated, systematic demolition of the minimal infrastructural means of carrying on daily life such as PA ministries and institutions, roads, hospitals, schools and electricity and water networks and demolishing of houses of the civil population. Indeed, Israel has declared total war on the Palestinians as a civic and national entity along with a decision to finish with Arafat who has come to symbolize the national movement which is now under attack, and with the PA which is the creation of the Oslo framework. Sharon has refused to obey the demand of US president Bush to immediately stop the operation and retreat to the areas in which Israeli troops have been situated prior to the 'Defensive Wall' operation. It seems that even the ceasefire mission of US secretary of State, Colin Powell is doomed to fail, and that he is going to let Sharon complete the operation until the infrastructure of terror is dismantled.' This indicates that within the parameters set by the US for Israel's policies, Israel has a relative free hand in selecting the time and methods of implementing the joint strategic goals of both states. In the post-Oslo era, Israel is returning to a version of direct colonial rule. This time however Israel cunningly attempts to only take over security responsibility in Area A' (since Areas B and C - representing 82% of the West Bank - are already beneath Israeli security control) thus leaving the Palestinians to take care of their daily needs (senior political commentator Akiva Eldar, Haaretz, April 11), apparently beneath the strangling conditions Israel imposes on them. As emphasized by Sharon, this situation will continue until an alternative responsible Palestinian leadership will be found',

which apparently can arise only after the Palestinian national movement is abolished. The opening of Sharon's government to the extreme-Right National Religious Party (now headed by the fanatic messianic Brigadier (res.) Efi Eitam who is preaching for 'Transfer' of the Palestinians), and to David Levi (Gesher') together with the forthcoming re-entrance of the right-wing extremist Avigdor Liberman, aims at ensuring a majority in the government for the implementation of the re-conquest plan, with or without the Labour party. {{Q Will the Israeli government succeed in catching or killing all the Palestinian activists/militants?}}

<img721|left> {{A}} We have to be careful not to play into Israeli hands and present the brutal onslaught on the civilian population and infrastructure, as if it is aimed only at catching the alleged terrorists' whom the army can identify according to a list of names at their disposal. As the Israelis themselves emphasize it is the terror infrastructure' they are after, which is a very blurred concept and one that includes political leaders as well as military commanders, like Marwan Barghouti (Fatah) [who was arrested after this interview] and Ahmed Sa'adat the general secretary of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) who is currently hiding in the besieged Arafat compound. Thus the Israeli media, when announcing a number of Palestinians killed (not often), takes care to emphasize that they had been armed', as if the participation of civilians in defending their camp or neighbourhood justifies depicting them as terrorists'. Of course, catching the heavy' wanted persons has been one of the aims of this military attack. Indeed according to Israeli officials, the hundreds who have been killed and the four

thousand who have been arrested during the first two weeks of the invasion (one thousand of them have been released to date) include 300 wanted activists. However, the success in catching these activists and the demolition of some 'laboratories' in which weapons have been produced cannot stop the resistance, including its military operations and suicide bombers, as has been already proved by the bombing operations near Haifa and in Jerusalem, and the military attacks on settlers and soldiers which took place while the Israeli military operation continues.

A senior military command estimated that the infrastructure of terror' can be rebuilt in four months time and thus, as Israeli commentators emphasize, in a very short time the army is bound to reenter the Palestinian cities (which at the time these words are written, it has not yet withdrawn from) and the entire area A and commit a harsher military offensive than the present. Moreover, this may be the opportunity for Sharon to finally commit the big blow' which will light the fire in the North as well, and under whose pretext Israel would try to finish once and for all with the Palestinian problem'. {{Q I suppose the long term aim of the Israeli government is to mount the pressure on the majority of the Palestinian population in order to make them leave the country'. Is this what the government is trying to do: Putting into practice the politics of transfer without describing it in this way?

A The policies which are aimed at making the life of the Palestinian population unbearable in order either to make them surrender or leave the country, has been adopted by all Israeli governments, both Likud and Labour. However, Sharon's plan of mass expulsion of Palestinians under the cover of the stormy circumstances' of the coming premeditated big blow', has never been pronounced publicly. Until around two years ago, the explicit call for 'transfer' has been looked upon as

a barbaric' idea to which only the marginal messianic circles held. This is not any more the case. The unified government of Sharon-Peres has included within it the Transfer Party- Moledet' whose leader (Gandi) was killed by members of the military wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Also the recent entrance into the government and the security' cabinet of the above mentioned General (Res.) Efi Etam who calls for transfer of Palestinians has not been considered by Labour a sufficient reason for leaving this extremist Right government. Moreover, transfer of Palestinians has become a legitimate topic of discussion in the Israeli media and among different circle of academics and research centres. These plans include the expulsion of the Palestinian citizens of Israel as well, whose national identity and solidarity with the struggle for liberation of their brothers in the 1967 occupied territories has been strengthening rapidly. Moreover, a total change has been taking place in their political demands regarding the relations between the Palestinian minority and the Jewish-Zionist state. Inspired by the National Democratic Alliance movement (Tajamu), they no longer suffice in calling for equality in civil rights, but also demand the recognition of their collective rights as a Palestinian national minority. This demand constitutes a genuine challenge to the definition of Israel as a Jewish state' which almost the entire Jewish population of Israel perceives as the essence of Zionism and which even amongst those termed Left' find wholehearted adherence and identification. Moreover, the prevailing interpretation of the 'Jewish state' definition is the notion of a numerical

majority of Jews which is claimed to be a necessary condition for sustaining the Jewish identity' of Israel, and whose violation puts in danger that of the entire Jewish people. This interpretation is doomed to bring its followers, including those amongst the Zionist Left' who genuinely believe in the two states solution, to support policies aiming at fighting the demographic danger' of a Palestinian majority, through different policies of oppression aiming at encouraging Palestinians to leave, including that of inevitable' ethnic cleansing. (as recent articles by Israeli 'peace-seekers' Amos Oz (novelist) and Benny Morris (historian) attest). {{Q Who are the potential allies for a long term policy for a real alternative? Are there political movements/organisations that can be won for such a perspective?}} {{A}} At present, there are no political forces among the Jewish population in Israel which can lead the struggle against the US-Israeli colonialist project. All Jewish political parties actually represent the interests of the Ashkenazi [[Jews of European origin]] capitalist class and the Ashkenazi bourgeoisie whose hegemony has not been seriously challenged yet. Not only is there no difference between the neo-liberal ideologies of Right and Left' but also it is precisely the Labour Party which has led the Oslo policy, that serves as their political home. The Zionist ideology with the notion of the Jewish state at its centre which constitutes the hegemonic ideology of Israel, has proved a successful tool in uniting the Jewish population, including the working class, behind the ongoing Zionist colonialist project.

The Israeli working class is split along national and ethnic lines. The Mizrahim Jews, [10] who (together with the Palestinian citizens of Israel) comprise the majority of the lower layers of the proletariat lack any

independent organisations that express their economic, social and cultural oppression. Their past cooptation by the Labour has been replaced by the political Right, now with the help of the false leadership of the apparent Mizrahi' party of Shas. The entire working class, both Jews and Palestinian Arabs lack even trade unions which fight for their minimal basic rights as workers. The past powerful Histadrut, which traditionally has served the needs of Zionism in cooperation with Jewish capital is now serving the sheer interests of The big Committees', which comprise largely the Ashkenazi elite of the organised working class.

What is mistakenly named the Left' in Israel refers only to those within the Jewish population who support a political solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict' which includes the concessions' of withdrawal to the 1967 borders' and the creation of a Palestinian state' - with different opinions regarding the fate of the settlements and the extent of the indirect control that Israel will have on the Palestinian entity. Most of them have wholeheartedly accepted the Oslo agreements, while ignoring the Bantustan nature of the solution which was offered by them. No real soul searching regarding the essence of Oslo has been committed by even the more radical' sector which constitutes a minority of the peace camp. This minority adheres to the belief that the failure of Oslo has been a result of Israel's violation of both its written articles and the understandings' on which Oslo was founded. The peace camp mainly consists of Zionist Ashkenazi middle class whose fight for the end of occupation' and the establishment of a Palestinian state (with different meanings attributed to these slogans) are generally not contextualised or couched within any comprehensive anti-imperialist



perspective, any understanding and challenge of Israel as a US client state in the region and the US as the prime supporter of the Israeli occupation. Nor are these Leftists' in opposition to capitalist globalisation and the neo-liberal policies of Israel's economy. For too long the anti-Zionist socialist analysis has concentrated largely on the prevailing slogans and confessed values and self images within the Israeli peace camp, as the main basis for explaining their political positions and has drawn from them alone conclusions regarding their main potential allies. Thus we too often have forgotten to insert into our analysis the basic Marxist assumptions regarding the inter-relationships between their membership in the hegemonic bourgeoisie Ashkenazi class, and their interests in keeping this hegemony through the Jewish state' and the Bantustan regime it would govern in the whole of historic Palestine. Their class origin as well as their Zionist ideology makes them incapable of leading the democratic struggle here, which is a condition for the implementation of Palestinian national rights. Moreover, if we stop seeing in their consciousness and declared motives, the only explanation for their political behaviour we shall find out that their European origin and class belonging which makes them benefactors of the different versions of the Bantustan solutions offered till now, is a significant factor in determining the allies they search for among the Palestinians.

Thus, even the more radical sector of the Israeli Peace camp has, till the current military offensive (which will reshuffle the relations of forces within the Palestinian leadership), been committed to the bureaucratic leadership of the PA, most of whom Arafat brought when he returned from Tunis and remain alienated from the popular strata in the refugee camps and villages, student and labourers who are the backbone of the resistance. The Israeli peace camp has preferred to disregard the rise of local

leaders who represent the revived spirit of the Palestinian national movement, which embodies the seeds of social and political transformation of the corrupted autocratic regime which has emerged under the PA as well.

**Q What role do the Palestinian citizens in Israel play? Are they of any importance concerning the fight for an alternative?**

A The Palestinian citizens of Israel are oppressed both in national and class terms and are assigned no share in peace dividends' of the era of capitalist globalisation of the New Middle East'. They have emerged as the only genuine democratic force in the Israeli political scene who seriously challenge the Jewish Zionist state. Inspired by the National Democratic Assembly party, headed by MK (member of Knesset) Azmi Bishara, they have increasingly taken a step forward from the traditional demand for equality of citizen rights' to that of collective rights as a national minority'.

This demand negates the very foundations of the Jewish state, as emphasized by ex Prime Minister Ehud Barak in the midst of the hot public debate which took place after the October 2000 militant demonstrations in which 13 Palestinian citizens of Israel were killed by the police: "We, as a Jewish state, can agree to equality of individual rights of Arabs which does not harm the democratic Jewish-Zionist state. But the Jewish state cannot accept the aspiration to define another national collective identity within it, with the long run vision of a state of all its citizens' held by extremists". The strengthening of the national identity of the 1948 Palestinians and their growing solidarity with their brothers' and sisters' resistance in the 1967 occupied territories, indeed may grow to be a threat to the Jewish state which is the embodiment of the Zionist movement. The question of Palestine has been for decades defined only in terms

of the 1967 occupied territories (including by the majority of the Israeli Left'), which it is said, can be solved by the two state solution. The atomisation and marginalisation of the Palestinian citizens of Israel has been mistakenly taken for granted, as has been proved when they boycotted the last general elections and during the 18 months that have passed since the outbreak of the Intifada. Moreover, the assumption that underlined the very 1947 UN decision to partition Palestine that the destruction of the entire Palestinian National movement could be easily achieved, has proved false as well. Thus after more than 50 years since the establishment of the state of Israel, we have witnessed the return of the old concerns of Imperialism and Zionism that an uncontrolled uprising of a united Palestinian people in Israel and in the 1967 occupied territories will stir the oppressed masses in the Arab countries and in the entire Middle East.

