



## IV339 - April 2002

# Millions rally against Berlusconi

15 April 2002, by **Flavia d'Angeli**



The mobilisation was initially called to oppose the Berlusconi government's decision to 'reform' the Labour Statute, in particular article 18 (which lays down an obligation to rehire a worker who is unjustly dismissed). However, in the extremely effervescent context of the Italian social situation, the demonstration became the reference point for the various social struggles and anti-governmental initiatives. Coming just three days after the murder (claimed by the Red Brigades) of the author of the proposed reform of article 18, professor Marco Biagi, and after the attempt by the government to use the terrorist attack to smear the whole movement, the demonstration also presented a big opportunity for the social and democratic opposition.

The return of the 'Red Brigades' comes at a time of very heated social conflict. The government is attempting to carry out a significant restructuring of the social and democratic guarantees won after the Second World War - national labour contract, safeguards against dismissals, pensions, health and public education. The CGIL, traditionally linked to the PCI and subsequently the DS, but now rather critical of the liberal democratic line of the latter's leadership, has reacted with an

intensification of protest, numerous strikes, last Saturday's demonstration and the calling of a general strike for April 5, 2002. This determination has created a convergence of the entire opposition, from Rifondazione Comunista to the centre left Olive Tree alliance, in a common fight against the government, and has forced the other two big union confederations, the CISL (moderate, Christian) and the UIL (once linked to ex-prime minister Craxi's Socialist Party, now linked to the Olive Tree) to break off negotiations with the government and the Confindustria (the employers' federation) and support the call for a general strike (although they argue it should be put off until April 19, 2002).

The assassination of Marco Biagi was immediately used by Berlusconi and the president of Confindustria to discredit the trade unions, in particular the CGIL, and the anti-globalisation movement in general. As this article was written, the CGIL, CISL and UIL cancelled their next meeting with the government because of a statement made by Bossi and the Minister of Defence, explicitly identifying the trade union movement as 'the water where terrorism swims'; the statement also attacked the Social Forum movement and its best known spokespersons, such as Agnoletto and Casarini.

However, the movement reacted by

demonstrating again its strength, its capacity for social mobilisation, and radical and democratic approach. The Social Forum brought a contingent of more than 300,000 people to the demonstration, proposing that the intransigent defence of article 18 should lead on to a new 'season of social rights', starting from the extension of the Labour Statute to all new insecure contracts and the demand for a European social income for the unemployed and insecure workers.

The demonstration had immediate effects also on the moderate left. Its errors and *débâcles* have forced millions of people to defend their own living condition of life, organising around a new democratic participation. There has been an 'eruption from below' in political life, starting at Genoa in the demonstrations against the G8 summit and finally reaching the traditional trade union movement with the CGIL in the forefront. At the centre of this movement: a politics which is independent of bureaucratic alchemies; concrete demands - opposition to 'flexibility' of labour; a direct protagonism which should express itself immediately through the general strike; an intransigent defence of democracy against any terrorist barbarism and any cynical manipulation by the government.

Just eight months separate this

demonstration from the July days in Genoa. But there is an obvious link between the two events. We began, in a city emptied by the violence of the police, to march against the arrogance

of the powerful. We have continued to mobilize against war and neo-liberalism, often alone. Today this little flux of rebellion has been

transformed into an immense permanent movement, which continues to reaffirm the simple concept forged at Porto Alegre: another world is possible.

## Left Bloc strengthened

15 April 2002, by **Sérgio Vitorino**



The result is the culmination of a gradual erosion of support for his government, which without an absolute majority in parliament had relied on the right to get through its policies - policies that were either openly neo-liberal and prey to the pressures of the financial lobbies, or simply gutless, like the continuing run-down of public services - health, education and social security - or the endless delays over tax reform, urgently needed to stem massive tax evasion by the rich.

It was a good result for the Left Bloc, which with over 150,000 votes won 2.8% of the national total, moving from two to three seats in parliament. For the first time the Bloc elected a member of parliament for Oporto, the country's second city, and it only just missed winning a fourth seat in Setúbal.

But overall it was a bad result for the left and for the country. Even more so because the main right-wing bourgeois party, the Social Democratic Party (PSD), without an overall majority in parliament, will now have to form a government with the support of the Popular Party (PP), which calls itself "centre-Christian" but whose rhetoric and style have moved ever closer to the far right on key questions like immigration and crime.

It's a Portuguese version of the coalition governments that seem set to become the new rage in Europe - after left coalitions in France or Germany,

as in Portugal too, have opened the doors of power to a right-wing even more populist and xenophobic than the traditional parties.

### Credit

In fact the number of seats won by the two parties of the right (102 for the PSD, 14 for the PP) gives them an absolute majority over the combined seats of the left (95 for the PS, 12 for the Communist Party (PC) and 3 for the Bloc (BE)), which in theory should allow them to form a stable government. But credit for victory in these elections is unlikely to go to the right itself. Indeed the weak and obviously uncharismatic PSD leader, now prime minister elect, Durao Barroso, is hardly "to blame" at all.

Rather it was down to the classic logic of alternating power between the two main parties and, above all, to a protest vote against the Socialist government and its inability to rule from the left.

On the majority of decisive issues for the country, the traditional parties, that is the PS and the PSD, are indistinguishable, both in their policies and in the arrogant way in which they implement them. These are precisely the issues which the Bloc took up as the main banners of its campaign, in opposition to what its electoral manifesto called the "conservative modernization" which Portugal has undergone over the last 25 years: reform of the educational and health systems, which have been brought to the verge of collapse by both parties' policies of privatisation and cutbacks; drugs and drug-

dependency (a social drama of the first order in Portugal, on which the Bloc has managed to achieve some important legal advances); tax reform (on which the PS repeatedly retreated in the face of pressure from the financial sector); reform of public administration which is slow, bureaucratic and unaccountable; or the decriminalisation of abortion.

The Left Bloc's campaign - dynamic, to the point, irreverent, taking up clear political causes and deliberately seeking to upset the established powers, both elected and unelected - brought fruits even before polling day. For example, by arguing in favour of taxing large fortunes, the campaign drew angry reactions from powerful business interests. Public initiatives like this attracted unprecedented support and involvement in the campaign, opening up an ever broader space for the Bloc's proposals.

Sympathy for the campaign was reinforced by the impact of the exemplary, hard-hitting, parliamentary performance of the two deputies the Bloc elected in 1999. These latest election results confirm this - and show that it's this new, combative left which can best resist the advance of the right in Portugal.

There was such a scarcity of ideas coming from the main parties that the growth of the Left Bloc was only to be expected, in spite of the pressure on electors to cast their vote "tactically" in favour of the PS in order to stop the right getting in. In the first week of the campaign the main topic was the European Football Cup (which Portugal is due to host in 2004) and the lack of sufficient funds to satisfy

the appetites of the property speculators who want to build new stadiums. This reduced the level of the debate to zero. There was also increased populism, expressed in the PS's turn towards talking tough on crime and security, in an attempt to occupy the space to its right. Some of this clearly backfired - like the unfortunate play on words on one of the PS's campaign billboards, which had the party leader, Ferro Rodrigues, promising to govern with a "mao de ferro" ("hand of iron" - "ferro" meaning "iron" in Portuguese). This was meant as a reply to the PP's slogan of governing with a "braco direito" (which combined the ideas of ruling from the right, ruling with a "strong arm", and the suggestion that the PP would be the natural "right-hand" support for the PSD). But it just went to show that the right was rather better both at setting an authoritarian agenda and at deploying vacuous marketing techniques.

## Crisis of the CP

The Socialists' defeat was not however the meltdown they had feared. They managed some victories, in Oporto for example, and they prevented the PSD from winning an absolute majority. But this was more a result of tactical voting against the threat of a right-wing government than of any merit of their own. The party had chosen to replace their outgoing leader and prime minister, Antonio Guterres, with Ferro Rodrigues, who had played a co-ordinating role in the previous administration, and therefore had considerable difficulty establishing any critical distance between himself and the mistakes of the past.

The Left Bloc itself reaffirmed its

status as a genuinely national movement - securing a significant vote in almost every important town and city, and in some cases almost overtaking the PP and the Communists. But the Bloc lost almost one percent of the votes it won in Lisbon in the previous elections, precisely amongst those urban left layers most vulnerable to the call for tactical voting.

It was the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) that suffered most from this factor. Its slow electoral decline has become more acute in recent elections. This time it was almost a collapse. The PCP lost five of its 17 members of parliament, as well as its position as the country's "third party" - ceded to the PP which also lost votes. It's also been going through unprecedented internal divisions. Shortly after the local elections more than 500 members, including a majority of the party's parliamentary group, made a public appeal for an extraordinary congress to discuss the possibility of a governmental alliance with the Socialists - a position rejected by the party's "hard-line" leadership. In the wake of these latest disappointing results, more divisions are surfacing.

## Resist, resist, resist

That is the slogan of the moment, given the first measures announced by this right-wing government, which was elected on a very vague programme, and against which, given the generally demoralised state of the left, the Left Bloc will provide the most determined opposition. We can expect a mad extension of selection in

education; a tax "shock" which instead of introducing greater justice will treat all, rich and poor, alike; privatisation of state television; a hardening of the police state; the rolling back of some of the social gains won with difficulty over the last seven years; increasing restrictions on immigration and the rights of immigrant communities; a freeze on public sector wages and more underfunding of public services to cope with the public deficit - and these are just the tip of the iceberg which has already been announced.

It's now up to the Left Bloc, as the only left force to come out of these elections stronger, to take the lead in opposing the government. It must also challenge the rest of the left over the causes of those electoral results which let the right in. The Bloc has a responsibility for pushing forward a series of battles for a more humane society - like the decriminalisation of abortion, at a time when women continue to be tried in Portugal for having abortions - battles which a demoralised left might well let drop, but which can in fact be continued in the new situation. And that situation is not necessarily less favourable. The right-wing government is based on a coalition agreement which may prove precarious. Its social base is weak. And the Socialist Party, no longer in government, will naturally tend to assume an oppositional stance.

What is more, the right takes up the reins of power in a new economic context, where the manna of European funds has come to an end and where the promised crisis is already upon us, bringing austerity measures behind it. All this will demand, and permit, new answers and new mobilizations from the social movements.

## Left Bloc Deputies

15 April 2002



Francisco "Chico" Louca

Since 1999 the Bloc has adopted a policy of rotating mandates for its 2

parliamentary deputies, according to circumstances and the subjects of parliamentary debate. This allowed two other Bloc supporters, Helena Neves and Fernando Rosas, to intervene at the parliamentary level (Rosas headed the Bloc list for Setubal

at this election, missing election by just over a thousand votes).

Rotation will continue in the new parliament, with the alternatives being Miguel Portas (a leader of Política XXI, one of the founding components of the Bloc and a candidate in Lisbon at

these elections), Ana Drago (a young sociologist who was also a candidate in Lisbon) or Alda Sousa (a leader of the PSR, member of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International and the second candidate for the Bloc in Oporto).

## "An unknown to represent the unknowns"

15 April 2002, by **Penelope Duggan**



These sponsorships must come from councillors of the départements, regions, elected assemblies of the overseas territories or mayors, a total of more than 46,000 potential sponsors. In France every commune - 37,600 of them - has its elected mayor. It is essentially on the mayors of the small rural communes that the candidates outside the main parties must rely for their sponsorships. These mayors are in general local figures unaffiliated to any party apparatus and are thus more open to agreeing to give their sponsorship, either in the name of the defence of democratic rights or through sympathy with the candidate.

So since last autumn the activists of the three far-left groups (Lutte Ouvrière and the Parti de travailleurs as well as the LCR), a variety of ecologist or other "small candidates" as well as the far right Front National and Mouvement National Républicain have been crisscrossing the countryside to obtain first promises of support and in the last month definitive signatures. While Lutte Ouvrière benefits from its well-known candidate, Arlette Laguiller, now at 8-10% in the opinion polls, the LCR as such has not been present in a presidential campaign since 1974 and last campaigned for a candidate in 1988 when it was a leading force in the independent campaign of Pierre Juquin, a former leader of the CP.

Last June the LCR decided in a national conference that not only would it present its own candidate, following the refusal of Lutte Ouvrière to envisage a joint campaign around the candidacy of Arlette Laguiller, but that it would make a radical change and choose a new candidate rather than running Alain Krivine, until now the LCR's only presidential candidate (in 1969 and 1974) and its major spokesperson.

Olivier Besancenot at 27 is the youngest candidate in the election and indeed will only reach the legal age of candidacy on April 18. He started his political life as a high school student in 1988 in reaction against the rise of the National Front and against racist incidents in his school; he then participated in the movement of high school students against the Gulf War in 1990.

As a student he continued to be an activist both in student life and in the part-time jobs he had at the same time, notably as a worker in a supermarket where he played an active role in unionising his fellow workers. Since 1997 he has been a post worker, taking one year out in 2000 to work as an assistant to the LCR's European MPs (Alain Krivine and Roseline Vacchetta). He joined the JCR (youth organisation in solidarity with the LCR) early in his political life and rapidly the Ligue as well.

Since 1998 he has been a member of the LCR political committee. The LCR has not waited for the official confirmation of its candidacy and has

been waging a vigorous political campaign. Despite the fact that he continued working up to the end of February, Olivier has already spoken at dozens of meetings up and down the country as have Alain Krivine and Roseline Vacchetta, alongside him or separately. The presence of a young candidate, who talks directly from his experience and who is, as he says, "an unknown to represent the unknowns", has attracted a new and younger audience to the meetings.

They appreciate his stance as an anti-globalisation activist, present at all the major mobilizations including Porto Alegre on both occasions, as a workplace activist, who denounces the fact that Chirac will never appear before a tribunal charged with rigging elections or diverting public funds to his own pocket while a young black from the socially deprived suburbs will find himself in prison for six months for having simply smoked a joint.

They appreciate his stance as a young worker who stands on the picket line with the young part-time and underpaid workers from McDonalds, who participates in forums such as that on "New challenges for feminism" or the conference organised by the Centre for Research and Information on Cannabis.

A recent opinion poll indicated that 74% of those questioned saw no difference between Jacques Chirac, the current president and candidate of the right, and Lionel Jospin, current prime minister and candidate of the Socialist Party.



The free market right takes its line from the programme of the MEDEF, the bosses' organisation, and makes great play of the question of "insecurity", but Chirac cannot unify it into one political party. His "Union in movement" seems divided, without any real perspective other than unity around his candidacy. Increasingly discredited by financial and political scandals, he can no longer campaign as in 1995 around overcoming the "social fracture". This is opening a space for Jean-Pierre Chevenement, representative of a populist current misled into a reactionary nationalism. A former leader of a "left-wing" current in the SP, he is increasingly associated with "law and order" and anti-Corsican positions.

And the left? Lionel Jospin proclaims

that he has not got a socialist project, and that the main regret of his government is its failure to deal with the question of "insecurity". But no excuses for its failure to deal with continuing inequality, mass unemployment, job casualisation. And on key questions such as privatisation, pensions and the European Union there is not much difference between the right and "pluralist left" of the governmental majority.

This intensified social-liberal profile of the SP is speeding up the crisis in the CP. The sharpest indication is the fact that Arlette Laguiller is well ahead of the CP candidate in the opinion polls. Millions of CP voters do not see any sense in voting for a CP that is just a satellite of the SP.

The significant showing in favour of Arlette Laguiller in the opinion polls indicates that there is a current which wants to show its disapproval, from a leftwing stance, of the government's policies. This trend has existed in French politics since the big strike movement of winter 1995.

But although we, like Arlette Laguiller, are on the side of the workers, we also think that revolutionaries should be involved in the struggles of new generations, like the workers of McDonalds, the feminist struggle, the ecological movement and all the new social movements like the global justice movement. This is the message of the Besancenot campaign, which is also showing the way to building a new anti-capitalist force.

