



IC 2005

The World Imperialist Offensive and the Occupation of Iraq

11 March 2005

These choices are in turn fully in keeping with the prevailing logic of this phase of the history of capitalism. Neoliberalism is at bottom an undertaking meant to dismantle the social protections granted by capitalism. Breaking the 'social consensus', which had been a source of reformism in the workers movement, inevitably goes together with the decline of reformism and a reinforcement of the repressive functions of the state.



The counterpart of this choice on a world scale is, on the one hand, a sharp reduction in development aid, which is itself part of the instrumentalization of the debt by the imperialist powers so as to impose neoliberal prescriptions on the rest of the world. On the other hand, the counterpart includes the decision to maintain the huge military apparatus inherited from the Cold War, despite the disappearance of the USSR. The budgetary choices made in the US speak volumes in this regard: while Washington's military spending, at over \$500 billion, amount to about 5 per cent of GDP, and on their own to more than half of world military spending, US public 'development' aid amounts to barely 0.15 per cent of

GDP (by contrast to a scandalously low minimum goal of 0.7 per cent set by the UN!).

The 1991 Gulf War underscored the crucial importance of imperialist control over world oil resources, made more serious by the drying up of these resources predicted for the coming decades. By demonstrating the 'indispensable' role of the US in ensuring imperialist control of these resources, the war played a decisive role in inciting European and Japanese imperialism to confirm their military dependence - combined with complex relations of partnership and competition on the economic level - on Washington. This meant: maintaining NATO, redefining its tasks in the direction of interventions 'to maintain security', expanding the organization in Eastern Europe; and renewal and revaluing of the Japan-US Security Treaty.

US imperialism, after having confirmed the extent to which its military supremacy was a key trump card in its global hegemony (reinforcement of US military supremacy under Reagan had been the decisive factor in the US's recovery of hegemony after years of decline), seized the opportunity provided by the collapse of the USSR in order to complete its military network spanning the planet. The

massive return of US troops to the Arab-Persian Gulf region from 1990 on was followed by NATO enlargement to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic (1999) and then to the three Baltic ex-Soviet republics as well as Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia (2004).

This enlargement was meant to continue, and is already accompanied by multiple ties to other countries in these regions, including Ukraine.

NATO intervention in the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia beginning in 1994, culminating in the 1999 Kosovo War, was a first opportunity to commit NATO to military intervention, followed by a role in controlling territory. It contributed to consecrating the new US hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe. This first intervention was followed by NATO intervention in Afghanistan. In Kosovo and Afghanistan the US delegated to NATO, as an auxiliary organization, missions of control that are not vital for its own interests, while reserving for itself unilateral direct control of missions that it does consider vital, as is the case with operations in the Gulf region.

2

The attacks on 11 September 2001 furnished an opportunity and an ideological pretext - the 'war on terrorism' - for a major advance in extending the imperialist military network to strategic regions where it had previously been absent.

Military intervention in Afghanistan was not aimed only at overthrowing the Taliban regime and destroying the Al-Qaeda network. It aimed above all at re-establishing a direct, permanent US military presence, ranging from 'advisors' to bases and facilities, in the highly strategic region stretching from the Caucasus to the borders of China: in Afghanistan itself, but also in Georgia and Azerbaidzhan as well as several Central Asia ex-Soviet republics (notably Uzbekistan and Kirghizstan). The Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia are not only rich in hydrocarbons (gas and oil); they are also of considerable strategic interest, situated at the heart of the continental landmass that joins European Russia to China. Russia and China are viewed in Washington as the US's two main potential rivals for global hegemony.

Occupying Iraq was a major project for US imperialist expansion from 1990 on. Combined with the US guardianship over the Saudi kingdom and the other oil autocracies of the Gulf, it puts Washington in a position of directly controlling almost half of world oil reserves. This project had been postponed for political reasons, the same ones that had prevented Bush I from pushing onwards with the invasion of Iraq as far as Baghdad. The Bush II administration had to resort to lies, which today are publicly established, so as to justify its invasion politically in the name of the 'war on terrorism'.

3

The Afghanistan and Iraq wars illustrate both the strength of US imperialism - and thus of the world imperialist system as a whole, of which it is by far the main armed force - and its limits.

Since the end of the Vietnam War, the

Pentagon has reoriented its strategy towards wars of higher 'capital intensity', putting its chips on military technology, a domain in which the US enjoys crushing superiority, instead of human resources. Vietnam convinced Washington - due both to the demoralization of its troops (which consisted partly of conscripts), reflecting the growing strength of the US anti-war movement, and to the contribution of US troop casualties to the demoralization and the growth of the movement - to minimize its reliance on troops. The result was a professionalization of armies that spread to several imperialist countries.

No country in the world is capable of facing US firepower with so-called conventional weapons and means alone. The ease with which the US has attained its military objectives since 1991 fully demonstrates this. In addition, the gap between US military means and those of the rest of the world keeps on getting deeper, thanks to the unrivalled US military budget. Nonetheless the relatively limited numbers of US military personnel constitute a first major limit to US power.

The fact that the Pentagon is obliged to concentrate almost 150,000 soldiers in Iraq and to this end immobilize an even greater proportion of its personnel - in particular the increasingly recalcitrant Reservists - , on top of the troops already stationed abroad elsewhere, results in a situation in which Washington is dangerously close to 'overstretch', and its ability to dissuade other countries like Iran is considerably reduced. Beyond this human limit there is also an economic limit, due to the steadily increasing strain caused by a vertiginously rising federal deficit, even if Washington still has considerable manoeuvring room in this respect (particularly because the deficit is due in large part to tax cuts).