This growing awareness of the false assumptions regarding the Palestinians in Israel, is the reason for the war that has been opened recently by the Israeli establishment against the Palestinian leadership and citizens within Israel, who have been defined as a 'time bomb'. No doubt, a second front has been opened by the Palestinians inside Israel against the Zionist implementation of the apartheid regime throughout historic Palestine, which may prove to be no less important than the struggle of the Palestinians in the 1967 occupied territories. That is why I have concluded that anti-Zionist internationalists and socialists among the Jewish population should support this growing genuine nationalist stream among the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Indeed, their members are not committed to class politics, or to socialist programs regarding the future of Palestine. But their nationalism should be estimated according to the only criterion that true internationalists should adopt in deciding whether any national movement is progressive, namely its challenging imperialism (which in Israel/Palestine equals the struggle against the Zionist project), as Aijaz Ahmed emphasizes in his book



Lineages of the Present (p.300): "I have long been very suspicious of nationalism, because a great many nationalists strike me as at least very chauvinistic if not altogether fascist. But the blanket contempt for all nationalisms tends to slide over the question of imperialism. I think that they who are fighting against imperialism cannot just forego their

nationalism"...

The daily struggles led by the Palestinians in Israel against the Jewish-Zionist nature of the state as well as the struggle of the 1967 Palestinians for liberation is at the same time a struggle against US imperialism in the region. Therefore joining them as well as accepting their

leading role in determining the agenda of the Jewish radical circles in Israel is the most progressive democratic assignment confronting internationalists.

*Questions asked by Daniel Berger for German Inprekorr, and for Avanti (monthly paper of the German socialist organisation, the RSB)*

## "Permanent, uninterrupted revolution in the heads of millions"

16 May 2002, by **Luis Zamora**

**Q How would you describe the situation in the country, or more precisely the confrontations that are taking place?**

A First, a completely new experience opened up and came to the surface in December, 2001. A new experience, because the popular assembly process, of debates and collective action that has taken place for two months, out of necessity, continues to rethink and reassert itself.



The weakness of the political regime has deepened. And not only in relation to the government, as expressed in the pots and pan banging demonstrations against the Court — but in the series of incidents in the street with politicians being repudiated, insulted and harassed.

Another element is the sharpening of the internal ruptures or confrontations within the dominant class, although they have been going on for a long time, they can be seen very clearly in the last two months. But the fact or phenomenon that's most important - at the level of consciousness - or the collective subjectivity, as it's termed - is in 'people's heads'. I don't wish to counter-pose this to the actions, the stream of mobilizations leading to two

new governments, but indeed to emphasize that there is a revolution, permanent and uninterrupted, going on in the heads of millions of people.

One of the slogans seen on the demonstrations states: "They should all go, none should remain". It's understandable that the politicians would be angered with this slogan and they say that it's subversive, but one can also hear supporters of the 'progressive moderates' complaining about it, saying that the slogan could possibly be exploited by the authoritarians. "They should all go" isn't only a mere expression of current circumstances, it's the cry of the streets which is yelled out with the most fervour and about which there is no discussion by those who bang their pots and pans. It's a cry and a watchword which brings unity to the movement.

And so, as a consequence, the workers, the youth, the people who are mobilizing, will be faced with this reality. What will we do then? Will we return to a delegate system? Will we look for others, better, more honest, or whoever? Or will we go towards a structure of more direct democracy? Will we make the decisions? Will we decide? The so-called 'progressives' are really afraid of self-determination and talk about keeping our eyes open, in case some authoritarian comes along. There is also an effort by the

government and other institutions, and some of the communications media, to prevent the population from making decisions.

"Let's be careful...we will not push Duhalde [11] out until we have an alternative", the 'progressives' say. "They shouldn't all go, we have to have someone, it's only a phrase", they say in regard to the slogans. These are the arguments of those who defend the governmental institutions. I believe it's beautiful to debate them, and in the popular neighbourhood assemblies they're being debated. I believe the question of 'uncertainty' is an argument which benefits the government and it spreads this idea, because it's their only point to justify supporting them. The 'uncertainty' argument has support in other sectors like the so-called centre-left too, but the idea is also favourable terrain for constructing something new.

**Q Systematically people resist the constitutional formula: "people only deliberate and govern through their representatives". The same ones who used to close their eyes when the military violated the constitution now cannot accept that there are neighbourhood assemblies, piqueteros and the unemployed who challenge the classical criteria of parliamentary representation. But I have the**

**impression that, for part of the left, these expressions are also uncomfortable, because these movements are not able to fill the space with the 'demand for power', even though at some point these demands may be useful. What's your opinion?**

**A** For part of the left, there is something to this because according to my criteria, they form part of the 'system of representation'. They decry the idea of the bourgeois representative system, even though some of them will be standing in elections as 'the best representatives'. They have a conviction that electoral representation must continue. They don't really value the fundamental role of a mobilized population and of fighting, working people but they do value the role of an elected representative.

Others on the left are afraid of the possibility of the people's self-determination because it would signify that they, themselves, could be questioned about their programme and they are not prepared to give an opportunity to the people to be self-acting, unless it coincides with such a programme.

What can happen in face of a power vacuum in the country? Who will fill this vacuum? All right, as we are exploring ways to institute an alternative, we can think of a kind of parliament even though we might have a week without a government while the popular assemblies are voting for delegates (who could be replaced on a rotation basis). It's not important today what the precise slogan will be - the government falls and then we fill the vacuum according to such and such predetermined formula - what is important is to continue the practice of the popular assemblies and to put forward these ideas in the discussion. This is exciting because one could contribute right to the end in the search for something different, new and revolutionary. Why accept the minimum at this time? I don't share the characterization that some organizations have, that, "the people are ready to take the power, they wish to do it, they only lack leadership". I don't believe this matches reality.

It also seems evident to me that there is a process underway which is very rich and revolutionary. 'Revolutionary' is the way a government can immediately be pulled down, and more; but 'revolutionary' is what's happening in people's heads and in the actions during these past weeks.

We must push forward the possibilities opening up to us, possibilities that, if they develop, could permit us to attempt to go much further than has happened in many other similar situations in the twentieth century. We can advance measures that build power from below, a culture constructed from below and with a practice constructed from below, different from that of the capitalists, instead of attempting the transformation of society from above. But this implies confronting, within the left, the same problems of dogmatism, sectarianism and substitutionism.

The other day I listened to a very important leader of a traditional left organisation who said that the popular assemblies are going to end up being watered down, and that what is important is that they be channelled into the political parties; for him what is important is the party, and not the organization and construction of people's power... It's significant here that a leader of the left doesn't realize it would be a serious retreat if the popular assemblies were dissolved...

The mobilization and the creativity displayed during these two months has been impressive, but we must observe that these forces from below are now competing with calls for meetings by the CTA [12] and FreNaPo [13]. At the same time the movement from below has to confront the street gangs of Duhalde, and the union bureaucracy which is looking for ways to reposition itself and is also blundering into the same sectarian methods and formalism of the organized left.

**Q The measures adopted by this government since it took over don't seem to be improving the situation. Does the 'New Productivity Alliance', proclaimed by Duhalde, really exist?**

**A** I don't believe it exists, in reality...

It's true that unlike the Menem decade, when there was a plan which pleased the big bourgeoisie and imperialism, today such a plan doesn't exist. The IMF used to say: "Here's the plan, apply it, and afterwards we'll give you support." Now they say: "You present us with a plan and after that we'll talk". Apparently, the IMF doesn't seem to have plans for countries such as Argentina either. Before, they could say: "Privatise, deregulate and open up the economy!" Today they can't say this because it's ridiculous. There is nothing to privatise and nothing to deregulate...they can only demand adjustments to pay the debt...

Duhalde is working with the financial sectors and with the privatised businesses, attempting to base himself on the so-called, 'productive' sectors, saying that they'll be the engines for development. Firstly, these 'productive' sectors don't exist like that: they don't have Argentina's development as an objective. Secondly, the foreign or trans-national sectors are dominant and they're not tied to Argentina's development, but to its plunder, or, through speculation and parasitic intermediation, obtaining super profits which go outside the country. And in any case, Duhalde has not been given support by such groups to confront the financial sector, but to negotiate with it; and it's difficult to base oneself on the trans-nationals in order to blackmail other multi-nationals. And obviously Duhalde doesn't question what the imperialists tell him through the IMF or other international financial institutions.

He negotiates with the banks, large businesses, multi-nationals and with imperialism... conceding a little to each one but not reconciling himself to any single one. But I reject the notion that there may be a project that can be based on some 'productive' sector to confront the financial sectors, and least of all, imperialism. The failure of this idea has been demonstrated over the last two months. The popular sectors not only don't support Duhalde, they mobilize against him, weakening his power even more. He doesn't have authority, and this again was clearly revealed in his discussions with the petroleum

companies. I was on a television programme when Duhalde stated: "I'm not going to tolerate an increase in energy prices", when the representative of Esso who was there immediately answered back: "It's impossible not to increase prices." And then the other day Duhalde declares: "Alright, the increase wasn't much, it's reasonable." And this is what happens with everything.

**Q What is the extent of the "harmonizing" that was put forward by the Church and the United Nations?**

A The 'harmonizing' has gone totally unnoticed by the population. The lack of prestige of the governmental institutions is so great that to save the political regime they have to look to the Church and the United Nations to show some kind of agreements, somewhere. However, the people are moving in an opposite direction. There is a sector of the population that is participating in actions against the government and its institutions. It is perhaps, not the majority, but the rest of the people, who do not participate actively, support it, regard it with sympathy and are in solidarity with it. This sector is questioning the banks, denounces the privatisations as doing serious harm to Argentina, and there are no important sectors of the population who dispute the speeches of those who are mobilizing. On Friday, in the Plaza de Mayo, there was some 'few thousand' there and it looked as though it would have been very easy to repress them, if the government had wished. But these 'few thousand' are accompanied by the sympathy of millions.

I remark on this to contrast it with what is happening with the 'harmonization': it has gone unnoticed, no one follows these conversations, in the popular assemblies it isn't discussed. On the other hand, it's an arena where again the divisions and the discussions in the dominant classes have become more apparent; who put their demands forward, looking to increase their share of the pie.

The Church says the same thing about them: "They behave selfishly". I believe that the Church, and I refer

here to the hierarchy, and the UN, are institutions with little prestige. As the population shouts: "They should all go", the Church attempts to protect them (the politicians) from the pots and pan bangers with a rescue operation. We are reminded that, earlier, the Church had tried to save De la Rúa [14] in Caritas, with a 'harmonization' that came late. Possibly, now, the "harmonization" is discredited in the collective imagination of the country. Obviously, when they invite us, we don't go.

**Q Days before the social explosion of December 19th and 20th, the CTA had called a 'popular consultation' which has had many repercussions, and in the excitement of this process, FreNaPo was formed, which has joined the 'harmonization' project. What do you think?**

A I went to vote in the 'popular consultation', but it seems to me that this activity came late in the process: it had been planned a year and a half before, so already, by this chronological fact it was evident that it would finish up being something very bureaucratic, that would not correspond with the active reality that was developing in the country. But anyway, it had an impact. It invited the people to participate, it talked about unemployment and many people, for different reasons, went to vote. I voted, at any rate, with criticism, because after the 'consultation', what was necessary, in my opinion, was that the three million who voted, be summoned to encircle the Congress.