# Barcelona: against the Europe of capital

15 April 2002, by **Josep María Antentas**

## The context of the mobilizations



At the international level, the mobilizations in Barcelona were marked by the dynamics of the development of the movement after September 11. If Brussels constituted the first test, passed with flying colours, the Second World Social Forum at Porto Alegre revealed the continued good state of health of the movement, in spite of the reactionary turn in world politics imposed by Bush after September 11.

The mobilizations in Barcelona, the first of any significance in Europe after the second WSF, showed once again that resistance to neo-liberal globalisation is continuing.

Within the Spanish State, the Barcelona mobilizations must be

placed in a context of a renaissance of social mobilizations, albeit in partial and unequal form, and an increase in social discontent with the policies of the PP government as well as those of the CiU in Catalonia.

Several fronts have been opened in recent months. We would emphasize the following:

- First, the student mobilizations against proposed changes in the universities, whose defining moment was the student strike of November 14 (November 13 in Catalonia), that brought 300,000 students onto the street. The strike was launched, in most of the universities, by the *asambleario* student movement, with a combativity that initially bypassed the traditional student organizations tied to the PSOE and IU and the strategies of these parties and the big unions. At the end of the mobilizations, nevertheless, these sectors retook the initiative, with the demonstration in Madrid on December 1, 2001 that attracted 200,000 people, called by the PSOE, IU, CCOO and the UGT.

- Secondly, the massive mobilizations against the National Hydrological Plan (PHN) for the diversion of the waters of the Ebro, whose impact in the most affected zones (Aragón, the regions around the Ebro in Catalonia and so on) has been of enormous social breadth. On the Sunday before the European summit, March 10, the platform against the PHN mobilized some 200,000 people in Barcelona.

- Thirdly, the mobilizations of the undocumented immigrants, whose catalyst was the coming into effect of the new nationality law in early 2001.

- Fourthly, we should emphasize the outbreak of a number of trade union struggles, some with great social impact (like that of Sintel), and others of a much more local character and with less importance (Miniwatt, Lear and so on). In spite of this, it is nonetheless clear that there has not been a situation of generalized labour conflict in recent months and that, in addition, the general situation has suffered from the demobilisatory leadership of the majority unions, the

CCOO and the UGT.

- In the fifth place, we should note the increasing role of the anti-globalisation movement itself, which, from the mobilizations against the World Bank in Barcelona (June 24-25, 2001) has been taking root and gaining social force throughout the Spanish state.

The dynamic of all these struggles has been different in each case, although some common elements exist. In general, they have been based around broad and unitary campaigns or platforms with combative and mobilisatory approaches. In almost all cases there has been an element of conflict between the most combative and mobilized sectors and the parliamentary political organizations (PSOE, most of IU, ICV and so on) and the big unions, the CCOO and UGT, which have often set up their own platforms in competition with the unitary campaigns, as is the case in the mobilizations against the university laws or the immigrant struggles.

All these struggles have served to considerably erode the hegemony of the PP government, whose authoritarian and arrogant approach has been repeatedly demonstrated. Nevertheless, the main socially contested governmental projects have been pursued, although with an evident lack of legitimacy, as is the case with the universities law, and the Aznar government has not yet entered into crisis. Nonetheless we can say that the period of social demobilization which characterized the first PP government is over and that we are beginning a new cycle of struggles, albeit of a contradictory and still limited form.

## **The anti-globalisation movement in Catalonia and the Spanish state**

In the period since Seattle, several events have marked the development of the anti-globalisation movement in

the Spanish state and Catalonia. Three of the most significant have been:

- First, the social consultation for the abolition of the foreign debt, organized by the Citizens' Network for the Abolition of the Foreign Debt (RCADE) on March 12, 2000. Taking place on the same day as the general election, the consultation obtained more than 1,250,000 votes (half of them in Catalonia). The process of preparation served to create an important network with local implantation, the most militant sector of which subsequently participated actively in the various activities of the 'anti-globalisation movement'.

- Secondly, there was the creation of the Movement of Global Resistance (MRG) in Catalonia and the preparation of the mobilization for Prague in September 2000. The MRG was set up in Catalonia before the summer of 2000. It involved people from sectors of the independent movement, groups in solidarity with the Zapatistas, the RCADE, and several local rank and file collectives.

The MRG was formed as a diffuse network of coordination of groups and people oriented to grass roots work in the fight against capitalist globalisation. From the beginning an orientation more focused in participating in the campaigns and international mobilizations and another centred more on work at the local level and with less connection with the international processes coexisted in the MRG. The first campaign carried out was the preparation of the mobilization against the IMF and the World Bank meeting in Prague (S26).

In the framework of this campaign, several MRGs were set up in the main cities of the Spanish State, like Madrid, Valencia or Zaragoza, but without any real connection with the MRG in Catalonia and with a very different profile and composition in each case.

The mobilization for Prague became a veritable founding struggle of the movement against capitalist globalisation in the Spanish state. After Prague the 'anti-globalisation' movement in the Spanish state

emerged initially as a movement centred on a new militant generation and the MRG became its reference point. The importance of the MRG has not been so much at the organizational level, but in the fact that it has been one of the best expressions of the present processes of radicalisation of an important layer of youth in Catalonia and the Spanish state, and the emergence of a new militant generation.

This latter is characterized by a generic anti-capitalist ideology, by the will to revive grass roots political activity, organizing in horizontal networks and with little organizational formalization and by the search for 'non-conventional' forms of mobilization, centred on various forms of non-violent direct action.

During the second half of the 1990s there has been a framework favourable to the eruption of a powerful youth movement, disconnected from the movements of previous militant generations and the political left, because of two factors.

On the one hand, the weakening of the structures and militant networks of the various movements arising in the 1970s and 1980s and the drift to the right of the big unions. On the other, the crisis of the political left, due to the blockage and stagnation of projects like the IU or the rightward drift of others like the ICV in Catalonia, as well as the implosion of the main organizations of the revolutionary left during the early 1990s.

The present wave of radicalisation of youth opposed to capitalist globalisation was preceded by a first wave around the okupa movement from the end of 1996 to 1999, in a context of demobilization. The present radicalisation, nevertheless, is based partly on the previous height of the autonomous movement, but its framework covers a much broader and diverse spectrum of young people, and it takes place in a context of revival of struggles and the confluence of several social sectors and generations in unitary campaigns, like the mobilizations in Barcelona against the EU Summit.

- Thirdly, there was the campaign against the World Bank Conference on Development in Barcelona (June 25-27, 2001). Barcelona 2001 saw the launch on a wide scale of the anti-globalisation movement in the Spanish State, and above all in Catalonia, although its impact was very unequal at a territorial level. The campaign against the World Bank was formed by a broad assembly of networks and organizations across a very broad ideological and social spectrum. The big unions and the parliamentary left of Catalonia were dragged into supporting the campaign, although their participation was symbolic. Barcelona 2001 saw the transformation of the profile of the movement and an extension and pluralisation of its social base, creating a process of convergence between a great variety of social organizations, so that it was no longer a movement exclusively formed by the new militant generation.



The balance sheet of the mobilizations was highly positive, with more than 30,000 people participating in the demonstration of June 24, and 5,000 in the counter-conference; there was also the symbolic victory of the WB being forced to cancel the conference.

## **The European presidency and the Campaign Against the Europe of Capital**

### **The dynamics of the campaign**

The preparations for the Spanish European presidency began in autumn 2001, after the local success in June against the World Bank and the international success in Genoa, and amidst the confusion reigning after September 11. The six months of the European presidency were crammed with official appointments, due to the

very decentralized approach that the Aznar government has adopted to the presidency (two European Councils, 41 ministerial meetings and 151 lower level meetings). The structure adopted for these six months of mobilizations has been one of a flexible coordination on the state scale of the different local campaigns organized in the cities that will host some of the multiple official meetings.

The anti-globalisation movement initially appeared to have a very unequal implantation in the different parts of the Spanish state, little consolidated in some areas, deeply implanted and organizationally mature in others.

The beginning of the Campaign against the Europe of Capital and War in Catalonia was slow and complicated. Although the mobilizations against the World Bank in June had consolidated the movement in Catalonia, a certain sensation of fatigue was evident in the militant layers. Barcelona faced the quite unusual situation of being the scene of two great anti-globalisation mobilizations in a few months (June 2001 and March 2002), and the Summit of Heads of State was prepared with the sensation of 'second time around', of a repetition of what was already done in June.

At the same time, the movement was paralysed for a couple of months by strategic discrepancies on the organizational form to adopt. Finally, it was decided to establish a unitary campaign, inspired by that formed against the World Bank.

The campaign, which did not really start until the beginning of 2002, was formed by more than 100 organizations of a different nature (informal networks, local platforms, parties, unions, NGOs and so on), as well as many individuals.

Among the main groups we can emphasize the MRG and its periphery, the RCADE, the Zapatista Rebellion support group, ATTAC, the Assembly of Workers Against Globalisation (comprising the CGT, the Inter-trade union Alternative of Catalonia and critical members of the CCOO), the world-wide women's march network

and the Rojos current of the IU in Catalonia. In the campaign, or at least in some of its activities, there was a good participation by a section of the independence movement, a part of which had broken off during the campaign against the World Bank to set up a small platform called Barcelona Tremola ('Barcelona Shakes'). However, the big union confederations, the CCOO and the UGT, the Catalan parliamentary parties the ICV, (ex-Communists, reconverted into greens), the ERC (the nationalistic left), most of the IU, and the Socialist Party did not participate. These organizations, with the support of some NGOs, organized around their own platform, the Barcelona Social Forum.

In spite of this, the Social Forum was finally forced to support the demonstration of March 16 called by the campaign, as it was obvious that this was going to be an unavoidable event.

As had already happened in the campaign against the World Bank, the Campaign against the Europe of Capital did not adopt a structure of a platform of organizations, but rather that of a campaign formed by assemblies and open working commissions, in which each person acted on an individual basis and not as representatives of an organization.

This is the organizational form that better fits with the reality of the movement in Catalonia, with a very great weight of informal networks and non-organized individuals. The balance sheet of the internal dynamics of the campaign is positive, and the coexistence between its different components has been correct, in spite of some problems and tensions deriving from the existence of different political cultures, in particular between the new militant generation and the movements based on preceding generations, and of some distrust between some sectors.

## **The balance sheet of the**

# mobilisations



The philosophy of the campaign was to conjugate several types of activity, with different objectives (alternative forum, mass demonstrations, day of direct action and so on), not with the intention of any counter-position but reciprocally to reinforce a perspective of strategic convergence between very different networks and organizations.

Starting from the incontestable fact that the priorities of many of the components of the campaign were different it was considered important to obtain a certain fusion of experiences so that everybody participated in the different moments and facets of the campaign. As the components of the Italian Social Forum would say, the objective was to make the campaign a reciprocal space of 'contamination'.

The activities finally organized were the following: a video-forum space from Monday 11 to Friday 14, with an attendance of more than 1,000 people in some sessions; a day of decentralized direct action on March 15, opening day of the official Summit; a 'forum of alternatives' on the morning of Saturday March 16, in which 6,000 people participated; the demonstration on the evening of March 16, whose numbers were impressive (250,000 according to the police, 500,000 according to the campaign, 300,000 according to the mass media); and a final concert with Manu Chao headlining, with 50,000 people.

To all these activities we should add the trade union demonstration organized by the ECTU on March 13, with about 100,000 people, as well as two other important activities the previous weekend: Reclaim the Streets on Saturday March 9, with 3,000 people, and the massive demonstration called by the Platform against the Plan Hidrológico Nacional on Sunday March 10, with 200,000 people.

It's worth commenting on two of the

main activities of the weekend: the demonstration and the day of decentralized direct action. The demonstration, undoubtedly, was a success of historical proportions, absolutely unexpected everywhere.

It is important to emphasize that the immense majority of the demonstrators were Catalan, because most of the foreign demonstrators were blocked at the French border, and the attendance of demonstrators from the rest of the Spanish State was not very high. The reason was that in many Spanish cities there were official meetings and mobilizations (in Zaragoza, Valencia, Madrid, Seville and so on) which demotivated many demonstrators from coming to Barcelona.

The demonstration was the result of three different appeals: that of the Campaign against the Europe of Capital and War, that of the Barcelona Social Forum, and that of the Catalan Platform against the Europe of Capital, grouping the pro-independence organizations. The correlation of forces between the three blocs leaves no room for doubts: the bloc of the Social Forum was of modest dimensions, the Catalan Platform organized a contingent of 5,000 people, and most of the demonstrators marched in the contingent of the Campaign.



Two big reasons help explain the success of the demonstration. First, the strength of the 'anti-globalisation' movement in Catalonia, whose dynamism was already made clear last June in the demonstration against the World Bank and subsequently in other international mobilizations.

Second, the success of the demonstration can be seen as a symptom of accumulated social rejection of the policies of the PP and, in particular, the attitude maintained by the Aznar government towards the mobilizations anticipated in Barcelona over the previous months.

On the one hand, the organized police presence, with more than 8,500

officers, was perceived as a disproportionate and arrogant militarisation of Barcelona. On the other, Aznar's systematic attempt at criminalisation of the movement had a boomerang effect and stimulated many citizens to join the demonstration.

The demonstration was developed in a climate of tension and confrontation much lower than that of Genoa, although the police presence was spectacular and the demonstration was cut by half by a brutal police charge. This relative absence of tension favoured the social legitimization of the movement, facilitating also the attempts at cooption and neutralization of the demonstration on the part of the institutional left.

The mayor of Barcelona, Joan Clos, of the Socialist Party, turned the massive anti-globalisation protest into another example of the traditional civismo of the Barcelonans, and an example of the capacity of the city to organize great social events in a satisfactory manner, as already shown in the Olympic Games of 1992!

The day of decentralized direct action on March 15 also deserves some commentary, because of its innovative character in relation to previous counter-summits. The need to organize a day of civil disobedience and 'non-conventional' protest was evident for the organizers of the Campaign.

At the same time, the possibility of laying siege to the official summit, following the 'classic' style of Seattle, seemed impossible considering the unprecedented police presence. Faced with this, it was decided to call a day of actions decentralized actions at points all over the city throughout the day.

The decentralized day of action served to readapt the strategy of non-violent direct action in the new current scenario, of increased repression and police presence during summits. Altogether there were more than 30 actions, within which we could point to: mobile street lobbies, in which 1,000 people participated (taking a route by the offices of several lobbies



and multinationals in the city centre); the attempt at occupation of one of the offices of Telefónica by some of its workers; different marches with bicycles in the city; a route by different Latin American consulates; a demonstration against genetically modified foods and, finally an 'alternative' circus with about 5,000 spectators.

## The perspective after the success

Finally, we can indicate some of the perspectives and the immediate challenges of the anti-globalisation movement in the Spanish state after the success of Barcelona and with the Spanish EU presidency as background.

In the first place, the European presidency is going to be, indeed is already, a good occasion to consolidate the anti-globalisation movement throughout the Spanish State. The mobilizations, on a different scale and levels, are going to take place in many cities and territories, and constitute a good opportunity to launch the movement in those places where it is still in an incipient phase.

It is too soon to know what will be the impact of Barcelona for the next big meetings of the European presidency, but it is evident that the success of Barcelona is going to contribute to building the future mobilizations, in particular that in Seville in June.

At the same time, even in the places where the movement is more consolidated, like in Catalonia, efforts must be made to reinforce its organizational capacity, because the current lack of synch between its capacity of mobilization and the weakness of its structures and organizational resources is obvious. Devising forms of organizational expression for the movement after the end of the Spanish presidency is another one of the debates that is now upon the table.

Secondly, the impulse of Barcelona and the entire European presidency should serve to give a definitive boost to the cycle of social struggles that has been taking place in the Spanish state in recent months.