The second limit to US military power, a consequence of the high 'capital intensity' of its armed forces, can be seen in the two cases of Afghanistan and Iraq. Technological might, which can crush any other conventional army, is not enough to subjugate a people. For that troops are needed.

Washington, although it has chosen to make its efforts in Iraq its top priority, is not managing to control even that country.

Afghanistan is at the mercy of out-of-control warlords and narco-traffickers, while Hamid Karzai's puppet regime has very limited real power beyond the perimeter of the capital Kabul and two or three other cities. The US is even less able today to control a hostile population in a medium-size country than it was during the Vietnam War.

4

The US has been able partially to overcome the 'Vietnam syndrome', which prevented it from intervening militarily abroad in any really massive fashion for more than 15 years, due to a combination of ideological factors.

On the one hand, the collapse of the Stalinist system in Eastern Europe and the general adherence of the 'post-Communist' states to unbridled market economies, of which the US was and still is the champion, provided world capitalism and its hegemonic state with an enormous increase in ideological power and legitimacy in the early 1990s.

On the other hand, this same collapse of the Stalinist system contributed to the political and/or ideological debacle of entire, major sections of the world left. In several countries and regions of the globe it freed up oppositional space that reactionary political or religious forces were able to occupy. When forces of this kind take on the task of challenging imperialist hegemony, the challenge encounters much less sympathy among the peoples of the imperialist countries. By the same token this decreases the possibility of building powerful anti-war movements.

In addition Washington, which still has to take account of the partial persistence of the 'Vietnam syndrome', has since 1989 attacked targets that are odious in the eyes of Western public opinion, thus winning a measure of credibility for its 'humanitarian' or 'democratic' pretensions. From Noriega (Panama, 1989) to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda

(2001) by way of Saddam Hussein (1990-91), the Serb forces in Bosnia (1994-95) and Milosevic (1999), the targets chosen by the US and its allies have all belonged to this particular category.

5

This situation changed with the war against and invasion of Iraq. Of all the imperialist wars of the past 15 years, this last one was undeniably the least legitimate in the eyes of world public opinion.

Saddam Hussein's regime had already been the target of an imperialist aggression in 1991, and Iraq had been subjected from that time on to repeated bombing and an embargo with genocidal consequences. Even though the regime targeted was once more an odious one, no new element enabled Washington to justify invading the country. Washington had to invent new elements and resort to lies as crude as 'weapons of mass destruction' supposedly in Iraq's possession (whereas Baghdad had agreed to give carte blanche to UN inspections) or the claimed links between Al-Qaida and the Ba'athist regime. These arguments were all the less convincing inasmuch as what was really at stake for Washington in occupying Iraq - oil - was glaringly obvious.

Dissensions among the imperialist powers themselves made the weakness of these pretexts still worse. (Russian and Chinese opposition alone would not have carried much weight from the point of view of ideological legitimization, given Moscow and Beijing's low credibility in this respect, as the precedent of the Kosovo War had shown.) French and German opposition to the invasion of Iraq contributed to undermining the legitimacy of the war.

For Paris, the partner and privileged supplier of Saddam Hussein's regime (like Moscow, by the way), the prospect of a US hold on Iraq constituted a substantial loss for the interests of French capital and the French state. For the Schröder-Fischer government in Berlin, it was electoral interests that won out:

Chancellor Schröder's rejection of the invasion of Iraq, which was particularly unpopular in Germany, contributed to his re-election, after his defeat had been widely foreseen because of the unpopularity of his social-liberal policies. Yet both France and Germany facilitated the aggression against Iraq - Germany by permitting unrestricted use of US infrastructure on its territory, France by opening its airspace - and wished it well.

These facts show the present limits to the military autonomy of subaltern imperialist powers in relation to US imperialism, at a moment when the European constitutional treaty is completing the European Union's anchorage in NATO. The challenge to US hegemony from allied imperialisms does not go further than a request that more account be taken of their particular interests in the military-political management of the imperialist world system, above all in face of the Bush Administration, whose arrogance and unilateralism have gone very far. There is no suggestion of any questioning of the partnership with Washington or of Washington's role as the main armed force of world capitalism, which no other state could claim to replace.

6

The ideological and political handicaps of Washington, London and their allies made it possible for an anti-war movement to develop on a very large scale. At its apogee, on 15 February 2003, the movement reached a level of mobilization on a world scale that was historically unprecedented. But it was not strong enough to prevent the invasion of Iraq, nor to compel the occupation forces to withdraw from it.

In the US itself, the anti-war movement managed a breakthrough, which was very difficult in face of the ideological climate created by 11 September 2001 and the quasi-unanimity of the US ruling class. In this context, the size of the demonstrations in New York and other US cities on 15 February 2003 was very impressive. But even though the movement was and still is much more important than what existed in the

first phase of the Vietnam War, it is still not strong enough to compel Washington to move back.

On the other hand, the world anti-war movement, mobilized correctly around the goal of trying to prevent the aggression (which was very difficult given the limited time available), did not place itself clearly enough in the perspective of building opposition in the long term to a prolonged occupation, which was quite clearly Washington's objective.