And in reality, this is what, in a few days, the mobilization began to do, spontaneously. I believe that FreNaPo - and the CTA, of course - suffered a decline because of their behaviour in the immediate events around the actions of December 19th and 20th. They lost prestige and there was much questioning among people. In the middle of the police's tear gas in the Plaza Congreso we met delegates from the CTA who were indignant at the CTA's order to retreat. This generated discussion inside the CTA.

Because of some feeling of rebuff throughout the CTA institution and

apparatus, faced with such an important mass action, some CTA members stayed away and others became directly involved in the confrontations with the authorities...there is now, at any rate, an attempt to achieve re-accommodation with the CTA and we should not underestimate the strength that this would have. This week was the first in the last two months where there were activities - within the arena the of the pots and pan bangers and picketers - called by organisations that were not members of the neighbourhood assemblies: the "Seize the Congress" convoked by the CTA and the CCC, [15] who placed themselves in front of the media talking about things which until then, they had not been able to do...

But it is certain that the CTA is reappearing. D'Elia [16] has made some very damaging statements raising the possibility that the BNP [17] might begin to pose itself as an alternative reference...

The CTA has a capacity for organization and organizational machinery and can try to show that they are part of the popular assembly process, without confronting it directly. On the other hand, I believe they chose the confrontation with the BNP, because of the very strong presence of a structured left within the Bloc, which runs the organization of the popular assemblies and the direct democracy process, the mobilizations and the mass participation.

**Q The daily world of Argentineans has crumbled. The lives of millions have changed abruptly owing to the impact of the government's measures, the pauperisation, etc. An expression of this new situation is the phenomenon of the pots and pan bangers, and all kinds of mobilizations, demanding concrete measures in face of the disaster produced by capitalism. But this brutal change opens up the possibility, for the first time in Argentina, that millions of people will catch a glimpse of the possibility of constructing and thinking of a different world, precisely because the old world has tumbled down. As socialists,**



## what can we put forward in the face of these new possibilities?

**A** Regarding an 'emergency programme', I consider it interesting what the various left economists see as being effective. They take shelter in ideas that are a somewhat traditional, even though today they are part of the urgent search for answers to the most elementary things the population demands. There is lot to be learned about this.



The other day in a neighbourhood assembly, "Nationalisation of the banks" was posed, and no one said anything. Then one of the neighbourhood participants mentioned the case of the Santander Bank, which is threatening to leave the country, saying they can't pay the cost of the peso-change. Then someone else interrupted, saying, "the Santander Bank should go if it wishes to go. But the bank, its buildings, its documents and our money stays here."

What he was proposing was expropriation rather than nationalization... and the rest of the audience who before then had been quiet, because they didn't understand what was meant by 'nationalization', gave this neighbour an ovation. What's important to understand is to not try to put forward demands without proposing methods that can be understood...The measures that are being proposed, such as "the re-taking over of the privatised businesses", "solving the matter of the pensions terminated by the AFJP, [18] "retaining the earnings of REPSOL-YPF, [19] "no increase of rates", and other measures open the road to an 'emergency programme'.

When I 'm appearing in the media, I talk a lot about the barbarism of capitalism, even though, obviously, in the popular assemblies I don't raise as a demand "a march against capitalism" - because it's important that those who are mobilizing, do it within a programmatic framework - but this is a contribution I'm making in the media, even though it may not be a so-called 'emergency' measure...

in this I see that the left organizations are very weak, almost electoralist, only pointing to what they more or less like. But it is important to talk about world globalisation, about the war, about what the IMF is doing and about the massacre of the poor, to show that capitalism is cruel and barbaric.

Today it appears possible that an 'emergency programme' may emerge from integrating the theoretical and technical suggestions of professionals and intellectual Marxists with the initiatives and models coming from those who are mobilized. To construct an 'emergency programme', which is not only strong, because of its logical coherence or abstract theory, but also because of its harmony with the new logic imposed by the demands and needs of the people.

Certainly, for example, the question of 'control' by service-users and workers, connects with what the rest of the population is demanding. "They should all go", is shouted by the masses, but alongside this, new methods of direct democracy are being built. I recently talked on television about the idea of re-nationalization of the enterprises under workers and the service-users control, and the other day organizations of service-users telephoned me to ask me about this. Members of the Caballito neighbourhood popular assembly approached me to talk about this also. They too wanted to see how this could be expanded.

These slogans must be linked with the discussion that is going on now in the popular assemblies, but it's no big deal. If we want to make a contribution to this discussion however, before we do so we should realise we can learn a lot from it.

**Q How do you think the development of the various forms of autonomy and self-organization of the people should be articulated? On the political and cultural terrain, what specific contribution can socialists make?**

**A** I remind you of what we are thinking of doing: calling a meeting around 'the five points' which the Autonomia y Libertad movement is

promoting. It will be a meeting to link ourselves to other activists, to push forward the popular assembly process, to develop more powerfully our anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and socialist 'points' to develop our ideas about self-determination and the levelling out of society.

After a period of exploration, better to say going and coming, with respect to organizational functioning, with time we will find it easier to get together to exchange ideas, for example, about what's happening in the popular assemblies in which we are all participating or in the other areas where the activists are functioning.

Some militants are not participating in the popular assemblies because they live in places where they have yet to develop. Some are not involved in them because they are active in their work places, or active with the unemployed workers in the 'roadblocks movement', the piqueteros, or in places in the country where the popular mobilization movement is much further behind... It seems to us this would be a modest achievement: to join with the fighters who are participating in the social process and who have written and phoned, who raise the need to know what's happening here or there in the country, and to answer more collectively questions such as:

"Will this process last?"

"How do you defend the popular assemblies?"

"How do you stimulate the political debate that is going on in the popular assemblies?"

"How do we link up with the other sectors?"

"How do we help strengthen the process of struggle that is going on and extend it?"

**Q Is this meeting strictly an Autonomia y Libertad project or does it have a more open character, to be defined in the course of the activity?**

**A** We are calling a meeting around the 'five points', to give a report... not for the purpose of raising the profile or



the building of the Autonomia y Libertad movement. The idea is to link ourselves broadly - even though there are organizational limits: we are addressing those who are not constructing another political organization - and establish bonds... We want to listen and bring forward our ideas, in a two way exchange with those who participate in the social organizations, or groups, or collectives, or trade union locals or neighbourhood organizations...some will come with documents, others with their experiences...

But the idea, from the political point of view, is enriching to the maximum, without having to approve political characterizations, policies, or orientations that might go beyond promoting the "five points"...

And from an organizational point of view, we are thinking of establishing an ongoing connection, but which would not signify assimilation into Autonomia y Libertad or reproduce Autonomia y Libertad everywhere, but to establish some kind of networking organization that would maintain the autonomy of its member organizations and which will serve to exchange information and perhaps get out some kind of periodical which could be sold throughout the network, ...perhaps to link struggles and to learn from them... Wherever we have been posing this idea these days, people are telling us: "Good, the truth is it's about time this happened!"

**Q Autonomia y Libertad's "five starting points" raises, and explicitly leaves open, some policy questions, strategies and theories, which have greater importance and urgency now, it seems obvious to me, after what has happened in the country... our journal, Herramienta, has come up against similar problems. Do you believe that it would be possible and useful to propitiate an exchange in our journal, more or less systematically, of opinions about the "five points" in the pages of the magazine, to begin thinking about them, with contributions from yourselves and others?**

A Yes, it seems to me that it would be useful to discuss them...as was

expected, we have found questioning in the more orthodox and traditional left. But we ourselves didn't realize that there are unresolved matters regarding them. Now we see these "five points" as very valuable and exciting, among other things, because they synchronize very much with the process that is presently going on, but there is no doubt it would be useful to establish some form of debate around them.

**Q Duhalde has said that he would not be President but he would possibly be a "piquetero", but at the same time he gives other speeches, systematically saying: "the country is over-run by anarchy", "we are heading towards a civil war", "there is a danger of a bloodbath", etc. Something like this was also stated by Alfonsín, "the Pope". [20] Are these just words or does it represent something more serious?**

A It seems to me in the short term they are just words. They're positions put with the goal of confusing and weakening the mobilizing process and the revolution in consciousness. But at any rate they are something of a warning that the ruling class is considering other alternatives ...As we said before, Duhalde's only strength resides in being able to persuade certain sectors of the population to support him by saying: "It's me or chaos". This was used many times before by Alfonsín and by Menem...but now we are in a different situation, because it seems to me that today the bourgeoisie has no organized structure for anything...If they are not able to weaken or discourage the mobilizations by other means, the idea that "anarchy is intolerable for any society", implies they will impose order at some point in time.



They are unable to address the people's demands, so they try to discourage the people, they try to wear them down, they try to cause divisions until the mobilizations can be defeated or suppressed. But today, repression is not the central policy... The instance that Duhalde carries out

a repression, all the world will be against him. On the other hand, I believe that Argentina is a country "shut out" by the global capitalists, and in this sense, it seems to me, the threat must be taken seriously. In the short term, I don't see any "authoritarian" plan, but we must be alert for the medium term... But what's the "medium term" in Argentina?

We're in a very different situation from that in which we were living two years ago... In reality the situation of the whole continent is radically different and more fluid: look at the situation in Peru, Bolivia and Venezuela. The same is true for Brazil, which is an unknown quantity. And now with the war in Columbia, imperialism is not just carrying out a war against the FARC. [21] it is setting in motion a programme for the whole continent. And in this context, Argentina could play an important role, because the political process here could show a way of confronting imperialism that would be effective and attractive for all the peoples of Latin America.

It is evident that with respect to Columbia, that if the situation advances there, it could be utilized as a significant example and could also produce a debate in Argentina. But in fact, the Argentine process has its differences with the rest of the Southern Cone in general and has a special interest for Latin America.

It's notable that these questions, which are really central, were pushed aside by the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. The FARC and the Zapatistas were not allowed to participate and there was also a policy decision that the situation in Argentina would go unnoticed as much as possible.

I had a bad impression of the World Social Forum. The official events didn't depart very far from defending a so-called, "more humane capitalism", and there was a political bias, as I mentioned. However, the experience of the "unofficial" activities and the contact with thousands and thousands of groups and fighters of the anti-globalisation movement, was worthwhile. You can't put a price on

that. Of course, it was also enriching to hear Chomsky and Wallerstein and to participate in the debates with anti-capitalist fighters such as Chesnais. I also had the very valuable opportunity of meeting the activists of the shanty towns -members of the landless movement (MST) in Brazil... Just as the organizers of the Forum discriminated against the Zapatistas, I also felt an attempt to control opinions about Argentina. I, for example, was invited on to a panel and was then uninvited and replaced by a representative from ARI. [22]

**Q Finally, about "the question of power", in very general terms, one of the most complex and polemical issues: has there been any advance or elaboration on this?**

A I don't know if there has been any progress...we have talked about this theme and underlined the value of a "counter-power" or an "anti-power", as some prefer to call it...In many popular assemblies, to take a concrete example, there were those who wanted to form employment bureaus and commissions to respond to the problems of the neighbourhoods. Thus the people are being given very rich experiences...and start to see in a more concrete way the formation of elements of a "counter-culture" that implies a solidarity practise of struggle against fragmentation and individualism, in opposition to capitalist culture, with the enormous strengths this gives to any collective action. We also see the beginning of the construction of a "counter-power", because in many ways the popular assemblies are discussing organizing society on the basis of a different model from the one that exists now and which is controlled by the ruling class...