However, it is too soon to know what is going to be the concrete practical translation of the impressive success at Barcelona for all the social movements in the country, although it is obvious that we have entered a more favourable situation for social

mobilization, and that the different struggles that can explode can rest, at least on the symbolic level, on the pressure of the anti-globalisation movement. And, in particular, it is difficult to know if the new climate opened after Barcelona is going to push the union leaderships towards a clear policy of opposition to the policies of the PP, as has already happened in Italy.

In any case, around the Campaign against the Europe of Capital and War processes of strategic coordination of sectoral struggles have been established, and links between organizations and movements have been strengthened.

It is worth emphasizing, for example, the processes of articulation of the trade union left, around the Assembly of Workers against Globalisation, or, at another level, the success of the mobile street lobbies, which can be the embryo of important campaigns against the multinationals.

It is still too soon to measure the mid-term impact of Barcelona. But one thing is clear: the pessimism and the resignation of three or four years ago have vanished completely in activist circles. And this is already a promising beginning.

## An international for humanity

**15 April 2002, by Eduardo Mancuso**



The World Social Forum not only consolidated itself as the "anti-Davos" (referring to the World Economic Forum, held this year in New York). It also gave a huge boost to the building of a broad world social alliance of resistance and alternatives to neo-liberal globalisation. In an atmosphere of festive militancy, more than 60,000 people from 131 countries (including 15,000 young people at the Youth

Camp and 1,500 peasants from Via Campesina) held dozens of talks and seminars, more than 700 workshops, demonstrations, debates and book launches. "We are diverse... The expression of this diversity is our strength and the basis of our unity", stated the social movements in their final declaration.

Porto Alegre II showed that "another world is possible" and, as the Rio Grande do Sul Governor, Olivio Dutra, put it, "urgent and necessary" as well. The Social Forum represents today a

project for an alternative civilization to that of globalised barbarism. It is a political movement and a space that is under construction - a space for ideas, for mobilization, for organizing the struggle - that is radically democratic and rebellious. It would be quite wrong to reduce it to a media event counter-posed to that of the World Economic Forum of the rich and powerful (which had the wind taken out of its sail this year by the collapse of Argentina and Enron).

## Space

The World Social Forum is also a space for education and participation, where it is possible to learn about and take part in the struggles of others, experience the cultural protests and affirmations of identity of the exploited and oppressed from across the globe.

This second edition showed that this process of collective reflection has clearly matured. Some of these ideas need to be at the heart of the strategy for the globalisation of humanity and solidarity that we are trying to construct. They include:

- the preservation of certain inalienable aspects of humanity which cannot be allowed to fall prey to the domination of the market (health, education, water, culture, non-renewable resources, etc);
- the cancellation of Third World debts, along with the regulation of financial markets and controls over international capital movements, including taxes levied on these going into public funds aimed at tackling the most dramatic social problems facing humanity, like hunger and absolute poverty;
- the promotion of genuine processes of participatory democracy like the successful Participatory Budget in Porto Alegre.

The II WSF set out to develop alternatives of peace and social justice to the unacceptable logic of imperialist war and neo-liberal exclusion which afflicts so much of humanity. As the Vice-Governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Miguel Rosetto, put it, the war and terror that characterize the US attempt to dominate the world "have no place in the ethical and civilizing dreams of humanity, which draw their strength from life, not from death and destruction". Or as the US linguist and activist Noam Chomsky pointed out: "Either we have a world without wars, or we simply won't have a world at all".

## Internationalism

The II World Social Forum in Porto Alegre is the bearer of a genuine project of globalised solidarity and democracy, because it has revived the historic notion of internationalism - uniting and drawing together peoples and nations at the same time as it points towards generous alternatives to the neo-liberal vision of the world. Whilst the World Public Assembly of the Participatory Budget was voting to redirect the world's military spending towards firstly eliminating hunger, then eradicating illiteracy and child labour, the US government was adding US\$36 billion onto its military budget for the current year. In the same way, the II WSF stood up against the recolonisation of the American continent through the introduction of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) - it launched a call for a continent-wide people's referendum on the issue later this year. And the through the Tribunal on Debt, it proposed cancelling the illegal and illegitimate debts of third world countries.

Porto Alegre II consolidated the anti neo-liberal content of the movement, and the hegemony of the militant, radical wing within it. The political expression of this is the Call of the Social Movements. The attempts by European social-democratic parties to co-opt the movement were not successful - the autonomy and combativity of the World Social Forum is growing stronger and stronger. In the words of Immanuel Wallerstein, this second edition showed that the elaboration and organisation of a general alternative programme to that of Davos and the Washington Consensus is a process that is well underway.

The II WSF opened with a march 'Against War and for Peace; Another World is Possible'. It ended with another march, 'Against the FTAA'. Both were more than 50,000 strong. Porto Alegre thus refuted, in practice, those neo-liberal ideologues who had

predicted that the movement opposed to capitalist globalisation would be weakened in the wake of September 11. The World Social Forum has won recognition as the annual event at which the global movement can meet, discuss, learn from each other's experiences, win support for its multiple struggles and agree a common set of mobilizations against its enemies. The international spread of the Forum was assured with the agreement to hold various regional and continental forums (Italy, Ecuador, India) in the run-up to the next World Forum in Porto Alegre at the beginning of 2003.

## Fundamental contribution

Finally, Porto Alegre made a fundamental contribution to developing processes of convergence. It established a common calendar of mobilizations for the next two years, providing the many struggles with a shared horizon and pushing forward the international linkage between social movements. It achieved qualitative leaps, politically and organizationally, in the campaigns against the FTAA, the WTO and GM products, and for the cancellation of dependent countries' debts and the taxation of international financial transactions. It also lent a new dynamic to the coming together of different sectors of struggle, not only youth and labour, but also the black movement, the women's movement, indigenous peoples and the movement for free choice of sexual orientation. All these came to the Forum and developed their own initiatives, with full recognition and full participation.

The Forum was also a great political victory for the democratic and popular local governments of Rio Grande do Sul state and Porto Alegre city. Both are led by the Workers' Party (PT), which has a real chance of achieving victory in next October's presidential elections for its candidate Lula and a programme of change for Brazil.

# From event to movement

15 April 2002, by **Salvatore Cannavò**



But the numbers indicate only the most visible part of the phenomenon. The forum is in reality a demonstration of the rootedness of the movement, of its being an active part of the world scene and of its capacity to influence events. The most incontrovertible proof of this is a comparison with the World Economic Forum held in New York at the same time: if in 2001 the two events enjoyed similar coverage, in 2002 there was no comparison. The event at Porto Alegre catalyses the hopes of the many and the fears of the few, constituting a true symbolic victory. In times of the paroxysm of symbology, this is no small thing.

But the forum represents above all the end of a nightmare, that of war. If after the attacks of September 11 the movement has been submitted to formidable pressure, with the attempt to portray it as equivalent to Islamic terror, Porto Alegre has drawn a line under that process.

THE movement has shown itself to be clearly against the war, despite the fears even of the organizers themselves. No one can believe that, just a few months after September 11, more than 50,000 people were ready to participate in this kind of demonstration, were ready to flock to listen to Noam Chomsky, according to whom "the true terrorists are the United States", to adopt an appeal of social movements in which the rejection of war and neo-liberalism are central.

None of this was inevitable. The type of forum that came into being at Porto Alegre might have involved a risk, an incentive to dispersion and fragmentation. And it is here that we find the second positive element: the Forum was not only the site at which

scattered subjectivities or individuals came together, but a unitary place that allowed relationships between networks of movements that have consolidated themselves over a full year, rich in experience of action, and therefore the repositories of plans and a global vision much greater than that expressed at the first Forum. There has been a visible change of gear in the action of the main international networks which underpin the Forum and the international tenor of the movement like Via Campesina - an international association of peasants with about 60 million affiliates - and Attac.

The youth camp also functioned as a network, impelled by a very intense programme of debate and discussion, and shot through by a project defined as 'intergalactic', a first attempt to bring about a network of radical youth experiences, capable of representing within the movement not only the specific condition of youth, but also the form in which a new generation is participating in the global confrontation, in ways and according to dynamics that vary from country to country and from continent to continent, but animated by a shared passion, anger and need.

## The final document

The forum of the social movements was one of the many within the world forum, by nature an open and composite space that is not organized vertically, but is a horizontal concatenation of thematic places - seminars, workshops - each of which is accountable only to itself and not to a predetermined programme. In reality the organisational structure of the Brazilian committee, made up of eight associations and the International council of around 60-70 members, defined a large part of the

invitations and the sequence of the central conferences, those of the morning, which were generally the most relevant and well attended. This year, moreover, certain political exclusions were also defined, like the Colombian FARC, not welcome at the Forum as they are expressions of armed struggle, while on the other hand nothing was said about those parliamentarians who after September 11 had voted in favour of the war against Afghanistan.

These social movements were the only organs to define their own final document. In the debate around the drafting of this document, which lasted four afternoons, some points of synthesis can be discerned.

The first refers to the war. All the subjects of the international movement had no hesitation in condemning it, understanding the intrinsic link with neo-liberal politics, defining it as 'another face of neo-liberalism, a face which is brutal and unacceptable'. On this point the discussion was very rapid and simple, signalling an advanced understanding within the most militant sectors of the movement. This does not automatically imply that the negative effects of the war on the development of mobilizations would suddenly cease: at the level of the masses and broad public opinion, the knot has still not been completely untied, but the determination of the movement to proceed with its own activities incorporating within them intransigent opposition to the war offers a guarantee of stability.

Second, the movements insisted on the importance of opening a second overall phase, emerging from the rhythms of the anti-summit demonstrations towards building campaigns, unifying initiatives and shared projects. This aspiration is still however only sketchy: in the final document, reference was made only to

already familiar themes such as the Tobin tax, cancellation of the debt, environmental and food sustainability and participatory democracy. This is no small thing but in the discussion we faced for the first time the need to get to grips also with the 'national variables' of neo-liberal policies.

Here we refer mainly to Argentina effect which has demonstrated the close link which exists between the dynamic of global policies laid down by the international institutions like the IMF or WTO, that of the national policies pursued in this case by De La Rúa, Cavallo or Duhalde and that between other states; in the Argentine case, the role not only of the USA but also Spain, the second biggest external investor in Argentina.

From this understanding emerge questions relative to privatisation, defence of wages, public services and the welfare state. Above all concern and attention becomes stronger in relation to processes of regional integration like the FTAA or European unification. In effect these are the links that connect the power of the international bodies and therefore the dynamic of internationalisation of capital with its 'national interests', the use of states and governments as instruments of accumulation and as necessary organizers of repression and class domination, but at the same time the spasmodic attempt to establish supranational alliances which allow control on the political and institutional level of the effective dynamics of capitalist expansion. It is therefore no coincidence that the WSF decided to 'root itself' and enlarge itself through the organization of multiple continental or regional forums.

The forum of the Americas, at Quito in Ecuador, and that of Europe, in Italy have already been established; nor is it by chance that the main mobilisations of the next 2 years will relate to the FTAA summit in Buenos Aires and the EU summits in Seville, Copenhagen and Athens. The European Forum in particular may be the occasion to outline another idea of Europe, to realize a more stable alliance between the social movements of the old continent and therefore an expansion of the

movement. But it also represents the opportunity for a relationship with the forces of organized trades unionism with the 'old workers' movement' so to speak, and to confront the role of traditional reformism which is attempting to insert itself in various forms in the new global movement. This is probably the most significant experience the movement will have in 2002, which may determine a further step forward: from itinerant movement to organized movement.

## **Crisis and rebirth of politics**

The insertion of traditional reformism within the movement has been at one and the same time clumsy and determined. Many reformist socialist and frequently also liberal parliamentarians have sent signals of openness to the movement, hypocritically ignoring their most recent role on the war or the application of neo-liberal measures. In some cases, however, this availability has involved an element of self criticism - albeit never explicit - or has been accompanied by a new political positioning that chooses the terrain of the movement as that most suited for presenting oneself as an alternative to the free market forces and in any case as an occasion for rejuvenation.

Certainly there is no doubt that the reformist presence in the movement is a lasting and not occasional or episodic fact. And this brings with it a different kind of relationship with the traditional political forms, those of parties and institutional representation. The movement is undoubtedly gaining in political and symbolic authority, legitimating itself in ways unthought of until a few months ago - one thinks of the difference between Genoa and Porto Alegre - realizing the conditions of its enlargement. At the same time it becomes a possible target for a political raid and could run the risk of splitting.

This new insertion, however, relates to a more general contradiction, the crisis of the traditional political form - institutional representation in the first place and the party understood as

something separate from the movement - which materialized in the development of the parliamentary forum. This was a real and genuine failure, presenting itself as a 'foreign body' in an environment capable of valorising any difference. The parliamentary forum was the only area of real contestation - in reality directed against the parliamentarians who in one way or another supported the war. There is a crisis of the bogged down politics of institutional mediation, of representation by the party or the trade union.

There is instead the rebirth of the politics of participation, of inclusion, of respect of pluralism and enrolled in a precise will for radical change, for determined struggle and, above all, of aspiration to a society which is more just, free and equal. At Porto Alegre the word 'socialism' resounded with some emphasis, in the youth camp as in the peasants camp, in the themed conferences of the Pontifical University where people queued up to listen to dissertations on the theme by Frei Betto and Michael Lowy - and in the meetings of the Women's March.

## **The new left**

So a new politics is born, capable of resolving itself from the ruins and from the defeat. Its favoured watchword is 'participation', its space of action is the forum, its coordinates are opposition to the war and to neo-liberalism. It is a politics which, in rejecting the dominant system, and in the tendency, perhaps idealistic, to accept the division of the world into 'us' (the movements, the good, the future) and 'them' (the powerful, the bad, the past) tends to valorise the theme of 'counterpower', though according to different versions: The moderate one which proposes to influence existing power; and the more radical one which does not want to compromise in any way with existing power.

It is however the sign of a turning point, we don't yet know how great, but which cannot any longer be thought of as an episodic contingency but rather as a rhythm of historical magnitude. This new politics constitutes the precondition also of a



new left: it is not enough to renew talk of socialism, but it is necessary to understand it in the light of a historic failure and in relation to the new needs expressed by a multiplicity of antagonistic subjectivities.

This new left was not yet expressed at Porto Alegre, nor will it express itself in the very near future, not least because it will not be the fruit of political alchemies or of forcing by the vanguard, but rather a process of

social and political remixing in which all the residual forms of the twentieth century will be up for play.

A process that will not be simple, but is unavoidable. In any case, an interesting gamble.

## Unanswered questions

15 April 2002, by **Fermin Gonzales**

### A Polemic with Social Democracy

ONE item on the WSF schedule was a workshop on the relation between social and political matters entitled "Another Means of Conducting Politics Is Possible". The session was called by the Working Group coordinating body for the Sao Paulo Forum, an organization that brings together the leading parties of the broad left throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Some 1,000 delegates attended as individuals or representatives of political and social organizations.

The keynote speaker was the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) representative for international relations and Executive Secretary of the Working Group, Aloisio Mercadante, who offered his view of the Sao Paulo Forum and the proposal of the PT's majority current for sponsoring a global meeting of parties and heads of state outside the neo-liberal camp to take place in conjunction with the III WSF.

This idea emerged out of joint work among members of Latin American parties affiliated to the Socialist International that view themselves as a local incarnation of the Social Europe, a group of left currents within European social-democratic parties looking to offer an alternative to the Third Way policies that the current led by Tony Blair puts forward as a sort of neo-liberalism with a human face. We should note that social democrats across the board, including those of

the Social Republic grouping, have voted in support of all of the military and anti-popular initiatives demanded by US imperialism and leading multi-lateral bodies.