After having culminated on 15 February 2003, the mobilizations continued on national levels or around international dates or campaigns. But the movement remained far below the level reached before the invasion. This weakening was further aggravated in the US by electoralist illusions, although in fact nothing justified these illusions given the fundamental agreement on the issue of the occupation of Iraq between the two main candidates still in the race. This overall situation greatly facilitated the re-election of George W. Bush, a victory that Bush interpreted as evidence of approval for his aggressive imperialist policy, giving him more elbowroom to pursue it or even intensify it, as the reshuffling of his executive team indicates.

Feeling that it has even greater room for maneuver, the Bush administration has stepped up its aggressive policy and its threats, not only in the Middle East but also in Latin America - where Cuba and Venezuela are in the firing line, in addition to the military intervention in Colombia - or in Eastern Asia, in particular against North Korea.

7

A major cause of the weakening of the anti-war movement was Washington and London's success in regaining some degree of ideological credibility during the first phase of the occupation.

The lack of Iraqi popular hostility towards the occupiers in the initial period after the overthrow of the Ba'athist dictatorship - even if the Iraqi popular reaction was very far

from the enthusiastic welcome predicted by Washington and London - did not fail to ideologically disarm the anti-war movement. In addition, the occupation forces were still able to make people believe that they were hot on the trail of 'weapons of mass destruction'.

This advantage began to dissipate with the irresistible rise of hostility to the occupiers, considerably exacerbated by their behaviour and by the major errors that the Bush Administration and its proconsul committed in running the country, while the pretext of 'weapons of mass destruction' turned out in the light of day to be a tissue of lies. Nonetheless, the Bush Administration was then able to exploit the hateful character of a part of the 'resistance' to the occupation - the most spectacular part, and the part deliberately given the most media attention - thus once again bringing into play a major reason for the anti-war movement's weakness in face of earlier interventions.

The continual growth of armed operations against the occupying forces, a few months after the start of the occupation, was the result of two tendencies that it is important to distinguish. On the one hand, actions against the occupation troops, most of them local and in many cases even individual, have in some cases been a response to the occupiers' arrogance and brutality, which reached their apogee with the two waves of aggression against the martyred city of Falluja in 2004.

On the other hand, some actions have been the work of organized networks, among which two kinds of networks have the most resources: the remains of the Ba'athist secret services, reorganized after the regime's collapse, which have substantial financial and military means at their disposal; and Sunni fundamentalist networks of the most fanatical kind, after the fashion of Al-Qaeda, a part of which originate outside Iraq and existed before the fall of the Ba'athist regime.

While armed actions against the occupiers are entirely legitimate acts of national resistance, it is equally

true that the two kinds of networks we have mentioned mix legitimate acts directed against the occupiers with acts of a profoundly reactionary nature directed against other segments of the Iraqi population on a quasi-racist basis - sectarian attacks against Shiites, ethnic attacks against Kurds - or a xenophobic basis: the revolting slaughter of foreigners who do not bear the slightest responsibility for the occupation, including immigrant workers.

Distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate actions, and clearly condemning actions of the second type, is an indispensable condition for relaunching the anti-war movement on a mass scale. The movement explained clearly its condemnation of Saddam Hussein in 1991 and again in 2003, of Milosevic in 1999, and of the Taliban and Osama bin Laden in 2001, while explaining that the odious nature of these forces in no way justified the imperialist interventions, which were themselves much more murderous. It is just as indispensable in Iraq to take a clear distance from reactionary acts, while explaining that the barbarism of the reactionary forces is a small matter compared with the major barbarism of US imperialism, tragically illustrated by Guantánamo, Abu-Ghraib and Falluja.

At the same time, the position of radical anti-imperialists in defence of the Iraqi people's right to resist the occupation by all legitimate means, including armed struggle, must be distinguished from the platform around which the broadest possible anti-war movement must be organized in the imperialist countries. This broad platform must focus on the withdrawal of US and allied troops from Iraq, and should not include support to the Iraqi resistance, even with the necessary distinctions, since such support could only limit the potential for mobilization. A broad platform can however include, as circumstances allow in each country and each stage of the mobilization, opposition to the Israeli occupation in Palestine, given how much the two occupations belong on the same political terrain. Opposition to the Israeli occupation in Palestine has in fact until now been an important lever in mobilizing people against the occupation of Iraq.

8

Armed actions are only one of the paths chosen by the Iraqi people in its resistance to the occupation of Iraq. The political struggle is another path, and the majority choice.

Armed resistance to the occupation has been waged above all by members of the Sunni Arab minority, part of which considered itself privileged under the Saddam Hussein regime. Nevertheless, even within the Sunni Arab community, the majority - represented by groups like the Association of Muslim Ulema - makes a clear distinction between legitimate actions and what it calls 'terrorism'.

The support by a large majority for legitimate armed resistance goes together with a choice, made by an equally big majority, for a political struggle against the occupation, with the two forms of struggle being seen as complementary. For obvious reasons, the other large minority in the country - the Kurds (most of them Sunni), who historically were oppressed by successive Iraqi governments before they achieved de facto autonomy under US protection from 1991 on - did not join the struggle against the occupation.

Among the Shiite Arab majority of the country, the predominant choice is for political struggle against the occupation. This choice is even shared by the fringe of the religious Shiite Muslim movement which is most radically opposed to the occupation, the fundamentalist current led by Muqtada al-Sadr, which has limited itself to a combination of political struggle and armed self-defence, without resorting to attacks.