We are not implying that the ruling class doesn't continue to hold power, something that we can't ignore because, definitely, it rules everywhere, and poses a very real tension, but the idea of exploring ways to end capitalism through a "counter-power", a power that would be so great, it would defeat the capitalist power, is reaffirmed by us...I'm not now posing the question of a cadre-party, which in a determined circumstance, in a determined wave of

struggles, for example, successfully challenges bourgeois power, without the masses first constructing a counter-culture and a "counter-power" from below, made favourable by a process of struggle that may give us a "socialism from below", like Hal Draper says...

I'm not able to say how this tension will be resolved, and I don't rule out that because of this tension it may be possible to arrive at some point for the need of some kind of organization similar to what we have known in the past...but in any case, the centre of gravity of our activities will not be around building a party that leads, but in the autonomy that produces power and makes intolerable the existence of the ruling class, working, not for an exceptional conjuncture, but pointing to a situation unsustainable in time...

So, what I'm saying is very general and full of questions, and seems to me, takes something from the Zapatistas, but it's also different. It's a very different matter getting rid of the bourgeois state power, compared to limiting yourself to solving partial grievances, specific to affected groups...

We're posing a global questioning of society and the capitalist world, and we encourage autonomy to defeat world capitalism. I could add that, even leaving aside the evaluations that we could have about the strong and weak points of the Russian revolution - for example, the extreme minority character of the working class and the Bolshevik party, only circumstantially a majority in the Soviets - it seems evident to me that at that historical moment, there were conditions that today I don't believe could be repeated...

Today imperialism's political, economic, military and cultural power makes it impossible to think of defeating it, without first basing oneself on the rank and file, a people acting for itself, to advance and organise, disorganising the enemy: this is the basis of everything, and starting from there we must be open to all kinds of combinations from the organisational point of view...

We're saying that in Argentina the

daily life of the people has changed and they are able to think of the possibility of a different world, but the people on the streets are feeling intense pressure to see how they can shorten the process of change, which will have repercussions on the political conjuncture in Latin America. There's a need to think through the problems of the transformation of society in a concrete way, and this implies thinking of the social transformation on a scale, not of one country, but of a region...the crisis in Argentina challenges us to think of a Latin American revolution, at least of the Southern Cone...It's quite unreal to think of a sustained Argentine revolutionary transformation if it doesn't achieve a synchronization with the popular masses of Brazil, who are a decisive factor in Latin America.

I have the impression that a large part of the left, in so far as it has been very electoralist in the current situation, has also gone back to being very nationalist... I include here the anti-imperialist demand such as "No payment of the external debt", which is handled like an election demand, and is not linked to a general framework... They pose voting for "No payment of the external debt" in a way that weakens the demand... Above all, this is so when they speak in the mass media.

I had a debate with the ARI in the Chamber Of Deputies but, really, I was up against several organizations on the left. Mario Cafiero, [23] who questioned the payment of the debt and the foreign domination of the country, ended up saying "We're not against the IMF, nor with the IMF: our position is to do without the IMF... We have to live within our means." And I felt the need to polemicise against him, to point out to people that these speeches weaken the struggle... Because the reality is that in the European countries, the G7, everyone, says: "Go through the IMF". People ask us to confront this. One must know and say: yes indeed, we are going into a confrontation with the IMF, and we are going face to face with the imperialist countries: that is, we must stand up to the imperialist world, to world globalisation and the barbarism of capitalism...

And in respect to "living within our means", Argentina has possibilities that other countries don't have, but only transitional, because the United States will not accept that "we could live within our means". They will not say "Ah, they don't want us? Good, then let them manage things themselves".

There will be a policy of isolating us, of harassment and of war. What is

posed is a fight. For this one must provide a framework for the slogan "I'm not paying", a framework that is part of the struggle against imperialism and the barbarism of capitalism and globalisation.

We need to think of ways of standing up to them, of uniting Latin Americans against them, but also primarily of winning the working people to take up this fight, with a serious policy, with

an awareness of what is happening in the world, which includes knowing that in Latin America all the conditions exist for an integrated struggle which opens a path against a world designed by the United States. This is a fundamental debate among the left and is the great challenge that is posed before us in Argentina. It would be wonderful if other fighters, in different parts of the world, would continue and support this process.

## Chavez gets another (last?) chance

16 May 2002, by **Emir Sader**



In the case of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez was elected with 70% of the popular vote (in 2000) after denouncing - correctly - the country's elites as characters in an 'oil farce'. They have indeed squandered the country's oil wealth by maintaining high prices without seeking to industrialize the country or to free Venezuela from the constraints linked to dependence on upheavals in oil prices. The Chavez government, through its minister, Ali Rodriguez, currently general coordinator of OPEC, contributed to an increase in oil prices by reintroducing a policy of quotas. Thanks to these resources, the Chavez government was able to implement redistributive social policies, reform the Constitution of the country and organize a number of elections and plebiscites that fully respected the rules of liberal democracy.

These transformations have not however changed the fundamentals of power in Venezuelan society. The media have maintained a solid front of opposition, around which resistance to the government is articulated, leaving this latter no space of expression outside the radio and TV interventions of Chavez himself. The supporters of Chavez have not succeeded in implanting themselves in the strategically central sector of the oil

industry, whose technicians and trades unionists continue to be affiliated to the union federations traditionally linked to the parties of the old regime like Democratic Action.

Chavez was in the process of undertaking a series of structural transformations: a package of measures, already voted through by Parliament, sought in the first place to begin a profound agrarian reform, but also extended to a series of other sectors, including the oil and fishing industries. However, the external and internal situation had already begun to change for Chavez. To the extent that the US economy passed from growth to recession, oil prices began to fall. Moreover, the internal employers' boycott deepened, with a flight of capital and the closure of productive enterprises.

On the other hand, through his 'Bonapartist' military style - to use the terms of the classic analyses - Chavez gradually isolated himself, leading to the simultaneous appearance of several fronts against him: he began to lose the support of groups which were initially in his camp in the beginning; he came up directly against the hierarchy of the Catholic church - which had been hostile to him since the beginning - and, to the extent that the deterioration of the economic situation aggravated the internal social situation, he began to lose

popular support.

### The opposition

The mobilizations against the Chavez government took on breadth with the adoption of the package of measures of December 2001 (the 49 laws that Carmona, the boss of bosses, wanted to suppress immediately during his 35 hours as president). These mobilizations were led essentially by a united front of the big companies, which functioned as a general command for the opposition, articulating the various private companies, the functionaries in the state owned enterprises, the Church hierarchy, the generalized discontent of the middle class, and counting on the external support of Washington.

To the extent that the coalition of Chavez supporters in parliament crumbled - he can only currently count on the support of barely half the deputies - the dissident groups are multiplying even inside the government. Beyond this, the popular layers and in particular the poorest sectors, which constitute the base of the régime and have benefited from the political measures adopted, remain unorganised, without any capacity of expression.

The oil companies' strike was the detonator of the decisive confrontation. Chavez could not

tolerate a halting of production, which would have definitively financially strangled his government, while at the same time the functionaries in these enterprises could not accept the new leadership named by the President without risk of losing control of the main resources of the country, which would come under the direct control of Chavez.

While seeking to undermine the Chavez regime and its strategic economic axis, the opposition began to score some points - even if it was only marginally at the beginning - inside the armed forces. Indeed the support of the latter was, with the oil and the personal charisma of Chavez, the essential basis of the regime's legitimacy. As Chavez weakened, the opposition began promoting 'saucepan concerts' and mobilized ever more people - from 150 to 500,000 people, it is estimated.

## Coup and countercoup

The coup was launched by senior officers in the armed forces, following a number of deaths in the repression of the demonstration of Thursday April 11, 2002. Some of the victims were shot by government troops, others were clearly hit by sharpshooters and the indications are that these had been set up by the military sectors of the opposition [and the mayor of Caracas]. The government established by the coup pursued its goals without respecting any institutional procedure and was very open in its pro-employer orientation. Thus, it immediately named a big employer as president and presented a programme for the oil industry: the suspension of sales to

Cuba; a distancing from the policies of OPEC and a rapprochement with the US. All this in a dynamic clearly leading to privatisation of the oil sector.

The popular mobilizations were a little late, showing how poorly organised Chavez's popular base had been. However, when these mobilizations began they quickly generalized across the country, and the Palace of government was seized. Meanwhile soldiers loyal to Chavez rebelled, the Parliament met and unanimously demanded the right of the vice-president to take his place in the government, and the OAS (Organization of American States) condemned the coup and reaffirmed the institutional legitimacy of the Chavez government. The employer-turned-president resigned and was arrested, while Chavez returned. In his speech he said he was ready to readjust his government, while announcing that those responsible for the coup, in particular those in the press, would be punished.

## Perspectives

What margin of manoeuvre does Chavez still enjoy? That depends firstly on his capacity to ensure that his project for the popular majority becomes a project for the whole of the country, striking at the axis of those forces which have already shown their determination to overthrow him. That would also depend on the capacity of the opposition to retake the initiative and renew its offensive.

Chavez's margin of manoeuvre has certainly diminished in relation to the armed forces, in Parliament and the

oil industry. It is probable that the initial project has been exhausted, because it supposed a clear polarization between the popular masses and the elites, which leads to forms of confrontation which Chavez can no longer countenance if he wishes to recycle his image as that of a leader capable of negotiating his projects with broader sectors.

Moreover, both the traditional elites and Chavez himself have taken account of the solid popular and military reaction. We will see what lessons they draw from it. Chavez has already made a gesture of negotiation, accepting the resignation of the oil industry chiefs that he had himself appointed and whose nomination had led to the strike against his government. Nonetheless, to the extent that the blows against his base have multiplied, the team around Chavez has been reduced to its hard core, those least disposed to negotiation.

The coming weeks will show if the wounds suffered by the Chavez project continue to bleed and if its death has just been postponed or if he can give a new élan to the project that brought him to power. The continental context is favourable to him; the price of oil should rise. It will then be on the internal level that things will be played out, which will depend on his ability to organize his base, divide the opposition, punish those are most directly linked to the coup d'état and negotiate with the others. He must succeed in maintaining the essentials of his project, while packaging it and formatting it in such a way as to gradually enlarge the consensus rather than increase the number of his adversaries, as has happened in recent months.

**"Chavez is very much weakened, and it will incline him still more towards conciliation"**

**16 May 2002, by Douglas Bravo**





### **Q Will the conflicts continue?**

**A** Since February 27, 1989, and the Caracazo [an uprising against poverty and hunger in Caracas - ed], which mobilized 10 million people, two forces have faced each other: those fighting for social emancipation and those who are trying to impose neo-liberalism.

This rebellion of the poor has maintained a high degree of institutional instability in the country. This is still the case now under a government which claims to institutionalise this popular reaction. I think that there will be a succession of coups, confrontations and insurrectional strikes.

I mean that there is a confrontation over the political regime, over oil, but the two currents that face each other are both neo-liberal, even if they represent different tendencies. On the one hand there is the bloc that could be called the Fourth Republic, composed of the politicians of the traditional right, the bosses and their media, some putschist military elements and some 'moderate' trades unionists [social democratic or social Christian] in the CTV federation.

This bloc supports an old and classic neo-liberalism in the distribution of wealth. On the other hand, there is a neo-liberalism that is much more advanced in its philosophical conception of capitalism: this is the bloc that supports the government. What is lacking here is a third force, revolutionary and patriotic, capable of

confronting the power of the bourgeoisie and imperialism.

In this schema, how do we explain the fact that the people came onto the streets to defend Chavez and that the troops remained loyal to the president?

It is clear that there are two very distinct currents inside chavismo. One current, the minority one - including the higher officers in the Armed Forces, the Supreme Tribunal and the Executive - takes the economic decisions and the official ones from the ideological and political point of view. It is this current that makes chavismo continually lose cadres, which poses problems; for example if Chavez loses five more deputies, he will lose his majority in the National Assembly.