The proposal for a meeting of parties evolved out of World Parliamentary Forum that met during WSF II in an event in which French and other European parliamentarians identified with the Social Republic came under heated criticism from leftwing European communists, especially the massive Italian delegation, and other legislators from around the world for having voted in the European Parliament in favour of the war against Afghanistan. While the meeting led to a statement on the vote on Afghanistan, it was clear the debate was only beginning.

### Reviving the Role of Parties and Other Political Organizations

On behalf of the Working Group, the delegate from *Presentes por el Socialismo* of Colombia explained the evolution of the Sao Paulo Forum and is many efforts to bring together social movements from the vantage point of political parties. The emphasis manifest in this presentation helped to explain the outlook of the revolutionary left current within the Sao Paulo Forum, extending from the old Communist parties to a wide array of revolutionary left organizations

with quite varied origins and forms of struggle.

In the face of the anti-party and centrist positions active within the WSF, and the debates and tensions that preceded this event, its was of fundamental importance to begin by defending the strategic role of political parties and organizations while recognizing criticisms of specific aspects of their practices especially in relation to social movements. The aforementioned presentation and the interventions of those participating in the discussion reflected two poles of thought: those who from a social and political standpoint sought to reaffirm the necessary, revolutionary role of parties - a position that within the bureaucracies of the WSF is rejected or reduced to its most institutionalised expressions including positions of elected office within the capitalist state - as well as those who also from social and political vantage points seek to convert the WSF into a sort of United Nations or as the caboose of their own "realistic" politics.

We believe it is essential to recall the ideological debate that began eleven and a half years ago at the first Sao Paulo Forum affirming its anti-imperialist and anti-neo-liberal character, something that has yet to be achieved among such broad and diverse forces in any other corner of the globe, and a position so far removed from the thinking of the European Social Republic. While ideas tend to gain strength in the Forum when they are put forward by the most representative national parties such as the Cuban CP, the Brazil PT,

or the Frente Amplio of Uruguay, political consensus emerges out of plenary sessions in which no organization, regardless of how large or small, or its methods of struggle, is excluded from the discussion or decision making, an idea that is very far from being embraced by the European Social Democrats.

It is important to note that the debate that took place years ago in the Sao Paulo Forum on the validity or lack thereof of varied forms of struggle has begun to emerge in the WSF. The debate that has emerged over the exclusion of armed organizations should be conducted not with a focus on the insurgent organizations that are clearly active on the level of political organizations but rather from the framework of social organizations that are being forced by the aggression of the system to take up forms of armed self defence when their right to mobilize as an expression of popular power is being denied in many countries such as the Philippines, Palestine, Bolivia, Ecuador and even in Argentina with the flying pickets of the unemployed.

This is a question that this WSF failed to take up thanks to the big international NGOs that want to sustain a WSF in which social issues are segregated from class, much less

revolutionary, economic and political concerns.

## Future Challenges

While this was just one of many seminars held in the context of the WSF, the debate that began there will mark the future of the WSF. The distinct ideological viewpoints were much more clearly expressed this time within the forum alongside a heavy dose of centrism and efforts to avoid debate.

There were significant contributions from participating social organizations, academicians, intellectuals and leaders of popular struggles. Four parallel workshops took place with the most combative and consistent those of the campesinos of the Movimiento Sin Tierra and Via Campesina that tend to be increasingly displaced within the WSF: that of the 15,000 young people who pitched our tents and engaged in thoroughgoing and combative debates and exchanges of experiences especially focusing on Argentina; that of the NGOs and social organizations which took up the questions of difference and that of the intellectuals and political militants who tried to concretise the current debates taking

place around the world.

There appears to be a growing trend within the WSF that seeks to prioritise an idealized sense of harmony as opposed to a clash of ideas, pressures toward mediation and harmonization versus mobilization; a tendency in which the ingenuousness of a newborn movement combines with the ancestral malice of those who seek to condemn it to a political purgatory beyond the scope of class struggle and conflict.

The debate is still pending on the world meeting of parties and the proposal that heads of state attend so as to put their stamp of approval on the WSF's demands.

While such hypocritical gestures may be seen as the tribute that vice pays to virtue, as compañero Livio Maitan, a leader of the Fourth International and Rifondazione Comunista, pointed out at the time, it would be equally naive to fail to recognize that behind the praise of vice stands the threat of corrupting virtue.

The fight goes on to stay the hand of repression against movements opposing globalisation and popular struggles, a fight that more than ever is linked to avoiding their co-option and institutionalisation.

## A triple triumph

**15 April 2002, by Livio Maitan**

Those who, following September 11, had anticipated, if not a swift disappearance, a slowing down or decline of the movement, have had to admit that their hopes or fears were unjustified. That fact is made even clearer by the contrast with the Davos-New York World Economic Forum, which met at almost the same time in an atmosphere of gloom. The Financial Times (February 5) concluded that 'unless he [WEF founder Klaus Schwab] can rework his formula, the world may no longer be listening.'

The broad and many-faceted nature of the lectures, debates, demonstrations and meetings over these unforgettable days, meant that even the most active participants, those most ready to go without sleep, found it hard to get an overall view. Even more so inasmuch as the Forum was marked by a 'coexistence' of three components: the social movements, youth and assemblies of parliamentarians.

Nobody could forget that the social movements have played the central role in the genesis and growth of the

global justice movement and remain its spinal column. By their composition and participation in sectoral struggles at many levels, by their more direct confrontation with the realities of the world today, they represent tendentially the most radical component, if one can put it thus, of the Porto Alegre left. It is not by chance that in both 2001 and 2002 they adopted the most rigorous and advanced declarations.

Of course, youth have been involved in these movements from the beginning.

However, it seems justified to consider them as a relatively autonomous component on this occasion, from the very fact of the unprecedented breadth of their participation and the presence of a great number of youth who were here for the first time.

The uninterrupted debates which took place on many subjects - from discussions on youth radicalisation at key moments of the 20th century to the Argentine events - reveals a thirst to learn and an encouraging tendency to involvement in the struggles which lie before us.

It was predictable that problems would be posed in the Parliamentary Forum. Indeed, this was the favoured framework for the efforts of some traditional political currents, above all the social democrats, to insert themselves in the Porto Alegre movement. These neophytes, often veterans of inglorious past battles, did not show a great deal of self-restraint, some involving themselves in manoeuvres inside the PT, [1] others indulging in veritable blackmail by exploiting the unitary will prevalent at Porto Alegre.

As shown by the other articles in this issue, there were confrontations, above all on the question of the war in Afghanistan. It was hard to draw up

common declarations with parliamentary representatives of parties that had supported the Gulf and Balkan wars as well as the one underway in Afghanistan. Finally, two parallel motions were adopted. One, fairly general in character, was adopted unanimously. The other, which did not contain an explicit condemnation of the war, was opposed by the PRC parliamentarians present and the LCR's MEPs. In this forum, moreover, despite numerous interventions from different parties or movements, several representatives of the Latin American CPs, four members of the French PS and a German social democrat, the war in Afghanistan had not been condemned nor even mentioned before the intervention of two representatives of the PRC. [2]

It is probable that the problem of the relationship with the social democratic currents will be posed anew at other meetings and at the 2003 Forum; this is still more the case with those parties which, after electoral defeats, will no longer be in government and will feel the need to get a little fresh air in their lungs. Reactions of pure and simple rejection, although understandable given the heavy responsibilities of the social democrats and others, would be wrong.

In fact, nobody suggested such a course of action at Porto Alegre: we do not fear debate with anybody but all the same, there are limits to the area of eventual integration. We cannot consider those who do not oppose neo-liberalism and war as an integral part of the movement, but punctual convergences may be possible on a case-by-case basis.

It is still more important that any sectarian reflex is avoided in relations with the trade union organizations. Whatever the current relationship of forces and whatever the current orientations of the unions, the problem of the relationship between new movements and the traditional workers' and popular movements remains significant. The Italian global justice movement has in general understood this well, participating actively in the strikes and demonstrations launched by the unions.

Nobody can say now in what international or indeed Brazilian context the 2003 Forum will take place. Whatever happens, the huge demonstration on March 16, 2002 in Barcelona indicates that the movement continues to grow and will play a crucial role in the struggles of the coming years.

# The Fourth International at Porto Alegre

## 15 April 2002

During the Forum, the Brazilian comrades organized a presentation of the book *A estrela necessaria* by Raul Ponte, former mayor of Porto Alegre and main representative of the Socialist Democracy current in the PT.

A gathering of 600-700 people was addressed by Daniel Ben Said,

Michael Loewy, Miguel Rossetto, Lucio Costa (from the DS in Porto Alegre) and Livio Maitan.

After the closure of the Forum a second meeting took place with a similar attendance, with the aim of drawing a preliminary balance sheet

and developing lines of orientation and activity designed to enlarge and strengthen the Forum.

Christophe Aguiton, Hugo Blanco, Chico Vicente (secretary of the PT in Rio Grande do Sul), Flavia D'Angeli, Daniel Ben Said and Livio Maitan spoke.

# Dossier: Introduction

15 April 2002

- In "[Drive to war accelerates](#)" Salah Jaber looks at the threat to Iraq;

- In "[Palestine terrorised](#)" Phil Hearse examines the war against the Palestinians;

- In "[America's global gamble](#)" Peter Gowan explains the background to US policy choices;

- In "[Fighting military globalisation](#)" and "[The Mindanao People's Peace movement](#)" Harry Tubongbanwa and

Eva Oler Ferraren analyze the role of the Philippines in the 'war on terror';

- and we reproduce two statements by the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International on the [Philippines](#) and [Colombia](#).

## Drive to war accelerates

15 April 2002, by [Salah Jaber](#)

It emerged, in a leaked classified Pentagon report called the Nuclear Posture Review, that Bush has a list of countries against which the US is prepared to launch a nuclear first strike. The list includes not only Iraq but North Korea, Iran, Libya, China - and even Russia, despite President Putin's repositioning towards NATO. The report also includes the use of nuclear weapons in the event of an Arab-Israeli conflict.

Included in the circumstances under which nuclear weapons could be used against the countries concerned are the possibility of "targets able to withstand a non-nuclear strike", and "surprising military developments". Alongside this the report revealed that the US is developing a new generation of so-called battlefield nuclear devices designed for particular situations.

Before September 11 these chilling revelations might have been dismissed as the ravings of a right-wing lunatic fringe. Nuclear weapons, sold for the last 50 years as a supposed deterrent, are being rehabilitated as a legitimate means of warfare, even against states which do not have such weapons.

The US Republican right is now calling the shots for the world's only super-power, and it is clear that they

are prepared to contemplate the use of nuclear weapons - at least against Iraq.

At the same time political preparation for an attack on Iraq is going ahead apace. It seems that there is nothing Iraq can do which would divert the Bush administration from attacking it.

If Iraq agrees in principle to let so-called weapons inspectors in the US will demand a regime so stringent - access to anything and everything at a moment's notice - that it will be impossible for the Iraqis to accept. Rumsfeld has said "we do not intend to take yes for an answer".

The coalition pieced together for the assault on Afghanistan will of course be adapted for a war against Iraq: Dick Cheney's current shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East is designed to neutralise or contain any hostile reaction to a new US onslaught against Baghdad.

Bush calls the preparation for war against Iraq 'stage two' of his "war against terrorism". But stage one is still expanding rapidly, and the world is changing by the day. Military action continues in Afghanistan in the guise of so-called "mopping up" operations.

Simultaneously the Palestinians are facing all out war from Israel, with the direct support and protection of the USA. This has escalated consistently since September 11 and continues to do so.

In the USA Bush is increasing defence spending by 14%, or \$48 billion dollars. This war drive goes hand-in-hand with a huge increase in anti-democratic measures and paranoid surveillance in the US itself. Thousands of immigrants have been rounded up and several hundred are still kept in jail, often in undisclosed locations.

US troops are already intervening in the Philippines and Colombia as well as Somalia and the Yemen, and civil rights are under attack across the world.

In Britain the Crime and Security Act has introduced internment without trial in contravention to the European convention on human rights. A number of people, all of Arab origin, have been detained without trial or any apparent evidence of wrong-doing under this draconian legislation, and kept under top security conditions. Measures of this kind are adopted by major European states, and new legislations - at the level of the



European Union as well as at the level of its individual member states - have been furnished that can and will be used against the movement fighting neo-liberal globalisation.

India, too, has responded, using its own "Terrorist" problem in Kashmir as the pretext for an internal crackdown with new draconian anti-terrorist laws, while the Pakistani military dictatorship started a crackdown against the very Islamic fundamentalists which it nurtured for so long - a crackdown which does not spare left-wing parties and unions.

As a result of all this US imperialism is stronger and more aggressive than ever before in military and political terms, having gained a new hegemony in Central Asia and greater influence over Russia and China.

The danger of an open-ended war, in which the most barbaric weapons of mass destruction are used by the world's dominant imperialist nation in pursuit of a fraudulent war against "terrorism" has never been greater.

Anyone concerned about the future of the planet should react with anger and horror at the US plans to bombard defenceless, dependent nations with nuclear radiation. Anyone committed to defending the rights of the oppressed should be joining the protests at the brutality of the Israeli forces, wielding the full force of a terrorist state to crush any aspiration of the Palestinians for an independent state on a tiny part of their historical homeland.

A new US war on Iraq aimed at ousting Saddam Hussein and replacing his dictatorship with a

regime more amenable to Washington will escalate the slaughter of innocents that has followed September 11.

Already far more Afghan civilians have died in US bombings than the death toll in the Twin Towers and Washington on that day. But a war against Iraq brings the risk of a far larger death toll, even without the threat of a US nuclear strike. In the meantime, the US-imposed embargo against Iraq is continuing to bring its huge death toll among Iraqi civilians and children: 90,000 each year, the majority of whom are under 5 years old, according to UN agencies.

The US-Nato criminal world hegemony and new war drive must be opposed by anyone committed to notions of democracy and to the interests of humankind.

## Palestine terrorised

15 April 2002, by **Phil Hearse**



The news from these towns is terrible. Dozens of people have been killed, hundreds wounded and over 1,000 taken prisoner. The whereabouts of many is unknown. Corpses lie rotting in the street, food and water is running out and ambulances are routinely prevented from attending the wounded.

Israel's new blitzkrieg against the Palestinians follows the remorseless logic of reactionary occupying armies - an attempt to definitively smash the armed resistance, and to cow and terrorise a whole people by random killings of civilians, mass arrests and torture, house to house searches, the wanton destruction of property, the imposition of curfews and the humiliation of the Palestinian leadership.

George Bush's claim that the

Palestinians have brought this upon themselves is absurd. This is the typical hypocrisy of imperialism - blaming the victims for the violence of the oppressor. What the Palestinians have done - the Palestinian masses and not Yasser Arafat - is to stand up and refuse to live on their knees, to stand up and to indeed say 'enough is enough', to say that they refuse to live as a permanently occupied and humiliated people. That is the meaning of the second Intifada.

Bush and Sharon claim the Israeli invasion has been caused by the Palestinian suicide bombings. Anyone taken in by that confuses cause and effect; the suicide bombings have been an attempt - a desperate attempt - to retaliate against the wave of assassinations of Palestinian militants, and the daily brutalisation of the Palestinian people from tanks, helicopter gunships and F-16 fighter bombers. If there had been not a single suicide bombing, the Palestinian people would still be

brutalised.

What is unfolding in Palestine is the gradual implementation of the programme of the most reactionary wing of Zionism, the reconquest of the whole of 'Judea and Samaria'. Ariel Sharon has torn up the 1992 Oslo peace agreement, which itself was an act of pathetic submission by Arafat, an agreement to live in a caricature of a Bantustan under total Israeli supervision and control, which lacked the most elementary features of a real Palestinian state.