The majority current among Iraqi Shiites, led by Ayatollah Sistani - a traditionalist religious chief, representing the majority current of the Iraqi Shiite clergy wanting to exercise control over the political leadership without directly taking power in their hands -, has privileged political struggle since the start of the occupation as the road towards establishment of majority rule in Iraq - and accordingly Shiite acquisition, for the first time in their history, of a

decisive say in deciding the country's future - as a step towards withdrawal of foreign troops.

The first phase of this political struggle was played out as a clash between the ayatollah and US proconsul Paul Bremer on the issue of constitutional procedure. This confrontation, in which Bremer sought to impose a procedure based on appointment of constitution-writers by the occupying power, while the ayatollah demanded that they be democratically elected, constitutes the best refutation of Washington's hypocritical pretensions to be on a mission to "democratize" the region.

The confrontation ended with the ayatollah's victory and, after UN mediation, the setting of 30 January 2005 as the date for general elections. Faced with the escalating terrorist threat against participation in the elections in Sunni areas and the prospect of a very low turnout in these areas as a result, the chief political forces of the Sunni community called a boycott of the elections, so as not to give a stamp of approval to the inevitable Sunni under-representation.

Almost 60 per cent of Iraqis with the right to vote (the rolls used were based on lists for rationing under the embargo, therefore including the whole of the population) went to the voting booths in extremely difficult conditions in the Arab parts of Iraq. The list of the puppet Allawi, strongly supported by Washington, suffered a crushing defeat, not even winning 15 per cent of the votes cast.

The majority of seats in the Constituent Assembly went to the electoral coalition of which Ayatollah Sistani was the godfather and in which the main organized forces are fundamentalist currents linked to Iran. Nevertheless, governing the country requires a two-thirds majority in the Assembly, which necessitates compromises among different groups.

In addition, the groups elected agree unanimously on the need to involve leaders of the Sunni community, which is substantially under-represented.

The very great majority of Arab lists for the elections, including the majority coalition, included the demand for withdrawal of the occupying troops in their programs. But the dominant currents are counting on a withdrawal in the middle term, giving them time to build and consolidate a state apparatus under their control, so as to avoid chaos after the occupiers withdraw. This calculation is very short-sighted, if sincere (which is not always the case: when the list of puppet Prime Minister Allawi speaks of troop withdrawal, for example, the hypocrisy is obvious).

The history of the occupation since spring 2003 shows that its presence in fact fosters the chaos in the country and the rise at the margins of the most fanatical terrorist groups. In addition, the occupation is already carrying out today, and may carry out even more tomorrow, a strategy of increasing tensions, targeted particularly at religious and ethnic divisions, in order to "divide and rule".

Besides, an increasing number of statements have issued from Washington since the start of the occupation expressing Washington's refusal to stand by and let an "Iranian-style" regime be established in Iraq - statements whose arrogance is classically colonial. They should be seen in relation to Washington's escalating threats of war against Tehran and against the regional "axis of evil", that supposedly runs from Hizbollah in Lebanon to Iran by way of the Syrian regime.

The arrival in power of an Iraqi government allied to Iran would be in this respect a veritable catastrophe for

Washington, which will do everything it can to block this scenario: first of all breaking up the majority coalition, then preventing access to the "sensitive" ministries (Interior, Defense, Oil) by currents linked to Iran, and finally sharpening sectarian and ethnic tensions.

These considerations mean, whatever attitude the Iraqi government that emerges from the elections adopts, that the anti-war movement must continue to demand, more energetically than ever, the immediate withdrawal of the occupying troops from Iraq. The argument that the alternative to occupation is chaos is even weaker today than it used to be, given the emergence of an elected Assembly in the country. Rebuilding an Iraqi state will be all the easier if it is fully sovereign.

The slogans to put forward about Iraq within the anti-war movement should be:

- Immediate, total and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying troops;
- The right of the Iraqi people to decide its political future in full freedom and sovereignty;
- The right of the Kurdish people to self-determination.

The objective perspectives for the anti-war movement are constantly improving as is illustrated by the fragmenting of the "coalition of the willing" occupying Iraq, of which more and more countries are withdrawing their troops, and the continued rise of support for withdrawal in opinion polls, including in the US itself.

The sections of the Fourth International will involve themselves resolutely in mobilizing for the international day of demonstrations against the occupation of Iraq on 19 March 2005. They will advocate the establishment of a calendar of anti-war mobilizations on a world scale, to give the anti-war movement a long-term perspective.

On the Brazilian situation

9 March 2005

1) The experience of two years of the Lula government clearly demonstrates this government's orientation and the policies it is carrying out. This is a coalition government with representatives of capital, dependent on the parliamentary right. It is a government implementing neoliberal economic and financial policies and thus incapable of responding to the essential problems of poverty and social exclusion in Brazil and confrontation with imperialism. These two years also show that the internal dynamic of its policies cannot be changed.



2) The government's principal economic and social measures fit within the framework set by the financial markets and international institutions as well as their Brazilian finance capital allies: increasing the budget surplus so as to repay the public debt and raising interest rates, limiting social programmes, unattained agrarian reform targets, refusing to raise the minimum wage to a decent level, undermining public employees' pensions, a counter-reform of the universities paving the way for privatization, a counter-reform of trade-union organization that strengthens the trade-union bureaucracy and opens up prospects of restricting workers' rights, and the prospect of a counter-reform of rights at work.