The other current, majority from the quantitative but not qualitative viewpoint, is that which came into the street to defend Chavez. It is composed partly of officers ready to fight to defend the government, even if they do not dominate the military apparatus, and also political sectors that believe in the Bolivarian revolutionary project.

### **Q What is the current situation of the government?**

**A** The Chavez government has emerged very much weakened from the coup. However, this fragility will continue if he implements the conciliatory discourse that he has adopted since his return to power.

Conciliation as Chavez conceives it is a new pact - like that of Punto Fijo [an

agreement reached in 1958 between the Democratic Action (AD), COPEI (Social Christian) and Democratic Republican Union (URD) parties, after the fall of the military dictator, general Pedro Jimenez - ed.] - which does not take into account those who supported him and negotiates with the rightwing sectors which tried to overthrow him.

### **Q What position did your movement adopt during the coup?**

**A** Tercer Camino opposed the coup, we went onto the streets but we circulated a petition demanding the installation of a patriotic government.

### **Q What was your reference?**

**A** In the current situation a majority socio-political sector in the country - what one can consider as the patriotic and popular bloc, composed of civilians and soldiers, some currently in the government and others not - is in the process of elaborating a document that will be presented soon to President Chavez.

### **Q What is this proposal?**

**A** It amounts to a radical opposition to what we think will happen if Chavez pursues his policy of concessions, namely the privatisation of oil, gas and basic services.

Our initiative proposes, among other things, the expulsion of the right wing of the Armed Forces including some that Chavez is in the process of confirming in their posts, and the revision of measures seeking to create a consensus, like the acceptance of the resignation of the new leadership, appointed by him, of the oil company, the PDVSA.

## **On the PCE Congress**

**16 May 2002, by Ángeles Maestro**

This Platform, although conforming to the statutes of the party, had enormous difficulties in functioning that it is not possible to enumerate

here, but in spite of this, the candidacy to the Federal Committee obtained 21% of the votes.

The PCE congress represented a further phase in the process opened at the 6th Assembly of the Izquierda Unida (IU) with the Alternative

Document that was presented there. The development of events since October 2000 has confirmed the validity of the analysis put forward in the Alternative Document. In brief, the central elements are:

A: War, on a global and lasting basis, and the deepening of repression, are not accidental but rather strategic elements of capitalist globalisation.

B: War and repression are constituent elements of the new order and the new so-called 'anti-terrorist' alliances. Social democracy, hegemonised by the Third Way, is a structural element of the new imperialism.

C: The response of global capitalism to the increasingly deep and extensive economic crisis is the intensification of the mechanisms of exploitation and the elimination of the vestiges of legitimisation of the system: relatively 'progressive' taxation, systems of social protection, social, trade union and political rights.

D: The complicity of the great majority of the political and trade union forces of the left in these brutal aggressions expresses itself in the total refusal to lead a resistance and to struggle through effective general mobilisations.

E: The first consequence is a serious crisis of political representation, intensified by the generalized scandals of corruption linked to privatisation. The increasing abstention on the left reflects the defeat of left reformist positions that scarcely conceal the adoption of neo-liberal policies and complicity with war. The PSOE-IU

pact in 2000, the defeat of the Olive Tree coalition in Italy or the foreseeable electoral collapse of the PCF, are good examples of it.

F: Secondly, there is the increasing loss of legitimacy of the leaderships of the majority unions, which are increasingly seen as an element of the state apparatuses.

G: The bankruptcy of political and trade union representation, most vividly seen in Argentina, but with a general character, is linked to the emergence of the 'movement of movements', which shows that the days of impotent defeat are over and that it is possible to go onto the offensive, providing the starting point is the recognition that another capitalism is impossible.

H: A radical critique of the system and a strategic commitment to deepening and extending social conflict are essential prerequisites for the construction of new and broad forms of unity. That means participation in government must be subordinated to the interests of the social struggle.

I: It is vital that the most advanced and more combative sectors of the labour movement form part of the anti-globalisation movement to develop a dialectical relationship between social mobilization and intensification of the class struggle.

J: In the same way, the anti-globalisation movement must link itself to the workers' struggle to advance in the recomposition of class unity, incorporating alternative values, the fight for peace, internationalism not only as attitude but as a method of

work and the construction of forms of direct democracy.

The Platform questioned Stalinism in an explicit and radical form; in theory and practice, in internal political activity and in the very conception of power. Also it argued for a profound debate about the transition from Francoism and its consequences. In the words of one of its paragraphs: "Starting from the 13th Congress, the PCE initiated a timid criticism of the transition [from Francoism - ed.] and the political action of the leadership of the party during this period. In the 16th Congress it is necessary to go further and to consider if it makes any sense to maintain any loyalty towards a constitutional pact whose real consequences are the constant erosion of workers' rights and the reduction, until its disappearance, of democracy. We must consider if the construction of democracy does not rather necessitate the questioning of the present political system of our country and the updating of the central subjects that we defined in the project of democratic rupture, whose postponement decisively contributed to breaking the powerful popular movement constructed against the dictatorship".

The debate we raised in the PCE, far from being a short-term internal battle, relates both in theory and practice to the great question facing the fragmented and weak combative left in our country: the construction with many other people of a movement that can advance the viewpoint, as this year in Porto Alegre, that another world is possible only with socialism.

## Neither half full nor half empty

16 May 2002, by **Julio Setienes**



If we rely on texts, resolutions and

approved amendments it seems that, to take the concrete case of the Basque conflict, support for dialogue and therefore, the rejection of the banning of Herri Batasuna, prevailed.

However, this is not apparent from the report of Paco Frutos, which, surprisingly, does not contain a single reference to the Basque problem or the question of the right to self-

determination. More forcefully expressed is the orientation to work in the anti-globalisation movement and to support combative positions in the CC.OO as fundamental axes of the PCE's work. A militant attitude remains towards work in the social movements; in the case of the unions this has led to a position (a dangerous one, considering the diversity of its membership) in favour of the critical current of the CC.OO.

Enormous confusion continued at the international level, with the PCE remaining imprisoned in the political loyalties of the old 'international Communist movement'; that led to the invitation to the so-called Communist Parties of China or Korea, to give two examples of which there are plenty more. This is reflected also in the placing on the same level of the Forum of Sao Paulo and that of Porto Alegre, or taking shelter in a single reference (and for some, that is already an advance) to 'possible political responsibilities of Milosevic'.

The political repercussions of the anti-globalisation movement, on which an interesting reflection has begun, and the tremendous changes in the international panorama after September 11, do not seem to have opened a breach in the international politics of the PCE, which remains within the old parameters.

What impact will the outcome of the Congress have on the PCE's line within IU? It's difficult to say. Indubitably, the PCE as such is not extending its influence or political weight within IU. The reason is obvious: the PCE as an organizational bloc does not exist, but this is a question to which we will return.

It would also be possible to analyse whether, through its weight at the Congress, such-and-such a current of the PCE is going to acquire more or less influence in IU, but in the context of a zero sum game between such currents. Even in absolute terms, the global result of that sum has been decreasing since the creation of IU (if we take that as the moment of reference), considering the constant decline in affiliations the PCE has experienced since then. In the short term, it does not seem that the

outcome of the PCE congress is relevant to the present correlation of IU forces.

At the organizational level, we can note the continuity of general secretary Francisco Frutos, based on a coalition with Llamazares. This time, the formation of a bloc around the platform 'Partido Vivo', led by Angeles Maestro, produced some surprising confluences. The final result gave an estimated 59% to the sector of Frutos, 21% to the Platform 'Partido Vivo' and 20% to the followers of Llamazares. Few changes, then.

## PCE 2

The PCE maintains a high internal diversity. Practically all the plurality of IU has its reflection (often its origin) within the PCE. In fact, the three candidacies that confronted each other at the 6th Assembly of IU were headed by leaders of the PCE.

It is surprising, therefore, that we have the continued prohibition of currents in a party shot through with differences and divergences. Thus, given the non-existence of authentic currents of opinion that could articulate the disparities in the political terrain, difference are expressed - with the exception of the 'Partido Vivo' platform - around nuclei of influence which cannot really be described from the ideological point of view.

Nevertheless, it would be unjust to finish the analysis at this point. These nuclei of influence are formed not only around the internal struggle for power but around very substantial divergences on how politics should be practiced in the PCE and above all in IU. And method in politics is no small thing.

The last part of this brief analysis starts from a note: the Congress served to bury, at least in this political cycle, the feeling generated since the electoral defeat of 1999 in broad sectors of the PCE, although not always specified publicly, summed up in the question: 'What use is the IU to us, if we score almost the same percentage of votes as we did the last time we appeared as the CP?' A

question that reflects a reality on which there has been little reflection: the character of the PCE since the creation of the IU.

The PCE was the key to the construction of the IU, putting to the service of the project not only its ideas and the work of its militants, but a good part of its material resources. The initial political arc of the IU was composed of several tiny parties and a PCE that constituted 90% of IU affiliation. Since then, a double process has occurred: loss of the formal plurality of IU (although diversity from the political point of view remains) and gradual reduction of the presence of the PCE inside IU, where almost half of affiliates are no longer from the PCE

So, from an initial stage characterized by the generosity of the PCE towards the other much smaller component organizations of IU, we arrive at the current situation with an over representation of the PCE in the leadership bodies and public positions of IU in relation to its real weight in the coalition.

What is the nature of the PCE today, then? It is difficult to qualify it as a political current inside IU, because, as we said, the PCE is made up of several political currents that replicate the divergences of the PCE inside IU and vice versa.

It is a party, in the formal sense of the word, but is inserted in another formation under whose rubric it has contested elections for the last 16 years, as opposed to the nine when it presented itself as the PCE. Moreover, there is already a sense within the PCE that its strategic and not simply electoral project is the IU. With this there is the paradox that an organization that has existed for 81 years, that already was very plural, even in the last years of the dictatorship, acts like a single voice in another organization of which it forms part, IU. This distance between word and deed is a source of misunderstanding and frustration, a permanent hindrance to the development of IU and leads to a false question in the minds of many PCE militants: 'What use is the IU?' This renders difficult the complex analysis

of the situation of the forces to the left of social democracy in Europe, the relation between mobilization and social articulation with politics, the influence of the contradictory construction of the Spanish state on a state-wide political force and so on. In

short, it remains difficult to evaluate if the PCE is going to be obstacle to the renovation and the opening up of IU or a factor in the resolution of the existing tension

It is possible that the greatest virtue of this Congress has been to leave things as they were, not to try to resolve things which in logically must be resolved within IU and in through the relationship of the latter with the most combative sectors of society.

## The Crisis in the CC.00

16 May 2002, by **Pedro Montes**

In order to explain the crisis that has led to the dismissal of the second-in-command in the union hierarchy, organization secretary Rodolfo Benito, it is necessary to go back to the 7th Congress, held in April 2000, and also not to forget the outcome of the 6th Congress. In this latter, a 'Critical Sector' emerged which demanded a turn to the left and a revival of democracy and pluralism inside the union. Although the Critical Sector obtained a third of the vote and the posts on the Confederal Executive, they were effectively expelled from the leadership of the union during the four years prior to the 7th Congress.

At the latter, the Critical Sector again argued for a reorientation of union activity to confront and mobilize against a rightwing government that is implementing a severe and regressive neoliberal policy, without any trade union or political opposition worthy of mention. The Critical Sector, in spite of intense repression, practically replicated its result at the previous congress with 30% of the votes.