Suicide bombings which target civilians are not the method of mass mobilisation which socialists advocate. They damage the international image of the Palestinian struggle, and they make it more difficult for the growing opposition inside Israel itself. But they have to be seen for what they are - a desperate measure by desperate people. To put an equals sign between the suicide bombings and the actions of the Zionist army is to fail to make

an elementary distinction, that between the systematic daily violence of the oppressor and the desperate violence of the oppressed.

Until the start of the suicide bombings the most elementary fact of the Intifada, rarely mentioned in the Western media, was that this was a resistance struggle against occupation, carried out entirely within the so-called 'Palestinian territories', allegedly under the administration of the Palestinian Authority. Ever since the election of Sharon, the butcher of the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps in 1982, it has been on the cards that the Palestinian Authority would be destroyed and the 'Palestinian' areas reoccupied. Even before his election, right from the signing of the 1992 Oslo agreement, the relentless programme of settlement building on the West Bank and Gaza - and the destruction of Palestinian homes and the seizure of Palestinian land to make way for it - continued.

The green light for the destruction of the Palestinian Authority and wholesale reconquest of the West Bank and Gaza was given by the start of the US 'war on terrorism'. Confusion on this issue was created immediately after September 11, when Bush and Blair hypocritically talked up the need for a Palestinian state. In the days before the attack on Afghanistan, the US stayed Sharon's hand, preventing an all-out attack until the alliance against the Taliban had been created. Once the destruction of the Taliban had been carried out, such posturing was

dispensed with. The US has coordinated with the Israeli government every step of the way, and Sharon has been given the US go-ahead to destroy every armed and political organisation of the Palestinian people, something symbolised by the assassination of the general secretary of the PLFP and the murder of numerous top leaders of Fatah and Hamas.

Targeting Arafat is of course designed to symbolically humiliate the Palestinians. But Arafat's leadership has in fact been disastrous. He led them into the Oslo agreement trap and commanded a hopelessly corrupt and authoritarian Palestinian Authority, which did little for the Palestinian masses.

The Intifada was not of Arafat's choosing, it was imposed on him by the Palestinian masses. Moreover, the performance of the PLO leadership handed mass support to the Islamic Hamas movement on a plate. Hamas, with its extensive welfare and food programme, was seen by hundreds of thousands of Palestinians as the only force actually doing something for the people - and the only force resisting. Fatah was dragged into the resistance by the sheer necessity of self-defence, and by the need not to be totally outflanked by Hamas.

Little by little it has dawned on increasing numbers of Israelis that whatever blows are delivered to the Palestinians, the present Sharon policy means only permanent violence and conflict, that Israel cannot be secure if it is permanently at war. The

emergence of the 'refuseniks', the hundreds of reservists who have refused to go to the occupied territories, and the attempt by peace activists to take food the beleaguered population of Ramallah, are encouraging signs.

Equally, the international peace demonstration, fired on by Israeli troops, was an encouraging initiative, dealing a propaganda blow against the Israelis.

But the Palestinians need much more in terms of international solidarity. For the moment they are terribly isolated. The reactionary bourgeois nationalist and semi-feudal Arab leaders will not lift a finger to deliver real aid to the Palestinians, even turning down the very modest Iraqi proposal for a one-month oil embargo. The European Union has done precious little except express its 'concern'.

Only a mass movement of solidarity around the world can bring direct aid to the Palestinians. Here there are encouraging signs already, with huge sections of the global justice and peace movements being won to the cause of Palestine, something visibly shown by the November 30 London anti-war demonstration, which was also a massive display of support for the Palestinians. Without such a movement, there is a real danger that eventually the full programme of the Zionist right and of the settlers will be implemented - meaning the total expulsion of the Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza.

## America's global gamble

15 April 2002, by **Peter Gowan**

*HOW should we understand the US aims in the 'war on terrorism'?*



The declared aims of course are to defeat 'terrorists' and to overthrow the regimes of 'rogue states'. Out of the four terrorist movements and three rogue states mentioned by Bush in his State of the Union speech, two of the states and three of the

movements are Middle Eastern supporters of the Palestinian struggle and enemies of the United States and Israel. This regional concentration of US targets reflects the fact that the US is in very serious political difficulties in the Middle East and is

attempting to use the domestic and international mobilization in the wake of September 11 as a political base for a coercive drive against Iraq as the key to resolving its vulnerabilities in the region.

But beyond these tactical goals the US is attempting, as Colin Powell put it four days after September 11, to use the attack 'as an opportunity to reshape relations throughout the world' - in other words for US global programmatic goals. This 'reshaping' involves a drive to anchor US 'unipolarity', taking advantage of its overwhelming military power for this political goal. The first Bush administration and the Clinton administrations were equally dedicated to this goal. But September 11 gave the US new possibilities for moving forward towards achieving it.

The discourse of the 'Campaign against Terrorism' (CAT) actually expresses and justifies a unipolar globe. It says any state or movement considered by the US to be 'evil' must be disarmed (have its weapons of mass destruction removed) and must have its regime changed. States which wish to avoid this fate must ally with the US - no more neutrality in world politics - and states allying with the US are entering a US protectorate: providing facilities for the extension of US reach across the globe.

All of this is included in the CAT. Put another way, the Bush administration is trying to process its drive for world dominance through the CAT. And the CAT is valuable for this precisely because it justifies the drive at a popular level within the USA and partly within the whole OECD: people need US dominance because of the terror threat. Whether the CAT will work in this way is another matter: the drive to 'end' Iraq, as Paul Wolfowitz, the key intellectual in the Bush team put it, while keeping the lid on elsewhere will be a decisive test.

And even then, the capacity of the US to anchor its unipolar dominance politically will be far from assured. It faces strategic political (though not military) challenges to its global ambitions right across Eurasia from Western Europe through to China. The world is very much still in transition

between world orders: nothing has been settled 10 years after the Soviet Bloc collapse.

One way of noticing the current interregnum is by looking at the rival world order concepts. The US concept since the Gulf War of 1991 has been of a globe with an American 'sovereign', in the sense of 'sovereign' used by the German political and legal theorist Carl Schmitt. Schmitt says those are sovereign who can a) determine who is a friend and who is an enemy b) declare a state of emergency c) change the rules of the game, that is arbitrarily change the laws. This is what the US has been trying to impose on the globe since 1991: it alone can tell us who the enemies of the world are - Saddam Hussein, Milosevic, the Taliban government, Iran and so on. It alone can tell us what is a global emergency and what is not and thus when the global norms do not apply because the situation is not normal; and it can lay down the rules which others must follow without being bound by those rules itself.

Against this US conception, there are two other main ideas about how world capitalism should be managed. The Europeans put forward the world order concept of 'multilateralism', the rule of the 'international community', which means that there should be joint leadership around the G7 leading industrial nations and behind that the OECD. This conception, counter-posed to what they see as American 'unilateralism', does in turn mean undermining the sovereignty of nations. It means the G7's right to intervene if it doesn't like what a particular state is doing - as with Zimbabwe today.

The problem for the Europeans is that the Americans see this as a competitive strategy to their own, in fact the main competitor. They see the Europeans as trying to set the rules for the Americans or to bind the US to its own past rules. The US should be in some way subordinate to the G7, thematised as 'the international community.' That's why Condolizeesa Rice, presidential security advisor, says, "there's no such thing as an international community".

There is a third conception, that of the

UN security council and UN Charter as the determiners of world order, and this has been put forward by the Chinese, the Russians (although Putin now seems to want to leave this Camp for the G7 camp), the French and Germans to a certain extent, and other powerful states like India as well as many other states. That conception of world order should not be discounted, because it not only enjoys support from states, and is also anchored in the consciousness of billions of people. I would say that in a certain way you can see the power and persistence of this concept in the capacity of the Palestinian Intifada.

*Surely it's obvious who won the Cold War - America won the Cold War. The question really is this; why does the United States have to resort to military power to establish its hegemony? Can't America establish its supremacy through its trans-national corporations, which in so many fields are dominant? For example, in the 1990s the US corporations clearly overtook all competitors in the field of computer technology and most microelectronics, which was not so clear before. Why does it need all these wars? In what way, for example, is permanent war in Palestine in US interests?*

The only thing you can say for certain is that capitalism won the Cold War. This was a huge ideological and political victory, and it's true that in the 1990s there has been a big effort by the major capitalist powers to consolidate that victory, by outlawing any future possible socialist challenge. It's also true that there has been a co-operative effort on the part of the Atlantic powers to move 'outwards', to establish their economic and political hegemony in areas of the world which were inaccessible to them during the Cold War. But the degree of co-operation among the major capitalist powers has been very limited and often little more than rhetorical. Inter-imperialist competition remains very strong, especially between the US and Europe.

But this competition between Europe and America has not been directly about economics: it has been about political forms and centres of political authority, in the first place in Europe

itself. With the collapse of the Soviet Bloc the West Europeans have been trying to build their own political centre throwing off the Cold War American protectorate in Europe and extending the influence of their own centre Eastwards. If this were to succeed it could ultimately involve a link up of a European political centre with a capitalist Russia.

That is potentially very threatening for the United States. And in East Asia, there is a similar political risk: of a rising and opening China becoming a regional political-economy centre for ASEAN, South Korea and possibly even Japan. If, then, Western and Eastern Eurasia adopted similar lines on a range of global political issues that would amount to a major challenge to US power. In short, the collapse of the Soviet Bloc had paradoxical and contradictory effects: it both made the USA the overwhelmingly dominant military power and it threatened to undermine the US cold war protectorate system over the capitalist core. It is this contradiction that is driving much of world politics and most of US external strategy today.

Of course, many see these political battles as being of minor significance. They think the big story is economics and 'globalisation'. And they view this as the emergence of a more or less unified and autonomous world market where trans-national corporations from all the core countries cooperate to make the rules and exploit the world. And they see states and their political rivalries as taking a back seat.

There is an element of truth in this picture as far as North-South relations are concerned. There is collaboration of the Europeans and the US in imposing exploitative arrangements on the South. But we must remember that in the pattern of global capitalism shaped by American power since 1945 the big centres of value creation and realization have been within the core, a core that has expanded in very important extents into the new 'emerging' capitalisms of East and South East Asia.

The battle for capitalist supremacy takes place within this core.

And here, the degree of acceptance of autonomous market rules for capitalist competition is actually both limited and fragile. Economic regimes are far more based upon political compromises and political pressures than the proponents of 'economic globalisation' believe. Since the 1980s, this politicisation of economics has been hidden by a common project in Europe and in the US: the trans-national neo-liberal drive by capital against labour. This makes it seem as though there is something like a trans-national ruling class united in more or less everything. But this is wrong: it is simply a unity in a common tactic which each national capitalist class pursues for removing the social rights, weakening the political power and increasing the exploitation of its own labour.

Each core state, seeking to strengthen its national capital, faces options: it can do so at the expense of domestic labour, at the expense of peripheral countries or at the expense of other core capitalisms. During the 1990s the easy options for the West European states have been the first two (taking full advantage of the weakness of East Central Europe in this context). But the capitalisms of Western Europe are seeking to give themselves other possibilities for the future. Working as a concert of capitalisms (the Eurozone) they are seeking to build a regional shield that will enable them later to resist US capitalism and even to make domestic concessions in the face of a future European labour challenge.

Now the key point is that the entire structure of American capitalism as it has developed during the Cold War actually depends upon a particular global political structure, which we can summarize as the maintenance of a US protectorate over the entire capitalist core. As I tried to argue in my book *The Global Gamble*, this political dominance over the core is what underpins the dominance of the dollar and creates the basis of the dollar-Wall-Street Regime governing international monetary and financial relations. This in turn gives US capitalism the ability to run enormous deficits with the rest of the world, fund its structure of military protectorates and use both military-

political and economic statecraft to shape global capital accumulation in US interests. To put it bluntly, this system has meant that if any other core capitalism was to develop a new more advanced range of capital goods to underpin a new wave of accumulation the US can step in and clean up. There is a tendency for Marxists to underplay this political side of international capitalism.

It is in this context that we can see how dangerous it would be for American capitalism if political regionalism developed in Western and Eastern Eurasia. This is not a dangerous economic trend today: Europe, for example, is very accommodating to US business at present. But it could be extremely dangerous tomorrow.

The seeming unity of the capitalist core in 'globalisation' reflects the common neo-liberal assault against labour, the new wave of expansion into the South and also the trend towards 'financialisation', which shouldn't be seen as the dominance of finance capital over industrial capital, but rather the transformation of all major corporations into financial actors, winning large portions of their profits through financial operations. But if you look at the geography of production and ownership you get a different picture: a very strong regionalisation of capital, with each major region - North America, Europe and East Asia - becoming more regionally oriented: 90 per cent of what is consumed within each part of the triad is produced there, and ownership patterns reflect the same thing.

In Europe this production regionalism is combined with strong political regionalism. And in East Asia there are political stirrings in the same direction, strengthened since the East Asian financial crisis and the predatory activity of the US in that crisis. This political trend in East Asia is much more fragile than in Europe (especially because of Chinese-Japanese rivalry over leadership of a trend they both want). US elites are trying to build their own pan-American region while simultaneously the US has been and must battle to reorganize its political-military



dominance over Western and Eastern Eurasia.

This is the strategic context in which we must situate the tactics of the Bush administration. And in this context, the strategic continuities of the Bush administration with the Clinton administration become much more obvious. Both have been committed to anchoring direct US global political dominance. The Clinton administration focused, in East Asia, on opening up political economies to US penetration without major military-political moves. Its military-political efforts were concentrated on Europe, using the wars in the Western Balkans to re-establish US military political dominance over pan-Europe, to make the US the gatekeeper between Russia and the EU and to try (without much success) to keep Western Europe fragmented in national hub-and-spokes relations with the US in the military-political field.

At the same time, the Clinton administration tried to legitimate these operations via an economicist and mechanical materialist ideology of 'globalisation' plus a liberal cosmopolitan ideology of global human rights and global governance/global rule of law, global civil society, etc. etc. The problem with that kind of politics was that it produced liberal cosmopolitan blow-back from the EU: the Kyoto regime, the International Criminal Court, a whole raft of legal regimes for arms control, a whole conception of world order based on collegiality and civilian power - perfect for European imperialism.

Bush came in determined to rip all that up. He got off to a rocky start. Despite strong US pressure, Japan signed up to Kyoto, the US was voted off the UN Human Rights Commission (with European support), the ICC moved forward, the EU even intervened against Bush on North Korea, the Europeans deepened links with Iran, continued to block US policy on Iraq along with Russia, started competing for Putin, attacked US policy on Palestine, pressed ahead with its so-called European Security and Defence Policy etc., etc.

But with September 11 and the CAT, Bush has got a new American show on

the road. It is about shifting the entire global political agenda onto the terrain where the US is king: the military terrain.

*I was struck by your use of the theories of Carl Schmitt. He was of course a notorious authoritarian rightist, the Nazis' main theorist of jurisprudence. We are seeing something really nasty emerging in the United States, the most reactionary mobilization since McCarthyism in the 1950s. Is liberal democracy under threat?*

The answer is that it depends on what you mean by liberal democracy. In fact, the left paradoxically tends to exaggerate the extent to which labour has been - as they say in the US - 'put back in its box', both in Europe and in the United States.

Look at the situation in Italy. The remarkable thing is that the attempts by Berlusconi to push through reactionary social and economic measures have taken so long and made such little headway - so far. And if you look at the Clinton administration, there was a real attempt to turn the United States in the direction of 'social imperialism', privileging domestic labour over foreign labour. Clinton didn't bow to this in practical policy, but he did in rhetoric. That was the meaning of Clinton's rhetoric about 'labour standards' - labour rights and environmental standards - through the WTO. It was offering to defend US industry and labour against China and South East Asia.