3) In these conditions, policies meeting the demands and

requirements of the popular classes - wage increases, creation of millions of jobs, defence of public services, sweeping agrarian reform, a budgetary and fiscal policy in the service of social priorities rather than the financial markets - are being put forward in opposition to the Lula government's policies.

4) The government's general orientation turns left-wing ministers into mere insurance policies or hostages for overall policies that are not their own. These two years of experience show clearly that building an anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist socio-political workers' bloc is in contradiction to support for and participation in the current government.

5) Since the formation of the Lula government, there have been reservations, doubts or disagreements in the International on the subject of DS's participation in the government and the modalities of this participation (role in the social movements). Nevertheless, once DS had taken its decision, taking account the arguments put forward by the majority of Brazilian comrades, the International decided at the beginning of this process not to vote on any resolution, and to accompany this experience. At the last IC (February 2004) we opened a process of discussion (by means of an International Discussion Bulletin) on the Brazilian political situation. The International has thus avoided posing the issue of participation in the Lula government in dogmatic terms, without taking account of the country's characteristics, the PT's

history and its links to social and trade union movements. After the experience of these two past years, and taking note of what has been laid out in points 1 through 4, there can no longer be any doubt that occupying positions in the Lula government, whether at the ministerial level or in other posts involving political responsibilities, is in contradiction with the construction of an alternative in Brazil consistent with our programmatic positions.

6) The current reorganizations under way indicate that a complex period has opened up of political recomposition of the Brazilian left. This process can continue for a more or less prolonged period, up until the moment when a mass socialist political alternative can consolidate itself. Looking beyond the specific tempo and forms of recomposition in each sector, it is of decisive importance today to work towards a convergence of all anti-capitalist elements.

7) The IC notes the discussions and divergences within DS on strategy, and the participation of one of its currents in the formation of the PSOL. In a situation characterized by this division and the risk of further fragmentation, the IC decides to maintain relations with all the components of the FI in Brazil - with all components remaining members of the International with full rights - with the objective of fostering dialogue, relations and unity in action by all these components in the perspective of creating a political alternative to the Lula government.

Letter from FI leaders to the Brazilian DS

8 March 2005, by Daniel Bensaïd, Francisco Louçã, Michael Löwy

LETTER TO DEMOCRACIA SOCIALISTA

Paris, January 2005



Dear friends and comrades of DS,

Lula's presidency has reached the halfway mark, and the November municipal elections are a good occasion for a kind of provisional balance sheet, on the threshold of a period already characterized by preparations for the 2006 campaign. Since we are unable to participate in the upcoming World Social Forum and contribute in person to your discussions, as we have often done during more than a quarter century of friendly collaboration, we are sending you some thoughts about the development of the Brazilian situation and its international repercussions.

1. The central question, at the end of these two years, is how to characterize the government's policies. We can define them, without the slightest ambiguity, as social-liberal. This is what has earned them the accolades of the IMF and other international bodies. The resolution of DS's 7th national conference in November 2003 clearly acknowledged this fact: 'The first eight months of the Lula government were characterized by the construction of a system of alliances including broad sections of the bourgeoisie, by a fundamentally conservative economic policy, and, on the other hand, by limited progress in introducing changes' (II, 1). And further on: 'The macroeconomic policy has also expressed a total subordination to IMF guidelines' (II, 2). Still more recently, in its balance sheet of the municipal elections, the DS GT [leadership] observed (November 2004): 'The interest rate hikes, the unprecedented rise in budget surpluses, the subjection to finance capital and to the so-called

markets ... are strangling the nation.'

The everyday practice of the DS majority over the course of the past year, however, does not seem particularly consistent with the formulations adopted by the conference. How is it possible to characterize government policy in these terms, adopt a hesitant position in face of the concrete reforms that are its manifestations, and continue to participate in the government, without the comrades directly implicated in governmental responsibilities even clearly expressing their disagreement?



2. The conference resolution noted that the initial period of government revealed 'a dynamic of conflict both within government policies and in the relationship between the government and the social forces that got it elected' (II, 12). It drew the conclusion in the same breath that there was a 'dispute over the direction of the government' at the same time as one 'at the level of the party' (V, 9).

But there is a fundamental difference between the party and the government. The Party is the result of more than twenty years of struggles and experiences linked to social movement mobilizations. This political history manifests itself in internal contradictions between the party's original self-definitions and its current practice of subordinating them to the government's orientation. This is what enables us to claim the PT's legitimacy and heritage (the PT 'is ours'). By contrast, how could anyone claim that the government, which we have just characterized as conservative and 'in continuity' with Fernando Henrique Cardoso's, 'is ours'?! The party is the product of struggles.

The government is a state institution. Admittedly, the possibility exists in theory of pushing for positive reforms

within it. This possibility even exists in governments that are loyally administering the established order, like the Blair, Schröder or Jospin governments. But a government is not for all that a simple sum of its ministers' policies sector by sector, the site of a sort of duality of power between the 'economic' and social ministers. Lula's government thus has an overall set of policies, whose course is determined by its economic and financial choices. In its first weeks or months it was possible for us, from pedagogical motives, to concentrate our critical artillery on its economic decisions, on Meirelles and Palocci. But these so-called 'economic' decisions unmistakably constitute the political orientation of the government, which determine the budgetary constraints and condition the whole set of policies being carried out.