But the main objectives of the Congress were: the carve up of the majority's monopoly of power among its various factions; a very regressive reform of the statutes, severely limiting constitutional rights; and deciding on the succession to the outgoing general secretary, Antonio Gutiérrez.

Three candidates emerged, with possible minor political differences, but all defending the same documents on trade union strategy and the same anti-democratic attitudes. By common

accord and with the blessing of Gutiérrez it was understood that the new general secretary would be whoever enjoyed the greatest support among the majority. The strongest turned out to be Ignacio Toxo, secretary of the metalworkers' federation, and Benito, secretary of the Madrid federation. In third place and far behind was José Maria Fidalgo, a member of the Confederal Executive, whose support was limited to that provided by the central 'apparatus' and the 'presidential' designation that Gutiérrez had conferred on him. The latter, on seeing the results of the 'primaries', contravened the previous commitments he had made and demanded the resignation of the other two contenders.

Fidalgo was the candidate who best guaranteed the continuity of the policy of Gutiérrez. He was the most rightwing candidate, albeit in a close-run competition with Toxos, the weakest and, therefore, the most easily manipulated. Benito yielded first, in exchange for a privileged position in the union and an excellent position (organization secretary) to prepare for a later assault on the post of general secretary. Toxo resisted, but in the end surrendered in the hope of launching a subsequent challenge from his power base in the metalworkers' federation. And thus the ideology-free Fidalgo (his point of honour is that he has never been a member of any political party), without firm support, with his power based to a great extent on the balance of forces, but in any case very rightist

in conception, managed to become general secretary.

In his first two years Fidalgo has fulfilled scrupulously the expectations he had raised, accepting government policy without resistance, even applauding it, and negotiating and signing pacts with the Popular Party with an enthusiasm worthy of a better cause.

The union seemed in line with this strategy, but this was more apparent than real. In the first place, there is the anomaly represented by the situation of the Critical Sector, with almost a third of the union being excluded from the confederal leadership. Secondly, the 7th Congress had ended inconclusively. Toxo and Benito have not ceased to manoeuvre and prepare themselves for the assault on the general secretaryship at the next Congress. Still, nobody could have predicted the current crisis, its characteristics or the new alliances that have been forged. Suddenly, Fidalgo and Benito fell out, the first faulting the loyalty of the second. Toxo took his revenge, demanding the dismissal of Benito, which Fidalgo finally carried out, leading to the resignation of three Benito supporters from the Executive.

There have been no political explanations for what happened, apart from the stammerings of Benito. The crisis has not publicly had any component of ideological confrontation. Some glimpse the hand of Gutiérrez, accused of conniving with Benito out of spite because Fidalgo had displayed too much



autonomy. The Critical Sector has maintained a correct position: opposition to the line of the union, rejection - which in no way implies support to Benito - of purges carried out over legitimate disagreements and demands to restore integration, plurality and democracy in the organization.

Independently of its origins or shadowy aspects, the crisis of the CC.OO majority will have important repercussions, internal and external, although the outcome is uncertain, because an unfinished process has opened and its causes are not too clear.

Internally, the old majority will end up either very divided (indeed it is already) or will simply break up; this depends ultimately on whether the followers of Benito choose the path of resignation or confrontation. If they decide to fight, they need to develop their own discourse and to demarcate themselves to some degree from

Toxo's majority. We say Toxo's majority, because Fidalgo, although general secretary, has in the crisis lost his power which was sustained by the old balance of forces, and he has become a mere puppet of the metalworkers' secretary.

The new situation can be used to clarify positions and to open a debate in the union, on questions of concrete management as much as strategic areas. In short, it could help the Critical Sector emerge from isolation. But all these are possibilities, since the union has degenerated in its practices and ideological positions to such a dangerous degree that it is possible to ask if with the present framework, the present bureaucracy and the apparatus, it is possible to recover it.

At the external level, the most positive aspect of the crisis is Fidalgo's loss of authority and the weakening of the majority. Their willingness to agree to the PP's demands is so intense that the PP itself no longer sees the

general secretary and the majority as representing the whole of the union, so that it will demand less of them and distrust more their ability to deliver the membership when signing regressive pacts or agreements.

It does not seem that the crisis can be resolved through an extraordinary Congress and it cannot be ruled out that the internal confrontations will get worse. A climate of increased political tension in the union would be positive after the miasma that the bureaucracy has imposed lately, but this can only happen for sure if the affiliates and the workers can pressurize leaders who are mired in routine administration, political resignation, manoeuvres and dirty games, obedience, docility and the cultivation of their own interests. Of course, the much more difficult task will be using this crisis to generate the change of policy and internal practices that this union federation needs in the adverse conditions imposed by global capitalism and the Europe of the Maastricht.

## Signs of change

16 May 2002, by **Aleksander Buzgalin**

### Economic growth halted



Bush and PutinThe signs of an imminent downturn were already quite visible in the middle of 2000. Although the macroeconomic situation remained favourable (inflation was averaging no more than 1.5-2.0 percent per month, the money supply was slowly growing, the degree of monetisation of the turnover of goods and services was growing, individual incomes were growing in real terms, and companies' long-term debts were decreasing), there were dangerous symptoms building up in the

production sector. There was a downturn in company profitability in almost every branch of the economy. The short-term investment boom - which in any case had not affected all industries - began to drop off. In a number of branches of manufacturing industry, particularly in the consumer sector, investment growth did not simply slow down, but actually started to decline. The decline in profitability and fall in investments were directly linked, because over two-thirds of investment in Russian companies' capital assets comes from their own funds.

At the end of last year, these alarming symptoms were dramatically confirmed. In the last two months of the year, economic industrial growth gave way to a small decline in production. Does this mean that all

the opportunities for economic growth have been exhausted, and the Russian economy is heading for another downward spiral in the protracted crisis?

There is no simple answer. Events may take various turns. To understand what realistic prospects for economic growth remain in Russia, we need to examine the reasons for the upswing that has now come to an end.

#### Where did the recovery come from?

In contrast to the stagnation now looming over us, the economic upswing of the last two years was truly unexpected. The catalyst was the abrupt change in Russia's economic policy in 1998, which external factors necessitated. The growing pyramid of

domestic and foreign debt and the inability of the government to resolve this problem through a rational macroeconomic manoeuvre resulted in the financial collapse of August 1998. The fourfold devaluation of the rouble created highly favourable conditions for Russian exports (which were suffering at the time from an unfavourable world market) and adverse conditions for import. As a result, there was an increase in export incomes and economic growth in industries providing import substitution (mainly in consumer products) on the domestic market.

Primakov's government exploited this growth in export income by making it compulsory for exporters to sell all their hard currency proceeds, which enabled the government to stabilize the currency market and secure an increase in tax revenue for the budget.

A second factor was the general rise in world prices for oil and some other primary products, which began in 1999. This did not simply increase the inflow of export income and tax revenue, but also had a strong knock-on effect on the economy. In the fuel and primary industries there was a growing demand for pipelines, drilling equipment, construction equipment and other engineering products. Investment in the oil sector grew at an annual equivalent rate of more than 90 percent.

A third factor - which does not get very much coverage, but which had a major effect on the economic situation in most secondary industries - was the fact that wages were halved in real terms as a result of the August 1998 financial crisis. This considerably reduced companies' production costs, increased profitability and allowed them to increase investment in their capital assets. In addition, this reduction in real incomes was an additional factor governing the shift in consumer demand away from imported products towards domestically produced ones.

## **The limits of**

## **market growth**

This brief review of the factors influencing the economic recovery demonstrates that none of them was of a long-term nature. The world market is now gradually shifting towards a reduction in prices for fuel and primary products. Given the worsening economic conditions in the United States and the prospective depression in European economic activity, the trend towards a reduction in prices for these products will become even more marked. Import substitution in Russia's domestic market has already played itself out. It is not merely that the balance between imported and consumer goods on the domestic market has been restored: in 2000, as real incomes grew, there was a steady increase in the share of imported goods being bought by consumers.

A growth in incomes in real terms naturally creates a general increase in demand on the consumer market. However, this increase in demand mainly affects imported rather than domestically produced products. In addition, a growth in real incomes counteracts the advantages gained by a reduction in labour costs.

All these considerations were quite evident two years ago. In order to ensure long term and stable economic growth, the essential thing should have been to give the recovery an additional boost with some long-range strategies. The key one should have been to embark upon a modernization of the capital assets of the Russian economy.

## **The "2003 problem"**

This is the name given in Russia to the problem of the serious aging of the capital assets. This was already a problem before the radical market reforms even began. The reforms themselves, which led to a fourfold cut in investment in capital assets, greatly exacerbated this problem. Between 2003 and 2005 a considerable proportion of the capital assets in such sectors as agriculture, energy,

pipeline transportation, and the housing and utilities infrastructure will urgently need replacing. The winter of 2000-2001 has seen major failures in the heating supply system, gas leaks and explosions, and prolonged power cuts in a number of regions; these were only the first warning signs of the impending problem.

Russia must face the fact that it has no option but to implement a massive overhaul of the capital assets in almost every branch of the national economy. However, even the growth in investment which accompanied the economic recovery of 1999-2000 was not nearly enough to redeem the situation in any meaningful way. The government's current economic policy simply ignores this problem. Officials responsible for the economy continue to speak smugly of an economic upturn. And even when the problem is acknowledged - as with electricity - hopes for a solution are pinned on a market-based restructuring which is supposed to secure an influx of foreign investment on its own. For some reason the dismal results of the market-based restructuring of energy in California have not put our reformers off.

However, the secret to ensuring long-term economic growth lies precisely in resolving the problem of overhauling the capital assets. This is an extremely tough challenge, because the country is still suffering from a major lack of investment (both in terms of money and ideas). Mobilizing investment is of defining importance for the economy, because only a broad-scale modernization of the capital assets is capable of creating a rising domestic market for the manufacturing industry in the long term, and at the same time ensuring that Russian products become increasingly competitive.

## **A year wasted**

The Putin administration which came to power in early 2000 has done nothing in the last year - not only in terms of developing a strategy capable of providing for an overhaul of the capital assets, but also in terms of eliminating those economic threats which are visible today. This is

universally recognized, and the influential business magazine *Expert* writes about this quite openly. But does this mean that the worst case scenario has been realized?

There are serious grounds for doubting that things would have changed for the better even had the Putin administration and the Kasyanov government adopted a more proactive approach. The government's and the president's existing draft solutions for a whole range of serious economic development problems (restructuring transport and energy, reforming the pension system and the housing and utilities infrastructure, and reforming education) are based on inertia and the single-minded liberal approaches which have already brought Russia seven years of harsh economic crisis. Applying them to the current situation would mean that instead of stagnation or weak, unstable growth, the country would be subjected to a new edition of the crisis.

All these reform projects have one feature in common. They all imply an increased burden on the end user, be it companies (as customers for electricity or rail services) or ordinary people (who will have to pay more for rail tickets, electricity and education, and make extra contributions to the pension system). Much we are told of the benefits of these reforms in the long run, however, their immediate effect will be a rapid and significant shrink in demand on the domestic market, which will have a depressing effect on the economy and will inevitably bring about a decline.

Engineering a decline is an easy trick - one our government is quite capable of. But the government failed to harvest the fruits of the recovery which caught it unawares, and failed to create the conditions necessary to allow it to allocate resources for an accelerated renewal of the capital assets. It did not even manage to balance the budget, when all tax collecting targets had been more than met. And again, all hopes are being pinned on the idea that the 'market will sort everything out' - all we need is a market-based restructuring of this or that industry, or this or that branch of the economy. The only good news is that neither the president nor the

government seem to be in any hurry to implement these solutions.