One of the most striking things about US politics in the 1990s was that the hard right, despite their enormous financial and other resources, were unable to effectively build a mass base for themselves. The big new fact in world politics since September 11 is the hope by the hard right and their big business supporters that they've managed to establish a mass base for themselves in the US. But they're not going to get that base by having a huge assault on labour rights. That doesn't preclude of course restrictions on democratic rights with negative effects on minority ethnic communities and dissident political groups. They are, of course,

obsessively hostile to the anti-capitalist globalisation movement and there are resources in American political culture for witch-hunt politics against the left, something that could be played in the event of another major strike like September 11.

*What are the main obstacles to American success in its new offensive?*

The first thing which has been obsessing the US foreign policy establishment is the situation in the Indian sub-continent, and the danger of an uncontrollable war between India and Pakistan. This is incredibly dangerous for the US. They have great difficulty stabilizing Pakistan, the kinds of measures that could help in that can destabilize the India-Pakistan relationship.

Second, the big test is Iraq. The US has boxed itself into overthrowing the regime. Can it do it without chaos or worse in the Middle East? If yes, this will be a big US global political victory, especially over the West Europeans. It will also lead to a changed US policy towards Saudi Arabia (the aim being to pull troops out). If no, the US could get into very serious trouble and the whole Bush strategy would come apart.

Third, we should add that the situation in Afghanistan remains risky for the US. It will pay a serious price if this presently fictitious Karzai government openly collapses. And it could also get dragged into a morass in its war activities there.

But the key test will be Iraq. Failure on that will kill the general CAT as a framework for processing US global strategy. The stakes are very high on this. I can't see how they can do it without some sort of prior deal on Israel-Palestine. And even then, the US will have to pay out a lot to a lot of regimes to make the operation possible.

For the West European states the Iraq confrontation is also a big test. Up to now their strategy has been one of subversive bandwagoning with the Americans. They roll with every US punch but then do things to try to increase their cohesion and autonomy from the US. This time the West

Europeans could split.

*Don't you think that there's an element of irrationality in sections of the US leadership? For example the declaration that the US is prepared to use nuclear weapons to kill Saddam Hussein. Or the idea that they might use their new military positions in central Asia to attack China at some point in the future?*

I think it's important we appreciate why these outbursts of barbaric militarism occur. Part of this is panic and deep anxieties. The first anxiety is that there will be another major terrorist attack on the United States; and the fear that if that happens there will be a current emerging in the United States which says "since September 11 you have done nothing whatever to defend American citizens, in fact you have made the situation worse".

The second anxiety is that before September 11, and subsequently, the United States has been in an extremely exposed position over its Middle East policy, and they are desperately worried about developments there. The way that they cope with this is all kinds of threats and bellicosity, much of it bluff.



You have to bear in mind that the Bush team comes directly from Reaganism; it is the Reaganite wing of the American political establishment. And it's noticeable that many of them are from a military background - for example, the two top people at the State department, Powell and Armitage, are from the military. The same is true of Cheney - a civilian expert on things military - and of Wolfowitz. (Clinton's geopoliticians were from the Brzezinski side of the Carter administration and they, of course, in many ways launched military-political Reaganism in 1978-9, so no big difference) These people are intoxicated by what they think is the political efficacy of military power. They really don't have much experience of coping with explosive mass politics. This is a weakness.

Secondly, their big experience was against the USSR. Now the USSR was extremely cautious militarily and politically. And it also, as a matter of fact, shared a great deal of what might be called political values and political culture with the West if viewed in comparative historical terms. That is not true of some of their present enemies. Thus, when Bush included North Korea in 'axis of evil' he was taking a real risk with Kim Jong Il who can be jumpy and adventurist militarily. The same is also true of some of the people in the Pakistani intelligence forces; anyone who delves a bit deeper into the Pearl assassination, in which the Pakistani intelligence people were almost certainly involved, can see that. And the problem with military power is that its calculable political efficacy is greatest when it is not actually used. But once it is used, it unleashes new dynamics of its own which are not only often unpredictable but also uncontrollable.

And thirdly, despite the big new fact of mass American support for external military action, the US still has very limited capacity to militarily operate on the ground, directly controlling populations. Its efforts to do so in Afghanistan on any scale have not been impressive. Proxy forces plus special operations teams remains the limit for sustained population control US action.

But in another way, US military-political power is still overwhelmingly an instrument for influencing other states. For directly controlling the world's population, the US relies on these other states to do the job. It can't risk going onto the ground and doing much 'state building' or 'nation building' itself. Blair, of course, presents Britain as the loyal servant in this field but this is fundamentally a bluff. As the French say, the British may be the first in but they are also the first out in places like Macedonia or Afghanistan. Can we envisage the Europeans eagerly state-building in Baghdad amidst the carnage of a war against Saddam? Or how about the Turks, 'liberating' the Kurds?

And more generally a United States relying on other states for population control while bludgeoning these other

states with its military might has to confront the fact that the world's populations do not like this kind of American behaviour. They consider it to be illegitimate or even terroristic. And states do control their populations by partially reflecting their views. This is a very big long-term problem for US geopolitics.

*How do you see the prospects for the left in the current situation?*

The anti-capitalist globalisation movement has suffered a setback as a result of September 11 because it was united largely on issues of international social and economic policy rather than on a programme on key issues of world political order. Thus while no wing of the movement was in any way sympathetic to the methods of overall aims of those involved in September 11, the movement was not politically prepared to take on the Bush Afghan war and Campaign against Terrorism.

As a result it has suffered a very serious setback in the United States and indeed, though less severe, elsewhere. To be honest, a principled, egalitarian social liberalism should be prepared to embrace all the main social policy goals of the movement, but they could simultaneously have serious cognitive illusions about the nature of the American state and about the real goals and consequences of the Afghan war or a war against Iraq. Within a liberal perspective, you may see multinational companies as the source of the problem and may see Western states as basically expressions of popular will, even if skewed somewhat by undue corporate influence.

There are thus widespread illusions on the efficacy and legitimacy of military aggression by Western states. Nobody on the left in any way supports the Taliban state in Afghanistan. But many left liberals in the West think it does not matter very much who or what destroys that Taliban government and state. Some think anything would be better than the Taliban or Saddam or Milosevic. Others think that if the West bombs out the government and puts in Western agents plus some money for 'state-building' or 'nation-building' and development this will be

an advance for the population. All this is in general rubbish. It is a cardinal political principle that authoritarian governments must be defeated by social forces within the given country if there is to be any hope of positive political development.

At the same time, the actions and rhetoric of the Bush administration have produced a profound ideological shock to liberal and social democrats in very many parts of the world: there is genuine alarm at the naked drive for world domination without the slightest regard for international law. This provides an audience for the internationalist, anti-imperialist left. But it is also a challenge because it is capturable very easily by the liberal-legalist diplomacy of the EU with its concept of world order. This says we want a world ruled by law not by arbitrary force. We want to punish the wrong-doers but to stay ourselves within international law. And we want to use force only as a last resort, not a first resort.

But this line of argument is utterly specious for one very simple reason: the nature of international law. It is nothing other than the past codified policy of the dominant capitalist states. It has no popular democratic source of legitimacy whatever. And this applies also to the United Nations structure as it is actually constituted. We should not forget that this structure gives virtually untrammelled power to the five permanent members when they are united and unlimited blocking power to each of them individually.

The EU's diplomacy is a lesser evil than that of the US in their common effort to keep their dominance over the south where most of the world's

population lives. But it is a lesser evil only because it has little military capacity or militarist stomach (outside Britain and France). So it prefers the methods of economic statecraft and that kind of coercion. And the UN structure also lacks a principled basis of authority. Only the UN idea of the nations of the world actually uniting and deliberating through their representatives with due weight for the population size of countries - only the actualisation of that idea could give us a really authoritative body for 'laying down the law' internationally. In such a body the left should accept the official representatives of states.

It should not, for example, question the fact that the Blair government was elected by 24% of the British electorate or that the US Congress was bought and paid for by over \$700 million of corporate funding or that the Chinese communist party leadership emerged from a system different from the British or American one. All such issues should be tackled by domestic forces in the country concerned. Genuine global democrats should accept the will of the genuine international community of nations. But they should not accept the nauseating imperial cant of Blair's nonsense about 'the international community'.

After September 11, the Left must address these issues of the global political order and begin campaigning for a positive, principled basis for a legitimate global political order, while repudiating both the ludicrous (and sinister) US idea that it should rule the world and the scarcely less ludicrous idea that the G7 or OECD capitalism should, presumably because of their wealth and greed, be considered the 'international

community'.

*Well that is easier said than done; it won't happen without lots of big developments in the world of labour, without the results of many partial struggles beginning to create a new situation. But in that context you can see many positive signs, like the developments in Italy or the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre with 70,000 people, even after September 11.*

I agree. And on that topic let me say that I think it's crucial that the World Social Forum process and links, which so far seem to have been strongest in Europe and the Americas, are pushed into East Asia and especially into the labour movement in East Asia. That's going to be a crucial strategic task for the left in the coming period. The emergence, which is just beginning with new left and unions organizations in the Philippines, Indonesia and South Korea, of a powerful, independent and radical workers' movement in these countries would be a tremendous factor in starting to shift the relationship of forces.

And of course, links also with labour in Japan and above all within China. The Chinese people, such a huge part of humanity, are coming onto the world stage. They face great dangers from the United States and great tests as China manoeuvres as it must in the regimes of the world economy, as well as great domestic upheavals and crossroads. If the forces around the World Social Forum could link up with gigantic potential powers of labour in that part of the world not only the Bin Ladens of this world but also the political capacity of US military hardware would appear in a rather different perspective!

## Philippines: fighting military globalisation

15 April 2002, by **Harry Tubongbanwa**



THE Philippines is back on the map now because it is the place where the

biggest counter-terrorist group of US troops outside of Afghanistan exists so

far. We have 660 US Special troops in the southern part of the country right now - and others who are training the Philippine army in the north, several companies of them in different areas.

The biggest concentration is in Mindanao where they are training the Philippines army how to capture or destroy the terrorists - the Abu Sayyaf. There are actually less than 100 of these people, but now the Philippine army has around 8,000 troops on the small island of Basilan to carry this out. Even with the help of the US they seem to be having trouble dealing with these 80 people - this so-called network of Al-Qaida in the country.

The President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, is the most reliable ally of US imperialism in fighting the Al-Qaida network in the South East Asia region. She was the first one who supported Bush right after September 11 - even when the other leaders in the area did not.

The Philippines is also very important for President Bush today because it is a living manifestation of the failure of neo-liberal globalisation.

Today the transition period of the new government installed in January 2001 after what we call the second phase of people's power is over. After the national and local elections last May, the ruling party was able to consolidate its hold at both national and local level. Having the majority in the Lower House and a small majority in the Senate, the President is no longer dependent on allies who were responsible for her coming to power.

Now she can press ahead with the trial of former President Estrada, who she replaced. She wants to attack him because at the end of last year Estrada and his supporters tried to regain control of the government through a third phase of peoples' power. It was the poorest section of the population that was mobilised in December 2001.

When Arroyo came to power, there was a big broad coalition that put her there including the left. The Communist Party of the Philippines participated in the elections and gained seats in the Lower House.

Because of this help, at first Arroyo tried to accommodate the demands of the left but now she is very uncompromising with them.

We see the direct US military intervention as the armed wing of globalisation and also as a concrete expression of the post-cold war policy of the US strategy of "just in time". In a matter of hours the US can deploy large concentrations of troops to any country or island in the world - without the expense of maintaining bases. They sent troops from Okinawa in Japan to the Philippines for example. The US is also prepared to "act unilaterally if it must, but multilaterally if it can".

Why Mindanao? Geographically speaking it is at the centre of the growth area of South East Asia - Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Basilan is key to this - but of course it's also where the Abu Sayyaf are.

It was the Philippine government that originally created Abu Sayyaf - we identified 5 agents inside including the main strategist who was killed 2 years ago. In 1994 they started this when the Moro Revolutionary groups were negotiating with the government. The time was ripe for the entry of fundamentalist groups to offer an alternative to revolutionary ideas.

Abu Sayyaf mainly grew after the 1996 peace agreement between the Moro groups and the government and of course it attracted followers when this agreement broke down.

We see a connection between the government's support for the US and the presence of the troops. Just like Bush, President Arroyo's father was also a President and during her time as a senator she was very supportive of US bases in the Philippines. She is a very ardent follower of the younger Bush - she adopts his slogans like "Bullets for Bread" and "Security for Liberty". She claims to be implementing an all-out war against the Al-Qaida network in the Philippines - while what she is really concerned about is neutralising possible opponents in the 2004 Presidential elections.

There was a strong rumour at the end of last year that there would be a coup d'état and this forced her to say she would replace the Head of the National Police. But now the US troops are there she changed her mind. Not only has this man kept his job, his term has even been extended. The US troops have given her confidence both to continue ruling and prepare for the 2004 elections.

This situation gives an opportunity for the different groups of the revolutionary left in the Philippines to act together. Those who were active in getting rid of the US bases in 1991 are now back in the mainstream. Different blocks from the left, excluding the CP, are trying to rally behind this and form a coalition for peace. We are trying to connect the fight against globalisation with the presence of the US troops.

The Revolutionary Workers Party of Mindanao is active in this campaign, particularly in Mindanao. We are the only block that has a presence in Mindanao where the troops are. And through this work we are developing stronger co-operation with other left groups - particularly the Socialist Party of the Philippines - which has relations with the DSP in Australia - and the Workers' Party of the Philippines and also the Proletarian Party of the Philippines.

Today the government has broken off peace talks with all the different armed groups which means that the US troops can intervene militarily against them. The New People's Army, the military wing of the CP, was listed as a terrorist group by Bush.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front, with whom we have good relations, is very worried about the presence of US troops especially in Basilan because they have almost 2,000 armed men on the island. They think there is a danger that they will be identified as Abu Sayyaf.

There is a real possibility that people who are not members of Abu Sayyaf will be killed. Right before the US troops came the marines killed 3 people who they mistook as Abu Sayyaf - and the media where there and proved that they were not - not



least because they were cooking pork which Muslim fundamentalists certainly would not.

The government have argued that

there are only 2 options - either you are for Abu Sayyaf or you are for US troops. They have been showing videos on the TV of Abu Sayyaf

carrying out executions by beheading from 1995 to whip this up. For us it's an important job to educate people that it is not as simple as this. We have to condemn both.

# **The Mindanao People's Peace movement**

**15 April 2002, by Eva Oler Ferraren**

We have been pushing for a return to peace negotiations and campaigning against military globalisation. We are also concerned that the government has been trying to create animosity between Christians and Moslems in the Philippines, by labelling all Muslims terrorists and therefore

trying to get the majority Christian population on their side.

We are trying to develop this movement on an international level - particularly over these last few months in Europe. One of the things we want to encourage is international

delegations coming to Mindanao to bring back accurate information about what is really happening. This is particularly important because Arroyo is trying to use her supporters in other countries to write articles for example in the US press saying how good a job US troops are doing in Mindanao.

## **Against the deployment of the US military troops in the Philippines**

**15 April 2002**

2) Clearly, another goal of the US forces in Mindanao is to combat the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), which is alleged to be part of the international Al-Qaida terrorist network. It was only the US that linked ASG to Al-Qaida, with no hard evidence. But the ASG today is not much more than a group of local bandits engaged in the kidnap-for-ransom business, which uses terrorist methods to assist in that project (though it began life as an Islamic revivalist group).

3) The US has sent not only troops but also powerful armaments to Mindanao.

Even more sophisticated armaments are promised, part of an overall plan to install a US military command post in Basilan. Thus, the presence of the US troops in Mindanao will not be temporary. It will be ongoing (though without the expense of permanent

bases in the Philippine archipelago) even if this grossly violates the Philippines constitution. The goal is both control over the Southeast Asian region, and to strategically advance US policies regarding China.