3. In these conditions, participation in the government has become more and more problematic. In discussions among the Fourth International's militants we have insisted on not posing the question in abstract, doctrinaire terms, as a timeless issue, without taking account of the country's characteristics and the PT's history and links to the social and trade-union movements. A number of indications nonetheless provided cause for worry that, in the absence of major social mobilizations (with the exception of the landless peasants), several ministers known as left-wingers could become mere alibis or hostages for policies whose basic choices had already been announced in the Letter to Brazilians during the election campaign.

From the beginning there were different positions about Miguel [Rossetto]'s participation in the government, in the International as well as in your ranks. But once the DS had decided in favour of participation, without hiding our reservations and doubts, we respected your decision

and tried to help rather than put a spoke in your wheel. So we made an effort to convince comrades in our own sections that logically speaking the question of participation in the government should be subordinated to a judgement of the government's orientations. Unfortunately, there was hardly much suspense about it.

In any event, what suspense there was didn't last long: the appointment of Meirelles and Palocci and the first measures taken very quickly made clear what was happening. Whether or not one agrees with the argument, we can understand the concern with not creating additional difficulties for our mayoral candidates, particularly in Porto Alegre, by leaving the government. But since the municipal elections this argument no longer holds good.

4. Without amounting to an agrarian revolution, the National Programme of Agrarian Reform adopted in November 2003 could constitute a substantial reform, supported in fact by the landless peasants during the gathering where it was presented. It could in fact, if applied in practice, set in motion a dynamic of mobilization. Putting aside the controversy over the figures for 2004, it seems clear however that delays are piling up in meeting the programme's goals, and it is more and more doubtful whether these goals will be met during Lula's first term.

Faced with these obstacles, particularly the budgetary obstacles, a more militant rhetoric could have been adopted so as to make clear that the government's macro-economic choices are responsible for the delays, thus preparing a possible resignation from the government or at least the presentation of a balance sheet that could be defended in the social movements. But apparently on the contrary the Minister of Agrarian Development has kept very discrete in his public statements. He thus risks being caught between a rock and a hard place, between a government policy that he has hardly taken any distance from and the growing discontent of agrarian movements.

More generally, since the government is not a mere mosaic of ministries but

the instrument of an overall set of policies - even if Brazil has a presidential regime where there is nothing equivalent to a council of ministers - he cannot take refuge in managing 'one single ministry' and pay no attention to the overall logic of the government's orientation.

5. On the social level, the alarm went off as early as the winter of 2003, with the debate on pension reform. We have considered the argument that this issue did not have the same political centrality in Brazil's political life that pension reform does in France or Germany. This was nonetheless a genuine neoliberal reform of the same type, opening up the possibility of pension funds and, putting aside any technical quibbles, of increased privatization of social provisions.

The affair was serious enough to justify moving beyond oblique (or 'indirect') criticisms, justified by the pedagogical concern of not moving too much faster than the masses in their relationship to the government, to more head-on criticisms. Of course this change of direction would not have failed to raise the problem more sharply of our participation in a government whose policies we would have been openly fighting against. But instead of a clear and forthright opposition to the reform, we had a hesitant orientation, shown in the way the votes of left-wing PT MPs and senators were divided between 'disciplined' votes in favour, abstentions with an explanation, and votes against. The argument about discipline and the risk of sanctions was not very convincing; the more MPs had opposed the measure frankly (or at least abstained), the more difficult it would have been for the party leadership to take bureaucratic measures.

6. Apparently - the points are closely linked - we underestimated for a long time the importance of the expulsion procedure begun at this time against Heloisa [Helena] and the three dissident MPs. The resolution adopted by DS's 7th conference, 'In defence of democracy and against the expulsion of PT MPs', was very good. It concluded with the announcement of a public campaign against the threats of

expulsion.

Less than two weeks after the conference, however, the threats were transformed into a fait accompli. The Party leadership had gone ahead and defused the promised campaign before it had even gotten started. Whatever blunders the accused MPs may have made, these expulsions were no secondary mishap. The Lula leadership was using them to show clearly the Party's subordination to the government, and to divide preventively the oppositions that could not fail to emerge to the social effects of government policies. The bureaucratic sanctions thus illustrated the party's transformation into a transmission belt to society of government decisions, instead of a means of representing the social movements to the government. The recruitment of a kind of more careerist, less activist 'Palocci cohort' to the new PT consolidated and amplified this development.

These bureaucratic expulsions of several MPs who had stayed true to the Party's official programmatic engagements shocked people in international social and trade union left-wing milieux, far beyond our own ranks. Nevertheless we ourselves put off taking any initiative to protest until we knew what line of defence the DS comrades would adopt, also so as to avoid reducing the defence campaign to a strictly Trotskyist affair. We therefore took up the petition that the British comrades had initiated only after consulting DS comrades during their national conference. The very favourable response to this campaign, unfortunately begun much too late, showed the potential it had.

7. In November 2003 the resolutions of the 7th conference constituted a responsible attempt to preserve unity around a consensus, in the tradition of DS, without for all that hiding major differences in analysis. Likewise the organizational measures decided on (on the press, leadership bodies, etc.) demonstrated a new ambition to create a 'big DS', in the perspective of a more visible, more hard-edged and broader tendency.

But it was the PT leadership that dealt the hand and set the tempo,

particularly through the expulsion process that impelled those expelled to take initiatives outside the party or else pay the price of political death or hibernation. Some of us nonetheless considered the proclamation of the PSoL premature, thinking that it would have been preferable to wage a democratic campaign for at least several months for readmission to the PT, while at the same time systematically organizing gatherings and collectives for a 'socialist reconstruction of the PT' (according to the formula used in the conference resolution).