## **It's not all that bad**

Are there any favourable prospects for the Russian economy? It is hard to believe so - too many problems have accrued. However, we should not paint too gloomy a picture. There is no crisis looming in the short term. The Russian economy probably faces a slow down in the rate of development, and a period of slight decline. Even the mounting problems of upgrading equipment in various sectors of the economy will not in itself bring the economy to its knees. However, delaying their solution, in unstable market conditions, is fraught with risks. There is still some time in hand before these risks will pose a direct threat. This time could be used to find solutions.

## **Strong authority**

Although generally speaking there remains an adherence to democratic values and market freedoms, most Russians lean towards the idea of a strong authority capable of reviving Russia as a great power (this goal secured most support among respondents - 42.4%), using state intervention in the economy to correct the results of market reforms with a view to achieving greater social justice, and limiting the profits of private capital.

It is this socio-political tendency that determined Vladimir Putin's victory in the presidential elections. Voters saw in him a man capable of strengthening law and order, gearing the economy towards the needs of the ordinary people, and defending Russia's national interests, while at the same time preserving democratic forms of government and the positive results of the market reforms.

There is no need to demonstrate that Putin's ability to meet these demands is in fact very doubtful, and on certain issues totally illusory. The initially effective war against the Chechen guerrillas, which began with Putin's

ascendancy to power, eclipsed in voters' minds many other acts of Putin's which went against the mood of the electorate.

However, it is now clear that Putin has a very selective understanding of law and order, that he is even more inclined towards compromise with the West than Yeltsin was, and that his economic policy thus far is geared towards radical liberal ideas. This means that the voters will not see the expected rebirth of Russia from Putin, and he will not even manage to maintain the temporary period of economic growth.

The question is, how long will it be before Russia's voters admit to themselves that they have once again become the victims of unfounded hopes? These hopes may in fact linger on for a very long time, if - as with Yeltsin's re-election in 1996 - the electorate is not offered a convincing, attractive political alternative.

## **Where is the labour protest movement?**

The Russian labour movement has of late been something of a mystery for political scientists and sociologists. The fact is that wages have more than halved in real terms during the years of market reforms, and even these wages are paid several months late: unemployment has risen to 12 percent in a country which just ten years ago provided almost full employment; enterprises are no longer in a position to provide their workers with most of the social benefits they offered in Soviet times; and the image and prestige of manual labour has fallen as low as it can.

Yet, despite all this, there is no visible activity in the labour and trade union movement. Even in the toughest years of 'shock therapy' (1992-93), the number of strikes actually fell. Moreover, after some increase in industrial action in 1995-97, the number of strikes again decreased. Notably, the vast majority of official strikes are held by teachers demanding that the state pay their

salary arrears. In the eight years of reform a labour protest movement has not really taken hold. Yet not so long ago, in 1989-91, the country was rocked by miners' strikes, and the labour movement, which had suddenly made its presence felt after decades of silence, seemed poised to become one of the major factors in the social life of the new Russia. But those same workers, when faced with a dramatic decline in living conditions which has left one-third of Russia's population below the poverty line, have become astonishingly passive. Why has this happened?

## **The reasons for passivity**

The low level of strike action in Russia is determined by a whole range of economic and social factors, all of which contribute to a decline in the level of labour protest. First, though workers' visible wages have fallen dramatically, there has not been such a catastrophic fall in consumption. The fall in consumption in real terms has been curbed by the fact that many workers have allotments on which they produce their own food, and by semi-legal and illegal moonlighting.

Second, strike action stands very little chance of success when the economy is in deep crisis and production is falling, and when many enterprises are working to less than a third of their original capacity. Industrial action is more successful in periods of economic growth than in times of crisis.

Third, the strike movement in 1989-91 met with unanimous public sympathy and support, and no resistance from the authorities. Since 1992 all the main media outlets have been unanimous in their condemnation of strikers. Management and the local and federal authorities have resorted to various means of putting pressure on the strikers - from prosecution and dismissal to acts of terrorism.

Fourth, workers have had no experience of organizing themselves in the struggle for their rights. The traditional trade union structures which have survived from Soviet times

have gravitated, due to inertia, toward compromise with the authorities at all levels - from factory directors to the federal government; and the new alternative trade unions have turned out to be weak, small in number and prone to internal conflict. There is no tradition of mass demonstrations for solidarity by workers from different professions.

## **The labour movement is changing**

During 1992-93, protests by hired workers initially took the form of ordinary strikes, which at best brought temporary and partial success, the fruits of which were consumed by the ongoing economic crisis within two or three months. If workers were given a pay rise, any additional money would soon be devalued by inflation. If workers were paid the wages owed them in arrears, the delays would soon begin again. Then protest began to take the form of acts of despair. Workers, medics and teachers began to resort to hunger strikes, and sometimes even protest suicides. But the effect of these actions was equally short lived. Soon the authorities and management stopped paying much attention to their employees' hunger strikes and suicides.

Eventually, in 1996-97, the workers resorted to blocking transport routes, and in 1998 the miners organized a long-term picket in Moscow outside the government building, with political demands. At first these actions had wide repercussions, because they affected the interests of a large number of people (the blockade of the Trans-Siberian railway by miners, for example, which lasted for several days). The authorities were forced to seek a compromise, and management quickly made concessions. But here again, even when they had gained concessions, the workers soon felt that what they had won was slipping through their fingers. And the stance of the authorities soon became much harsher: They resorted to the regular use of force to free up the roads, and began taking legal action against the

organizers of the blockades.

So the methods tried by the workers did not bring them any real success. When the economic situation in the country was getting worse and worse, but the rich were getting richer and richer, these riches could only be growing at the expense of workers' income. If there is a fall in production, profits may be preserved either at the expense of workers' wages, or by selling off the enterprise's fixed assets (which, for the workers, also entails losing their job and their wages). No one was planning to part with their profits.

## **The first signs of change**

It is only now, in the eighth year of radical market 'reforms', that the first signs of change in the Russian labour movement have begun to appear. As yet there have only been a few illustrations of the working people's new approach to struggle for their rights, and these illustrations do not represent the face of the labour movement. As yet they are merely signs of impending change. Nevertheless, some things are indeed changing.

Above all, the tactic of passive protest against intolerable economic conditions is starting to be transformed into an active struggle to change these conditions - albeit as yet only in individual enterprises. The forms of the struggle are also changing in line with this. To prevent the plundering of assets at their workplace, employees have taken recourse to workers' control, and when they have met resistance from the management and owners of the enterprise, they have resorted to sit-ins. The actions of employees at the Yasnogorsk Engineering Plant in Tula oblast provides an example of the establishment of workers' control. This battle began back in 1998. The workers tried to gain full control of the plant - they practically ousted the old management and held a conference to elect their own directors. However, the courts ruled that the workers' actions were illegal, and the 'worker-directors' were



arrested. Nevertheless, the battle did not end there. The workers succeeded in securing the dismissal of the previous director and several members of the previous management. The factory strike committee set up an organ of workers' control - a shipping commission - which monitored the sale of the factory's products. Under pressure from the workers, the management was forced to recognize this workers' initiative, which allowed the workers to block any illicit deals struck to the detriment of the factory or concealed from the accounts.

As for sit-ins, there have been individual cases in Russia before now. Previously, occupying the enterprise was merely a way for the workers to bring production to a halt in the face of resistance from the management, the private security companies they had hired, or local authorities which supported the owners. But the last year or so has seen a growth in the number of cases where the workers assert control of the enterprise not to stop production - production is often brought to a halt anyway through the fault of the new owners - but conversely to ensure that work continues. This is also the aim of workers' control, which may be established without the workers' having to occupy the enterprise. The second factor which has emerged in relation to sit-ins is the growth of sympathy strikes by workers of different enterprises.

## Workforce occupy factory

In Russia only about a dozen enterprises are effectively controlled by the workforce. It is nigh-on to impossible to find any information about them in the 'free' Russian press, but if such information should appear, it is usually reminiscent of the 'negative propaganda' designed to corrupt enemy troops during times of war. The more successful the workers' actions, the more resistance they encounter. The best example of this is the confrontation at the Vyborg Pulp-and-Paper Factory in Sovetskii in Leningrad Oblast. In 1993 the factory was privatised, with numerous

violations of the law. Then the new shareholders and management bought the workers out, established almost full control of ownership and sold the factory on. This resale was also accompanied by numerous violations of the law. Suffice to say that the sale price was set at 4.5 times less than the book value of the factory, according to an audit by the Audit Office of the Russian Ministry of Finance. Ownership rights were transferred after a down payment of one-fifth of this sum. As a result, the new owners paid just 3.8 million dollars for the ownership rights to a factory which it had cost in the region of US\$700 million to renovate in the 1980s, with help from Finland.

The other aspect of this deal was the absence of a genuine owner. The company which formally obtained the ownership rights was a typical 'dummy' company which provided false information. The company describes itself as British, but is not registered in Britain, nor are its owners British citizens. The effective owner was the 'vodka king' of Leningrad Oblast, a Mr. Sabadash. Naturally, they needed a pretext to sell the factory at a reduced price, so a pretext was concocted: In 1995-96, the factory was artificially bankrupted, and was put up for sale in 1997. The new owners announced their intention to retain just one lumber trans-shipment station from the factory. The Leningrad Oblast prosecutor challenged the result of the sale and ordered the suspension of the transfer of ownership rights to the new owners. But effectively the new owners continued to control the mill. At this point, the workforce occupied the factory, put its own guard in place, elected its own director and began to run the place independently.

## Gunfire in Sovetsky



Why did shots ring out in Sovetsky? The answer is very simple - because the workforce quickly managed to get the factory working. The factory

emerged from bankruptcy and became profitable, the workers were given a pay rise and were paid the back-pay owed them, the factory paid its taxes regularly and was in a position to fund social benefits for its workers. These actions were naturally considered unacceptable. On July 9 came the first attempt by a private security company (an unlicensed one at that) to take over the factory. This attempt was resisted by the workers. On the night of October 12-13 a second attempt was made, this time deploying a 'Typhoon' unit - used to put down prison riots - OMON special troops and a private security company. Units of interior ministry troops were on standby. In order to make life more difficult for the factory, the would-be owners managed to force the railways to stop providing wagons for the supply of raw materials and the shipment of finished goods. However, this time too the attack met with organized resistance from the workforce. The unarmed employees (60 percent of whom were women) blockaded the Typhoon unit in the factory management offices. The Typhoon troops, sensing that that battle was not going their way, beat several people up and took them hostage, shutting one woman in the fridge. The Typhoon unit caused untold destruction to the premises they were occupying. When the workforce attempted to enter into negotiations, the Typhoon troops responded by opening fire, wounding two workers. However, the "valiant defenders" of illegally-obtained ownership rights were forced to retreat down a corridor of OMON troops - such was their fear of the workers' wrath. They were perhaps right to be frightened. These workers had reacted so passively to the bankruptcy of the factory in the mid-1990s: They collapsed from hunger in the lines for humanitarian aid, but did not enter into confrontation. But now, having taken the factory into their own hands, they realized that they could make it work, and they had no intention of backing down. 'We will fight to the death', say these people, most of whom completed secondary or higher vocational training.