4) The US-led anti-terrorism campaign in Mindanao constitutes a counter-insurgency war that will surely involve and harm the civilian population in the province of Basilan and elsewhere. US forces and the Armed Forces of the Philippines will conduct joint military operations against so-called terrorist groups, and this will not be limited to Basilan. It will cover all the islands of Mindanao. Already the US-backed military operation is being conducted not only against Abu Sayyaf, but also against other revolutionary armed groups in Mindanao. This can only worsen the existing political and social crisis there.

5) Mindanao plays a vital role in the neo-liberal policies of the government -which complies 100 percent with terms imposed by the Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines East Asian Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA). The US-backed military offensive in Mindanao targets not only the ASG. It is also designed to crush all the revolutionary groups and terrorize militants involved in the struggle against neo-liberal globalisation. The US troop deployment in Mindanao is, in this way, part of the global capitalist scheme to fully consolidate the BIMP-EAGA as one of the regional free trade agreements in Asia.

The FI therefore thoroughly condemns the deployment of US troops in the Philippines. The irresponsible actions of the present Philippine government put the national interests of the country at risk. In particular, the US intervention threatens the lives and

well-being of the civilian population of Mindanao (the tri-people: Moro, Christians, and Indigenous peoples). We must build a worldwide solidarity campaign in order to uphold the basic right of the broad masses of people in the Philippines to be free from such threats. We call on social movements,

revolutionary groups and human rights organizations everywhere to express their opposition to the new US presence in the Philippines, and to the US-led global war that has now expanded in the Southeast Asian region.

We condemn the terrorist activities of the ASG and other fundamentalist and rightist groups. Even more, however, must we condemn the direct intervention of US forces in the Philippines.

*February 28, 2002*

# Stop the bombing in Caguan! No to Plan Colombia!

## 15 April 2002

As a result, it has put a stop to any kind of peace process.

2) This bellicose offensive entitled Operation Tanatos includes the use of OV-10 aircraft, DC-34 stealth planes, Kafir, and Black Hawk helicopter gunships. More than 13 thousand soldiers are on the move on the ground, including the infantry battalion from Granada (in Meta Department) and troops from the Ninth, Twelfth and Thirteenth Brigades.

All these forces of the Colombian Army and Air Force are "advised" by North American military personnel as part of the Plan Colombia counter-insurgency strategy.

3) This new phase of the war aims to destroy not only the FARC-EP but the whole of Colombia's insurgent and popular movement. The bombing in Caguan is accompanied by an intensification of the dirty war against social activists and militants, and by a campaign of intimidation against the

civilian population.

This war against the Colombian people is carried out by the army, the paramilitaries, the US Drug Enforcement Agency and high-ranking US officers.

4) Armed and financed by Washington, this offensive is part of wider strategy in Latin America. It's a strategy that includes speeding up the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) as a project for domination, direct intervention to destabilise the "radical triangle" (Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela) and the use of a ferocious counter-insurgency campaign against the struggles of the popular movement and the left.

It is also part of the deepening process of economic recolonisation, via payments on the foreign debt and the adjustment programmes imposed by the IMF and the World Bank. This imperialist offensive is intended to provide "armour-plating" against the

crisis of political leadership within the local ruling elites.

At the same time it is capital's brutal attempt at "dissuasion", faced with the growth of social resistance and revolutionary struggles which, like that in Argentina, have both exploded the myth of neo-liberal invulnerability, and opened the way to a process of radical and democratic self-organisation by the working and popular classes.

5) The Fourth International condemns the bombing in Caguan, repeats its opposition to US imperialism's Plan Colombia, and expresses its solidarity with the struggle of Colombia's armed insurgents, its workers, peasants, students and slum-dwellers. We join in the international campaign of democratic, progressive, anti-imperialist and revolutionary forces which demand a halt to the war and full respect for human, social and political rights.

*February 21, 2002*

# Zimbabwe's rip-off poll

## 15 April 2002, by **Patrick Bond, Raj Patel**

We want to make seven brief points about the election. But to set the tone, here are the words of a young, organic radical activist, Hopewell Gumbor: "What went wrong? There has been massive violence prior to the elections AND AS A RESULT THE ELECTION COULD NOT HAVE BEEN FREE AND FAIR. Mugabe survived on an anti-imperialist rhetoric and the land crisis notwithstanding the violence campaign... Mugabe's rhetoric separated the urban poor from the rural poor. This is one important reality that must be interrogated. The answer to the MDC loss lies in the explanation of that massive discrepancy. But Mugabe was not genuine in his rhetoric. He announced a retreat from the IMF while he went on to privatise education and other services but manages to get the rural vote on a land ticket that results in violent farm invasions and occupations followed by a fast track resettlement program."

- The election: Mugabe stole this one. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network-mainly progressive human rights monitors-listed the following obvious pre-poll violations: disenfranchising voters through the voter registration process; registration of voters beyond 3 March 2002; "correcting" the voters' roll; control of voter education through the Electoral Supervisory Commission; drawing election supervisors and monitors from the Ministries of Defence, Home Affairs, and Education; disallowing postal voting [i.e. preventing around a million votes from Zimbabweans abroad, which would have mainly gone to the MDC]; constituency-based voting [i.e., preventing voters from casting their ballots no matter where they happen to be within Zimbabwe]; simultaneous holding of municipal and Presidential elections; restrictions concerning the accompanying of ballot boxes; printing of extra ballot papers; very restrictive and oppressive Public Order and Security Act; unequal access to the state controlled media, in particular the broadcast media, with a bias toward the ruling party; restrictions concerning both local and international observers; confiscation and destruction of identity cards by youths of the ruling party [i.e. preventing people from voting because an ID is required at the ballot

box]; establishment of illegal road blocks by youths of the ruling party; political violence, including torture and murders, largely perpetrated by ruling party supporters against members and supporters of the opposition; and selective enforcement of the law by law enforcement agents.

Then on the days of the election, March 9 and 10, urban Zimbabweans were confronted with drastic cutbacks in polling stations, requiring many hours of queuing in the hot sun. Rural voters witnessed a systematic refusal by the government to allow independent monitors near the booths, and opposition party electoral agents were unable to reach nearly half the stations, in part because of pro-Zanu thuggery. Across Zimbabwe, the government refused to abide by an urgent court order to extend voting for another day, opened only the polling booths in greater Harare (and five hours late at that), and then chased those still in long queues away at the end of the day.

- "Free and fair"? Through such tactics, we believe, easily more than 410,000 votes were stolen. Most international election monitors-with the notable exception of ruling-party ministers from neighbouring countries, the Organization of African Unity, and 50 official observers from South Africa-recognized this, declaring the poll unfree and unfair.

But the reports from countries of the North played into Zanu's hands. Mugabe has been quick to point to imperialist hypocrisy, the stolen election in the U.S., and the lack of genuine choice in most rich countries. In contrast, the state-owned media welcomed the Southern African Development Community's ministerial task force, which claimed, "Despite reported incidents of pre-election violence and some logistical shortcomings during voting... the elections were substantially free and fair, and were a true reflection of the will of the people of Zimbabwe." The South African observer delegation, led by businessman Sam Motsuenyane, called Mugabe's declaration of victory "legitimate." So too did the South African Federated Chamber of Commerce, leading to instant discredit and shame in Johannesburg.

And so it would seem that the elections have been stitched up through the revival of a colonial racial antagonism. Not quite, though. There were two dissenting voices from Africa, the most important being the SADC-Parliamentary Forum, a group of parliamentarians (not ministers) from the SADC region. Their conclusion was rather different: "The climate of insecurity obtaining in Zimbabwe since the 2000 parliamentary elections was such that the electoral process could not be said to adequately comply with the Norms and Standards for Elections in the SADC region." The Commonwealth observer mission said much the same. But all eyes have subsequently turned to Thabo Mbeki, and for good reason.

- Pretoria's pressure points In 1976, Mugabe's immediate predecessor, Ian Smith, was summoned to meet John Vorster and Henry Kissinger in Pretoria to be told that his position was untenable. Smith resisted the inevitable with a mix of ineffectual concessions and heightened repression, but the power that South Africa held over imports and exports was decisive.

There now appears an analogous moment of truth. Again, millions of black Zimbabweans suffer the depredations of an undemocratic, exploitative ruling elite. Again, a militaristic state serves the class interests of a few tens of thousands of well-connected bureaucrats, military and paramilitary leaders, and what are termed "briefcase businessmen," in the context of unprecedented economic crisis.

In this context of striking parallels, South African president Thabo Mbeki is taking advantage of temporary Western goodwill-aside from doubts about his genocidal HIV/AIDS policies-to offset the overall haemorrhaging of his country and continent. His New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad) follows similar South African interventions in the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, and a host of other international forums. The fly in the ointment, inevitably, is Mugabe.

- Pretoria's calculations: Pretoria's Zimbabwe schizophrenia has several

other crucial domestic features that outweigh the pro-Western logic of Nepad, though. Looking north, the ANC leadership must despair at the following: a liberation movement that won resounding electoral victories against a terribly weak opposition, but under circumstances of worsening abstentionism by, and depoliticisation of, the masses; that movement's undeniable failure to deliver a better life for most of the country's low-income people, while material inequality soared; rising popular alienation from, and cynicism about, nationalist politicians, as the gulf between rulers and the ruled widened inexorably and as numerous cases of corruption and poor governance were brought to public attention; growing economic misery as neo-liberal policies were tried and failed; and the sudden rise of an opposition movement based in the trade unions, quickly backed by most of civil society, the liberal petit-bourgeoisie, and the independent media-potentially leading to the election of a new, post-nationalist government. The last bullet, fired in Zambia in 1991 when Kenneth Kaunda lost by a landslide, and misfired in Zimbabwe this week thanks to Mugabe's electoral theft, is not yet loaded in South Africa. But it will be.

Pretoria bureaucrats argue that there is no alternative to constructive engagement with Mugabe. The mid-1990s Nigerian lesson-"We got our fingers burned"-was chillingly instructive. After talking tough to Sani Abacha's military regime, South African officials believed that Western countries would crack down with sanctions, especially on oil. The West didn't, leaving Pretoria exposed and ineffective. Another lesson was more current: when Zambia and Madagascar conducted profoundly flawed elections last December, leading to active (ongoing) civil-society and party-political protests, the West and Pretoria quickly accepted prevailing power relations.

For Mbeki, it would be ideal if Mugabe changes his stripes immediately, reverting to his early-mid-1990s neo-liberal mode. A successful Nepad requires Mugabe to act more politely, begin to repay U.S.\$1+ billion arrears to the Bretton Woods Institutions, and

refrain from detaining and torturing journalists and opposition party members. But none of this is likely, especially if Mugabe's downward spiral of economic degradation and political illegitimacy continues. What, then, can Mbeki do?

- Pretoria's next gambit: As we write (15 March), South African vice president Jacob Zuma has been meeting for many hours in Harare, trying to stitch together a band-aid solution prior to next Tuesday's crucial London meeting of Commonwealth leaders. Zuma will reportedly ask Mugabe to step down soon, perhaps handing power to his ally Emmerson Mnangagwa, the parliamentary leader who is trusted only a little within Zanu and not at all in the opposition. Mugabe is probably unwilling to accept.

The other option, which is also being pushed by elites of all stripes, from Mbeki/Zuma to Tony Blair in London to Tony Leon (South Africa's white opposition leader) in Cape Town, is a Government of National Unity in Harare.

But notwithstanding the possible offer of a vice-presidential job, Tsvangirai publicly rejected a deal on Thursday: "This is not about appointing people to certain positions without first achieving stability. Mugabe cannot buy legitimacy by forming a government of national unity with the MDC." The political cul-de-sac that Pretoria now faces, looking north, probably compels Mbeki to vaguely endorse Mugabe's theft. But a disincentive also looms: if Mbeki legitimises Mugabe, Nepad will be denounced as illegitimate.

- Pretoria's progressive opposition: Civil society groups across Africa-e.g., the Africa Social Forum network of social movements, which met in both Bamako, Mali and Porto Alegre, Brazil in January, which includes the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development-have already denounced Mbeki's neo-liberal, "good governance" plan for Africa.

By endorsing Mugabe, Mbeki invites active protests against both Nepad's hypocrisy on governance, as well as its reliance upon Western markets and

Washington-Consensus economic policies. Locations will include the upcoming (June) G-8 Meeting in rural Canada, the Africa Union launch in July in Pretoria, and the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in August.

How much good these protests do depends upon how advocates of social justice in Zimbabwe read the power relations, the importance they give international solidarity in the coming struggle for democracy, and the extent to which their comrades across the world can educate and mobilize.

- Self-activity of the Zimbabwean masses: But at home, what will democratic activists in Zimbabwe do, in response? So far, aside from a threatened national strike by the trade unions (foiled by police disruption of their planning meeting), the gut reaction seems to be hunkering down to overcome the shock of what many term the "mugging." Activists are overcome with exhaustion, intimidation, the arrest of more than a thousand civil-society election monitors last weekend, and the sheer challenge of going up against the repressive arms of the state. Army and police are patrolling the Harare ghettos and the mood of fear and loathing is palpable.

At this crucial juncture, leadership appears to be lacking. The left-of-centre NGO network group called Crisis in Zimbabwe has called upon the people "to register their concern in accordance with the Constitution," with no details. A similar group, the National Constitutional Assembly, will arrange protests "in coming weeks." Tsvangirai has withdrawn into his politburo to consult, after making a wishy-washy statement of pale defiance. Opposition lawyers, convinced that in theory they have a watertight case to re-hold the elections, are pessimistic. Given how Mugabe has stacked the judiciary, it is likely that the high court will rule in favour of Zanu.

So the last words go to activist Hopewell Gumbo: "The MDC-rising from anti-IMF working class movement-moved to the right at the alarm of most of its supporters. Tsvangirai showed inconsistencies in



his program. One was pronouncing mass action, and the following day talking of the courts. Zimbabwe has had a number of alternatives to the process of dealing with the

entrenched dictatorship of Mugabe. This is for now the most progressive way to look at the situation. We must bury behind our backs the loss and seek to invoke those alternatives that

have so far not been utilized."

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# Gujarat riots: Against communalism and state complicity

15 April 2002, by **Inquilabi Communist Sangathan**



The Inquilabi Communist Sangathan unreservedly deplores the torching of the train compartments leading to a large number of deaths. While warning the people of minority communities that this cannot be any legitimate response, and condemning the action, we also need to situate it in the proper context. For several months, the VHP has been whipping up communal tension and targeting Muslims with its renewed focus on temple building at Ayodha. This is the site where the Babri Masjid stood until December 6, 1992.

With a BJP dominated government at the centre, as well as a BJP government in Gujarat, the VHP had had ample support. Its forces had carried on extremely provocative activities without any hindrance. Without in the least condoning the massacre, it must be set in the perspective of continuous Hindutva provocations - provocations that had goaded some people of the minority communities evidently beyond endurance and had led to such a reprehensible act.

There has been continuous violence against Muslims in BJP ruled provinces (also elsewhere, but particularly in those states). In recent times, new anti-terrorist laws have been targeted against Muslims. Even when communalists have been challenged, only the Muslim communalists have been the target,

while the Hindu communalists of the VHP and other groups have not had a single hair on their heads touched.