This doesn't make much difference; there is no reliable scientific instrument to decide these issues of tempo and tactics. Politics is a field of forces and initiatives, which no one can master completely (otherwise the very idea of a decision would lose its whole meaning).

The PSoL was thus founded on the basis of an act of legitimate self-defence. It doubtless has a potential for growth. Even if the PT still absorbs certain forms of radicalization, its turn to the right frees up other spaces of social radicalization; there is life outside the PT. Nevertheless, even if the PSoL manages to organize a significant campaign in 2006, in its current state it is far from constituting a credible alternative to the PT, even to a more and more bureaucratized and corrupt PT. On paper (and perhaps seen from too great a distance) things seem clear: we should succumb neither to an ultraleftist overestimate of the capital that the PSoL has accumulated, nor to a fetishism of the PT. It is therefore necessary:

- To work to unite the PT left (what the Ceara comrades in a nice turn of phrase call 'the PT-ist tendency in the PT') on the basis of a clear substantive alternative to the government's policies. The resolute struggle that these comrades waged during the Fortaleza municipal election campaign is a sign that possibilities still exist.

- To contribute, in the case of those comrades who wish to do so, to building the PSoL, while avoiding the pitfalls of infantile ultraleftism (like the abstentionist position - or lack of a position - on the election in Porto

Alegre, which ignored the obvious fact that a victory for Raul [Pont] in the Porto Alegre municipal elections would have been important for the city, for the internal situation in the PT, and for the global justice movement as a whole).

- To foster dialogue between left-wing currents inside the PT and small independent forces like the PSoL. A certain complementarity could then be established among the critical left inside and outside the PT, avoiding attacks on each other and respecting each others' different tactical choices. This concerns particularly the comrades of our own current: even if they are implicated today in different choices and dynamics, they should make an effort not to burn their bridges and to keep their future options open.

8. Of course, a major difficulty of the situation, made still greater in Brazil by the country's size and regional contrasts, is the lack of synchronization of the rhythms of coming to consciousness in the PT, on the PT left, in the social movements, and in different states. Our task should be to combine this inevitably uneven development. But to do so we need a clear orientation and a firm will, rather than increasing hesitations by hesitating ourselves among the hesitators. In Fortaleza the comrades' determination was rewarded. If the DS had the project of posing a clear alternative to government policies, it would certainly be the force most capable of bring together a radical left inside the PT and fostering dialogue with the forces that no longer see this party as the main tool of class struggle.

Clearly a resolute opposition in the PT would prepare several different hypotheses, including the conditions for a possible major break, on a bigger scale than scattered departures out of disgust, capable of claiming a major part of the PT's continuity and historical heritage instead of abandoning them without a fight to the leadership that has usurped them.

9. While in May 2004 the discussion seemed possibly to be still open between comrades in the International and the DS leadership about various hypothetical courses of action after

the municipal elections, the room for discussion seems rather to be shrinking and divisions among our militants to be deepening. This is all the more so because the results of the municipal elections show that we too have paid the price in some cities, like Porto Alegre according to some statements by Raul, for the Lula government's policies, particularly in sectors traditionally linked to the PT. Without any doubt, the campaign suffered in sizable sectors of the electorate from the Lula government's image, from the regression that the Lula government represents in the eyes of some of the PT's most militant sectors, and from the way the PT reacted: looking for broader and broader alliances instead of strengthening its own capacity for social action and valuing the activist experience of a combative, unitary PT.

10. It is a sign of DS's maturity, and a positive aspect of the consensus culture that prevailed at its founding from the beginning of the 1980s on, that people tried to 'give time its time' instead of precipitating divergences in the form, as has been the case in some sections, of a civil war of tendencies and factions.

The paradox is that the orientation of the DS majority seems more conciliatory towards the PT majority today (on the speculative pretext that there are nuances and divisions in its ranks), at a time when more and more people are speaking out, among trade unionists, intellectuals, economists and some sectors of the church, to demand a radical change in government policies.

Carlos Lessa's departure (and Lula's absence from Celso Furtado's funeral) symbolizes the abandonment of what might have been left of 'developmentist' expectations. Frei Betto's quiet resignation reveals the difficulties of the Zero Hunger campaign, which exemplify the strangling of social reforms due to budget austerity. Although some people hoped that government policies would shift leftwards after the municipal elections, Lula has emphatically confirmed its economic course. Even if the up-tick in the conjuncture gives him a bit of pre-electoral manoeuvring room between

now and 2006, as seems likely, the 'general line' remains in place, with a few other anecdotal ornaments plastered onto it but none the less shocking (e.g. the made-to-measure immunity for Meirelles, the authorization of genetically modified seeds, etc.).

11. From now on the clock is ticking. Nobody can control its tempo and progression. But the institutional calendar will force clear choices on everyone by 2006. And 2006 is beginning today, with the preparation of the PT and PED conferences. With these dates looming, tactical issues must be subordinated to fundamental and substantive issues. The 7th conference resolution contains on this topic elements of the 'need to breathe new life into a perspective of transition to socialism' (I, 8): a proposal for national autonomy in opposition to globalized dependency; a proposal for a moratorium on the debt (on which a common front could be proposed to Venezuela, Argentina, tomorrow perhaps Bolivia, etc.); and

proposals for campaigns on the FTAA, on wages and jobs, on a general perspective for democratic control and a participatory budget on a federal level, and on a radical agrarian and environmental reform. By transforming this kind of platform into concrete campaigns, instead of keeping it in reserve as 'a programme for Sundays', and by raising the issue of a break with the government, we will be able to delineate alliances and convergences on solid foundations again, inside and outside the PT, rather than on the basis of impressions and fleeting interests.