## The lessons of the conflict

In the aftermath of the carnage at the Vyborg Pulp-and-Paper Factory, there were very different reactions to the conflict from different sections of Russian society. A stream of lies flowed from television screens and the pages of many wide-circulation newspapers: The workers were accused of seizing the property of others; it was they who had bankrupted the factory, they who avoided paying their taxes; they had resisted a legal ruling with weapons in their hands, and they had beaten up the 'rightful owner' of the factory, Mr. Sabadash, who was now in intensive care. None of these reports had any bearing on reality. Izvestia even demanded that tank units be turned on the workers, and that the factory be bombed instead of bombing Chechen terrorists. Such blood-thirstiness was not seen even in the 'democratic public's' calls for reprisals against the Supreme Soviet in October 1993. Journalists from the main television channels reiterated the slogans from the presidential elections of 1996 - 'there can be no review of

privatisation, otherwise there will be civil war.' Economic crime structures were using likable television presenters to make explicit threats of war against all those who challenged their right to steal and plunder with impunity. There was a different reaction from the workers of St. Petersburg and Leningrad oblast. A collection was set up for the factory's employees, and workers from the Leningrad Metal Factory formed workers' brigades to support the Vyborg workforce. The trade union committee at the Leningrad Metal Factory turned into a sort of headquarters for coordinating demonstrations of solidarity with the Vyborg Pulp-and-Paper Factory. The workers also found support in Moscow: The State Duma passed a resolution defending the actions of the factory's workforce, with only one vote against. An association called 'Academics for Democracy and Socialism' quickly dispatched a representative to the factory, and then with the assistance of a number of Duma deputies organized a press-conference for the representatives of the Vyborg factory.

So how will events unfold? We are

facing a paradox. Workers are beginning to stand up and fight not just for their wages, but to maintain production, to ensure that companies operate profitably, and against asset stripping. In response, they are shown the full weight of state power, which defends the rights of 'New Russians' to obtain ownership by circumventing the law, to steal the workers' wages from them and to receive income by decapitalising enterprises.

Who will win? Will other workforces follow the lead of the first people to organize workers' control? Will most of the population trust the political forces that support the workers' struggle? Or will those who dream of a Russian Pinochet win the day? It is too early to give a clear answer to these questions. But one thing is clear - the labour movement in Russia is beginning to change. Only events will show how quickly these changes will take place, whether this first surge will peter out, and whether individual attempts to establish workers' control will remain just that - individual cases. But by an irony of history, if Russia is to produce an effective entrepreneurial class then it is not the 'new Russians' who will be able to fill this role, but organized workers.

## EU enlargement: from poverty to misery

16 May 2002, by G Buster



The European Council at Laeken in turn agreed that EU enlargement will include all applicant states with the exception of Rumania, Bulgaria and Turkey. For years now EU membership has characterised and conditioned the political horizon of the CEECs, justifying the neo-liberal adjustment policies as the mechanism for systemic change. In the remaining twelve months Æ; and in the distinct transitional periods that have been arranged Æ; they will be required to pursue a definitive deep economic and

administrative restructuring with, as its consequence, a sharpening of conflicts of interests. Because later, when full membership is a fact, the single market will act on the correlation of forces established in each of the states in question, determining who are the winners and who are the losers in this major social transformation.

After ten years of systemic change, public opinion in the CEECs views the membership process as the light at the end of the tunnel: they are distrustful of present sacrifices and hopeful that they will be of some use. The question

is of some importance because when the negotiations are over each applicant state will have to hold referendums. And in recent years the situation has become somewhat clouded, with a majority of the electorate opposed to membership in such countries as Estonia and Latvia. But the latest survey by Eurobarometer shows a slight increase in support, with the potential yes vote hovering around 60%, although in some countries, such as Poland, 44% think the government is making too many concessions to the EU in the negotiations. [31] For a comparison, the EU's enlargement to

include Spain, Portugal and Greece increased its population by 22% and its GDP by 10%.

The difference in income levels is enormous. The per capita GDP of the three Mediterranean applicants in 1980 was 66% of the Community average, but in the case of the CEECs the per capita GDP is only 38%, which will effectively reduce the per capita GDP of the expanded EU (with the CEECs) by 15%, which under the present rules entails some major transfers. While the population of Poland is equivalent to 10% of the total EU population, that country accounts for only 2% of the EU's total GDP. The respective figures for Spain in 1980 were 14% and 8%. The problem is that in the relatively sophisticated model developed up to now for Commission services, assuming that the present reforms continue "means that for the AC 8 [the Accession Candidates] and for the CEEC 10 as a whole [including Romania and Bulgaria], an average growth rate of 3 per cent per year over the period 2000-09 would still be achievable, compared to a prudent assumption of 2.5 per cent average annual growth for the EU 15 over the same period. Thus, catching up would continue, albeit at a very slow rate." [32] While we don't want to rain on anyone's parade, it is necessary to point out that the model is based on the 1994-99 growth data. But the most recent data and forecasts on GDP growth clearly demonstrate the effects of the international recession and the drop in domestic and external demand, with declines ranging between 1% for Hungary and 3% for Poland from the forecast growth in GDP for 2002. [33] The consequences of enlargement for the present member states are, under the same model, "extremely small, with as many negatives as positives".

The political consequence of this perspective for the enlargement negotiations is a hardening of the respective positions of the EU and the applicant states up to the final moment.

With regard to the structural funds - 213,000 million Euros between 2000 and 2006, or 35% of the EU budget - the drop in regional per capita income

through enlargement means that 11 of the 17 Spanish regions that now receive structural funding will lose it, and end up at around 75% of the Community average. Spanish Prime Minister Aznar attempted a kamikaze manoeuvre to reopen the discussion closed at the 1999 Berlin Summit and secure a minimal flow of structural funding after 2007 for Spain, threatening to block the German position of a seven-year transitional period for the movement of persons in the enlargement negotiations. We now know how the story ended, with the complete isolation of Aznar in the EU.

But in the new negotiations that will open after enlargement, in 2007, Spain's alliance with the CEECs by itself may manage to raise the bar to 90% of the Community average for the support programs or increase the proportion in the Community tech budget for structural assistance from 0.45% of the EU GDP to 0.66%, as a Commission study has suggested. In the first option, the CEECs gain nothing and, in the second, they will prefer an alliance with Germany, which in the end is the major contributor to the Community budget, in order to avoid the major EU powers definitively reforming the regional assistance system and drastically reducing such assistance as Schroeder has threatened. If Spain receives 1,000 Euros annually per capita in structural support, it is not hard to imagine what this can mean for countries like Poland or Slovakia.

## Agriculture

The most difficult of the sectors left to negotiate is also the one that reflects the most dramatic differences. Seventeen percent of the labour force in the CEECs is in this sector, which accounts for an average 8% of the GDP - comparable in importance to the figures for Spain, Portugal and Greece - but a long shot from the EU averages of 4% and 1.5% respectively.

Again, Poland's situation (like Romania's) is exceptional, with 21% of its labour force in agriculture, producing 4% of the GDP. (The figures for Romania are 40% and 15% respectively.) In both countries more than 80% of the land is distributed in

small family operations with very low productivity, and the two countries combined have the same number of farmers, 7.3 million, as the entire EU. In all the CEECs with the exception of Rumania, rural employment has declined by 4% since 1994. Poland alone has lost 600,000 rural jobs in this period.

The Commission model cited earlier forecasts annual reductions in rural employment in excess of 1% in the eight applicant countries of the first phase, and reductions of 2% in the public sector. For Poland, with its particular rural structure, which differs from the seven other first-phase applicants in which there have been major agrarian reforms since the Second World War, this means uprooting more than one million people from their farms over the next five years while at the same time reform of the public sector and industrial restructuring are throwing a further 250,000 persons into the street. It is hard to imagine the social consequences of all this, given that real levels of consumption in the countryside have declined by 50% in the last ten years, with poverty rates of 29.9% compared with the national average of 16.5%. [34]

However, for the Commission the support programs linked to the CAP are incompatible with the necessary restructuring of the Polish countryside. It was the height of cynicism for Franz Fischler, European Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries, to state, on January 10 in Berlin, that "Structural change in the applicant countries will take time, and we also have to take that into account in the much talked-about question of direct payments. For what would happen if the system of direct payments were to be embraced in full on the very first day of joining the EU? First, this would be yet another incentive to retain existing structures, and second, we would run the risk of social upheaval, because at a stroke farmers would be earning considerably more than other workers in the same region." [39] The only expected safety valve is the emigration of some 900,000 people from the CEECs to Western Europe in the first five years of membership.



But the cards are now distributed and, notwithstanding the severity of the negotiations during 2002, the CEEC governments, whatever their political complexion, will give in, one by one, at the last moment. They are convinced that non-membership in the initial group would have much more dangerous electoral consequences for their political future than a bad deal. In the end there is always the

consolation that, once inside the EU, they will hold a substantial number of votes in the European Council - if the Treaty of Nice is ratified after Ireland's NO - and they can participate fully in the forthcoming negotiation of the community budget.

But the ground rules are about to change in the debate on the future of

the European Union. The leadership of the major powers (France, Germany and the United Kingdom) is not prepared for interminable haggling and negotiations in the enlarged EU. And many brand new citizens of the EU in Central and Eastern Europe may end up, as Marx (Groucho) pointed out, "going from the most dreadful poverty to the most complete misery, thanks to their own efforts".

## Ross Dowson

### 16 May 2002

Dowson had played a key role in reassembling a Canadian Trotskyist organization, the Revolutionary Workers Party, near the close of the Second World War. The RWP's main activity was the publication of a bi-weekly 8-page newspaper Labour Challenge, with a readership that for some time numbered in the thousands. The group also contested elections, mainly at the municipal level.

The postwar period was a difficult one for the left in general and no less so for the Trotskyists, who were harassed and driven out of their positions in the trade union movement. The divisions that developed in the Fourth International (FI) forces, and the subsequent international split, have been well documented. The already weakened RWP effectively disintegrated.

Ross Dowson worked strenuously to reconstitute the Canadian section of the FI, first through the Socialist Education League, based largely in Toronto, then through the League for Socialist Action (LSA), which was formally constituted in 1961.

During the 1960s the LSA, like most far-left groups, attracted new members among young people radicalised by the Cuban revolution,

the Vietnam war, and the developing women's liberation movement. Until the mid-1960s, the LSA was confined to English Canada. With the formation in 1964 of its Quebec counterpart, the Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière, the united organization (now the LSA/LSO) began attempting to analyse the Quebec national question and nationalist movement from a Marxist perspective. A consistent supporter of Quebec's right to self-determination, in 1970 it began actively supporting Quebec independence from the Canadian state.

Ross Dowson, as the organization's national secretary, was at the heart of all these developments. A skilled lithographer and printer by training, he spent almost his entire working life as a full-time paid staffer (at times the only one) for the organization. For the new generation of recruits in the Sixties and early Seventies, he was our major link to the older generation of class-struggle militants and Marxists who had built the labour and socialist movements in previous decades.

In the late Sixties Canadian Marxist academics, under the influence of the then-predominant dependency theory, tended to view Canada as a peripheral 'de-industrialising' subordinate satellite of the United States, de-

emphasizing or even denying its status as a (lesser) imperialist power in its own right. Dowson became enamoured with this approach and, when it became a prominent theme in a broad left opposition current that developed within the NDP in 1969-72, he began to adapt to it politically, developing a theory of a new, progressive Canadian nationalism, in opposition to U.S. 'domination', that should be embraced (albeit critically) by socialists as a radicalising force. In the early 1970s, a bitter debate on these positions broke out in the Canadian Trotskyist movement, and Dowson soon found himself in a minority.

After being decisively defeated at the League's 1973 convention, Dowson and about 20 supporters left the Canadian section of the FI to establish the Forward group, publishing a paper of that name for about ten years, and operated mainly in and around the NDP. The group functioned to some degree as a personal cult around Dowson. In 1988 Ross Dowson suffered a devastating stroke from which he never recovered. He spent his final years in an acute-care hospital.

Condensed from an article posted on Marxmail: <http://www.marxmail.org/>.