12. We are very much aware that the expression of the viewpoint elaborated in this letter may be perceived as interference in DS's internal debates. But the situation is quite serious, and its international repercussions are too great to let diplomacy win out over frankness. We belong to the same international organization precisely in order to enable us to establish relationships where plain speaking

takes place and benefit from each others' accumulated experience.

This discussion is legitimate in our eyes, all the more because we have taken the time to understand rather than making judgements by mechanically transposing abstract criteria. This is also the reason why the leading bodies of the International have chosen to open a discussion by circulating information and viewpoints, rather than to rush to take formal votes that could have crystallized positions prematurely instead of clarifying what is at stake. Insofar as all the comrades in DS, whatever their short-term party-building tactics, are still members of the International, we hope that our common framework of programmatic reference points will contribute to maintaining the conditions for a serious discussion, informed by experiences that are yet to come. This is what we are striving, to the extent we can, to help with.

Chico, Daniel and Michael

Appeal - Extend international solidarity to Filipino left

5 March 2005

The Fourth International calls for this campaign to be extended further. We cannot remain passive when the lives of countless militants are in danger, the future of the popular forces in the Philippines is at risk, and the very principles that underlie our common struggle are at stake.



Several dozen activists have already been killed; hundreds more know they may at any moment become the targets of the NPA. All the main progressive and revolutionary parties not controlled by the CPP have already been affected (including the

RPM-M, the Revolutionary Workers Party of Mindanao, Philippine section of our International) or are now specifically threatened.

Leading activists in the mass organisations, especially peasant organisations, have been assassinated. Leading personalities in the fight against capitalist globalization, for the cancellation of the third-world debt, and in the anti-war movement, have been singled out as "counter-revolutionaries" and "imperialist agents".

The experience of recent years shows that such accusations can be followed swiftly by the condemnation of such people by kangaroo courts, "people's

courts" on the orders of the PCP's leadership.

With this assassination policy against left activists, the Communist Party of the Philippines is creating a favourable situation for the provocations and manoeuvres of agents of the Philippine army and police.

It divides and paralyses the popular forces, making it more difficult for them to carry on their struggles. It profoundly discredits the revolutionary project and socialist alternative for which we are fighting. It therefore plays into the hands of imperialism and the right.

The CPP cannot tolerate the development of a pluralist popular movement and political left in the Philippines. It seeks to impose, by force of arms if necessary, its own monopoly. Everything possible must be done, internationally, to support and protect this pluralist left, and to assert its right to exist. Our

responsibility is clear.

The CPP is violating one of the most basic principles of our fight for another world, for a socialist world based on solidarity, equality and freedom. Violence within the workers' and popular movement cannot be tolerated. We cannot accept that a party calling itself revolutionary

should turn its armed forces against progressive activist organisations. This is totally contrary to everything we stand for.

2 March 2005

International Committee of the Fourth International

On Venezuela

5 March 2005

The development in recent years of very significant public health projects, literacy and school enrollment campaigns, the prioritization of forming cooperatives, agricultural reform and reforms to the commercial fishing system are all important signs of the social priorities driving this process.



In the international realm, Venezuela has decided to confront US imperialism (rejection of Plan Colombia, rejection of FTAA, refusal of US soldiers on its territory, closer ties with Cuba, condemnation of imperialist wars). Venezuela is becoming more and more of a point of reference for the global justice movement.

Popular mobilization is a decisive element that has made these political breaks possible: whether fighting the coup d'Etat in April 2002, or carrying out the community organizing that makes all the social programmes (education, health, housing, water, etc.) possible.

The process is unfolding within a framework of respect for bourgeois

democratic institutions. Despite the efforts to transform the state, the institutions remain marked by clientelist and corrupt practices, which are an obstacle to the policies decided by the government.

The revolutionary process has not yet become a revolutionary victory for the oppressed classes. The resistance has come from the Venezuelan right, but also from certain sectors of the 'Chavist' majority. The process is still disputed between revolutionary dynamics and tendencies oriented towards loyally managing capitalism.

- Undertake a campaign of information and solidarity with the Venezuelan revolutionary process: open a web page dedicated to Venezuela on our FI sites; political and trade union exchanges; publicity for the positive results in terms of social transformation; importance of the Venezuelan experience that we can distinguish from the social-liberal option; and the fundamental importance of popular mobilization, if one is willing to confront the ruling classes.

- In the context of our solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution, we support the sectors that make the radicalization of the revolution the

central axis of their political intervention. We will make contact with these sectors in order to plan political co-operation, to invite them to our international meetings, and to discuss with them our conception of party-building and the role of an international.

- The World Social Forum in 2006, which will hold one of its parts in Venezuela in January 2006, will be a key moment for the global justice movement to strengthen its links and express its solidarity with the popular organizations in Venezuela.

- Our comrades should get involved in activities linked to the Bolivarian process, like the Congress of People's Power and the World Festival of Youth (August 2005).

We intervene in our trade unions to promote the new trade union federation, the UNT, and trade union solidarity actions including where possible inviting trade unionists to solidarity activities.

- We propose to contribute to the Venezuelan process our best experiences in participatory democracy, in particular through collaboration with our Brazilian comrades.