The immediate reaction of Hindu communalist and fascist forces has been to talk, as usual, of Hindu tolerance and its abuse by the perfidious Muslims. The truth is quite different. Massive riots have been unleashed, with the epicentre at Gujarat and tremors being felt as far away as Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. The organised lumpen-gangs and storm troopers of the Hindutva brigade went on the rampage for two days. The promulgation of curfew did not halt them. By the afternoon of March 1, even the government was formally admitting to 150 deaths, a figure that rose to over 300 by the end of the day. The former Congress M.P. Ehsan Jaffrey has been burnt to death in Ahmedabad. Prof. Bhandarkar's house was burnt down in Vadodra. In both cases, despite repeated urgings, the police played the role of silent spectators. In Naroda, near Ahmedabad, a thousand strong crowd surrounded a slum, dragged out people, and burnt 67 of them alive. In every case, where the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, has even bothered to comment, he has claimed that the sequence of events proves that the blame cannot fall on the VHP. Modi patted the police on the back, and claimed that Jaffrey was responsible for his own death, because he had opened fire. What is a man, facing a violent mob, and having found the police non-responsive to his plea for help, supposed to do? Police Commissioner P.C. Pande, in open

justification for the communal role of the police, stated that the police "were not insulated from the general social milieu". They allowed 36 hours to pass without any serious intervention (the same pattern as in 1992 after the Babri Masjid destruction) and now the army is being deployed. By declaring a curfew, the government formally took the position that the situation was serious - but did nothing beyond that formality.

It is not only the state government, but also the Central Government that must be held responsible. We opposed the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance. But the government claimed this law was needed in the interests of India - and then hesitated to apply it to the VHP? The government treats the kar sevaks and the VHP as a whole as though they are extremely reasonable forces. And this is no surprise, since the VHP is part of the Sangh Parivar, the same family of organisations as the BJP itself.

So each case of intensification of communal provocation by the VHP has been met by warnings to Muslims not to lose their cool while the VHP has been given still more elbowroom. When the Central Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes was to pass through sensitive areas of Baroda, women from minority community in several areas were desperate for three days. They did not have milk vegetables or any necessities to feed their children in their homes. Children were crying without food. At night they couldn't sleep because of threats and mobs moving around freely in the

area.

In desperation women from one area decided to stop Mr. Fernandes and ask him to listen to them. They came out of their homes as his cavalcade with several cars and police vehicles came past. They tried to wave their hands and make gestures to stop him - but the big shot did not stop. Immediately after his car went by, the local police attacked these women, beating them with batons and used vulgar sexual abuse for trying to "tarnish" their image in the eyes of Fernandes. This led to fear among women and their families. If this can happen when Mr. Fernandes was just a few metres away, what will happen to them at night!

And this is not an isolated incident - in several places women have suffered abuses and violence in the hands of police. We demand immediate action against whoever is responsible for this incident and we demand safety for those women and their families. It is women and children suffer most when there are shortages so we also demand that the necessary action is taken to ensure the supply of milk, vegetables and other necessities reaches all the affected by the curfew without discrimination on the basis of caste and community.

On March 3, local TV cable operators

in Gujarat were instructed to block Star News Channel as they were showing the reality of the government's utter failure to prevent continuous violence. On the same day, Union Home Minister, BJP leader, and Gujarat MP, L. K. Advani finally found time to visit Gujarat. He started off by asserting, without a shred of proof, that the Godhra incident was pre-planned. He also asserted that police in Gujarat were perfectly fine, and rejected all criticisms of them.

Even as the violence continues, there is a ray of hope from initiatives in some places where peace committees are being set, involving people from both communities. These are having daily meetings so that no outsider also comes and creates any tension in the area. There are instances of majority community people saving their neighbours who practice minority religions. As a matter of principle, we believe that the state should not be given the right to curtail anyone's civil liberties, because this is a weapon that the state is likely to turn against the oppressed. We also believe that communalism, a product of reactionary capitalism utilising often pre-capitalist ideologies, cannot be extirpated by the bourgeois state. Only a resurgent working class, exercising its hegemony over the other oppressed, can successfully achieve that goal.

However, this is different from the question of tackling communal riots. A communal riot of the scale unleashed by the VHP currently cannot be tackled directly by the working class at its present stage of disunity and weakness. In order to defend human lives and conditions of existence, the governments, both at the state and the centre, must be compelled to take a firm stand.

We demand: Immediate and effective application of the army to stop all riots; the sacking of Gujarat Home Minister and Chief Minister for their failure to apply the law of the land and to stop riots, indeed, for their complicity in the riots; the arrest of all VHP leaders under the ordinary criminal laws; the scrapping of the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance; the weeding out of all communalist elements from the police; we call on working class and democratic/human rights movements active in India and abroad to publicly voice their concerns, and to mobilise against the fascists.

*We urge that messages of condemnation and demands for action go to; The National Human Rights Commission, Sardar Patel Bhavan, Sansad Marg, New Delhi-110001. Tel (011) 311560; 3348478 fax (011)3340016 Fax no of Chief Minister of Gujarat 091-79-3222101/3222020*

## Compromises on the road to hell

15 April 2002, by **Kunal Chattopadhyay**

Allegedly Babar had ordered the destruction of a temple on the site in order to build the mosque. In 1992 massive communal mobilisations and the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque resulted from this campaign by the right. Both the Congress government and then the United Front government dithered while the Far Right pressed ahead with its agenda. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the electoral arm of the combine, campaigned, and increased its seats in

parliament. Important sections of the Indian big bourgeoisie began to conclude that it was desirable to climb on to the BJP bandwagon. They understood that full scale implementation of neo-liberal policies required the prior atomisation of the working class and therefore the empowerment of the BJP.

At the same time, the BJP's sister organisations, the Viswa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal, and so on,

claimed to stand for all Hindus, to speak in their names regardless of parliamentary ups and downs. The VHP and its "holy men" continued to focus on the question of the temple. Contrary to what some on the left believed, this was not just a ploy to garner votes.

### Mistake

To think that the BJP is the real force

while the rest are adjuncts is a big mistake. The continuous harping on the Ram temple was a signal to supporters that here was a political force which did not allow political exigencies to harm "core" political issues, and a signal to the ruling class that accepting a long term BJP government would entail accepting their political terms. The VHP aimed to shift politics to the extreme right by force. The announcement of specific programmes, like the beginning of temple construction from March 15 2002, were intended to keep their extremist activists at a temperature near boiling point.

This rhythm was not totally unconnected with parliamentary political developments with elections in four provinces in early 2002. Despite the Prevention of Terrorism Act targeting Muslims, despite the blatant communalisation of the state apparatus, the BJP was an also-ran in all four states.

The increasing aggressiveness of the Hindutva brigade should also be seen in this context. They know that coming to power by basing themselves on a Hindu identity is impossible if the thrust is purely, or mainly, parliamentary. As with classical fascism, they try to blend legal and extra-parliamentary, violent mobilisations together.

Godhra is a powder-keg in the centre of Gujarat, India's most communally polarised state, and a Hindutva "laboratory". During the 1970s and 1980s, Godhra recorded violence or curfew on as many as 150 days in some years. The town had a Muslim majority population; there was endemic rivalry between Muslims and the surrounding Adivasi (tribal) groups, and caste Hindus; sharp Hindu-Muslim competition over trading interests; and the spread of Hindutva influence among the upper castes. All this gave Godhra a special, incendiary, character. Only a thorough, impartial and credible inquiry can establish what led to the gory Godhra incident in which 58 people were charred to death by a mob.

But no inquiry can ignore the relevant background: increasing harassment of

Indian Muslims since September 11 and especially since December 13, and their maligning as the principal perpetrators of terrorism; growing communalisation of Gujarat's society; the desperate tactics of the BJP in launching the temple-building campaign as they faced electoral defeat; the mobilisation of thousands of kar sevaks from Gujarat, and their abuse of Muslims, shouting militant Hindu slogans, taunting or cheating Muslim vendors, and verbally abusing Muslim women.

None of this constitutes a valid provocation for horrible and gratuitous acts like burning people alive. But they warrant a serious investigation into this incident. The provocations by the VHP and their friends were seized upon by some Muslim extremists to perpetrate a totally barbaric act. A mob several hundred strong was mobilised by 7 a.m. suggesting serious planning by Muslim communalists. Their far more dangerous counterparts among the Hindu communalists were all too happy to use this as an excuse.

## Partisan

State collusion alone can explain the partisan conduct of the Gujarat police. They not only failed to deter or stop the violence; but on several occasions actively encouraged it. The Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, virtually called on VHP - Bajrang Dal forces to commit murder and pogroms.

Just as in Bombay in 1992-93, the Gujarat police refused to intervene in time, knowing this would result in mass murder. It participated in arson, abduction, armed intimidation and homicide. Ten times more Muslims have already been killed in Gujarat than the Hindus murdered in Godhra. For millions of citizens, Gujarat has turned into a veritable purgatory. Vishwa Hindu Parishad goons took over more than 30 cities and towns, and rampaged, burned and killed at will. The police were nowhere to be seen. Once again, hardcore communalists suborned agencies of the state.

Unlike the unknowns in Godhra, little about its far bloodier aftermath is in

doubt. But despite the well-known connections between the VHP, the RSS and the BJP, the media focus on distinctions between them. The fountainhead of these organisations is the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) founded in 1925. This organisation has much in common with European fascist organisation, though there are differences. From an early stage, the RSS adopted what could be described as a far right version of a Gramscian policy of establishing hegemony. The first attempt to switch to a war of manoeuvres came in 1946-48, around the time of partition and independence.

The RSS had trained and drilled an immense number of members in 1925-46 but kept them aloof from the anti-colonial struggles. But in 1946-48 it sought to fan the flames of communalism and to set up what in retrospect looks like a premature fascist type bid for power. The murder of Gandhi, even though the murderer, Nathuram Godse, was no longer formally an RSS member, dealt a blow to this. At this point RSS leader Golwalkar wrote to the rightwing nationalist Home Minister Sardar Patel, offering a "united front" in an anti-communist crusade. If the RSS were re-legalised, he promised, it would keep out of politics.

After this deal the RSS did not withdraw from politics. It evolved a whole series of organisations including a women's organisation and a labour organisation. Its first electoral outfit on an all-India level was the Jan Sangh which in 1977 merged with a number of other bourgeois and petty bourgeois opposition parties to form the Janata Party and then formed a government of the centre.

## Agenda

Immediately, the RSS started pushing its agenda. This led to a conflict and the break up of the Janata Party, and the subsequent formation of the BJP. After initial lip service to Gandhian socialism, the BJP switched to a line of controlled, but steadily ascending Hindutva.

Meanwhile, from the 1970s, other outfits had been created, the most important of which was the Viswa Hindu Parishad, initially formed in reaction to lower caste rejection of oppressive Hinduism and conversions to other religions. This was obviously unacceptable to Hindu fundamentalists, and the VHP resisted these conversions. The VHP also took over the task of consolidating fundamentalist values amongst Indians living outside the country. Minorities in alien milieus, many of these tend to clutch at an odd mix of archaic and modern values, which is exploited by the VHP.

In the last few years a separation of functions has been effected. The BJP has been increasingly accepted as a responsible party - not because Vajpayee and Advani have turned over a new leaf but because the bourgeoisie, facing the unceasing decline of its traditional party, Congress, has been compelled to look to the BJP. The RSS has been repainted by the media as a nice, kind of "cultural" organisation despite the fact that countless Commissions of inquiry have established that Hindu communalists including the RSS have organised communal riots. It is only the VHP, and its purely thug like allies of the Bajrang Dal which are ostensibly "extremist".

Rewriting history is a necessary component of the RSS story. Central to Hindutva as a mass phenomenon is the development of a powerful image of Muslims as a perpetual "Other". This ideology appropriates stray elements from past prejudices, combines them with new ones skilfully dressed up as old truths, and spreads the resultant compound through the most up-to-date media techniques.

The Muslim becomes almost exactly what the Jew was in Nazi propaganda. The Muslim in India is supposedly unduly privileged - a charge even more absurd here than it was in Germany, where the Jews had been fairly prominent in intellectual, professional and business circles. In post-Independence India, Muslims are grossly underrepresented at elite level.

Regardless of reality, their alleged

privileges are supposedly the product of 'appeasement' of Muslims by 'pseudo-secularists'. In the pages of the RSS's Organiser, one reads regularly about the Red-Green alliance, a combination of Muslims and communists, recalling Hitler's denunciation of communism as a Jewish conspiracy.

The shift to a war of movement was substantially aided by the waning fortunes of the Congress. In the early and middle 1980s, both Indira and then Rajiv Gandhi attempted to play the "Hindu card", communalising the state apparatus on an unprecedented scale. This directly prepared the ground for the Ram blitzkrieg now spearheaded by the VHP.

Prior to 1989, Congress itself had sought to utilise the Ram issue. They updated the Ramayana epic into a pseudo-nationalist TV serial. The idols installed inside the Babri Masjid in December 1949 had been placed there in collusion with a previous Congress regime. And it was Rajiv who made a series of catastrophic political moves.

After the Shah Bano verdict, when a case of gender justice was substantially distorted into a case of communal verdict, the Rajiv Gandhi government brought in a bill that sought to appease Muslim communalists. To do a balancing act, he also tried appeasing Hindu communalists by allowing the ceremony for laying the foundation stone of the temple at Ayodhya. All this allowed the RSS and its fronts to go on the offensive.

Today the government is dependent on allies from other parties for whom Hindutva is no option. This is why there is a two faced approach. In parliament, the Prime Minister will give assurances. Outside, some kind of ritual blessing of the Ram temple of Ayodhya will be permitted to keep the pot boiling.

## Compromise

In this context we have to assess the "compromise" proposal made by Jayendra Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Kanchi - a very holy office in the Hindu faith. While the VHP demands

that Muslims meekly accept that the Ram temple be built on the site where the mosque was destroyed 10 years ago, the Shankaracharya suggests there should be a dialogue between the Hindu community and the Muslim community. He says they should be represented on the one hand by the VHP and on the other by the All India Muslim personal Law Board. He also proposed that there should be some guarantees to the Muslim community. This appeared to many as a voice of sanity by contrast with the rampaging mobs of the Viswa Hindu Parishad. But it would be a dangerous mistake to go down this path - one which would further legitimise and give succour to the forces responsible for the carnage we have seen in recent weeks.

The proposal for a "settlement" means accepting the claim of the VHP that it has the right to represent the Hindus of India. If this happens done, one might as well put up a sign-post, saying, constitutional democracy ends here.

And yet many are working overtime to prove the reasonableness of the compromise, claiming that it will isolate the VHP extremists and favour the so-called moderates. This is dangerous nonsense.

To portray Vajpayee as a "good" nationalist statesman who has risen above the "petty views" of the RSS by inviting this mediation is to court disaster. But an increasing section of the bourgeoisie is willing to put up with occasional violations of rights of Muslims and Christians (to say nothing of communists, trade unionists, atheists and other oddballs who stand in the way of the great and glorious globalisation) and therefore to project him as an upholder of secular traditions. To accept the mediation of religious heads with other religious heads is to ensure that there will be no space left for secular politics.

The very idea that Hindus constitute a homogeneous community is dangerous. It is tantamount to accepting the forcible inclusion of Dalits into the Hindu fold, ignoring the massive and varied ways in which Dalits have fought against their



oppression since the late 19 Century. After all the RSS was set up as much to counter Dalit assertion as to fight the Muslims.

What is the dispute about? Even if it were true (as in any case serious scholarship says it is not) that a general of Babar had destroyed a Ram temple under his orders, what should our response be? Kings committed many crimes. Kings of all religions exploited their subjects. Kings of all

religions and no definite religions all used religion politically, destroyed as well as supported the building of religious buildings.

A modern, secular state has to take a different stance. One can no more hold Muslims of present day India responsible for the alleged destruction of a Ram temple by Babar, than one can hold modern Hindus responsible for other alleged crimes against Muslim holy places.

What is the problem? Not what may or may not have happened centuries ago, but whether the VHP has the right to use force to destroy an existing mosque, and murder Muslims in a drive towards making them into second class citizens. Since they palpably do not have that right, banning them and arresting all their leaders is the first step in the direction of restoration of secularism and normalcy.

## Will China shake the world?

15 April 2002, by **Liu Yufan**

### Social services under the impact of market reform



THE lack of opportunities for education has always been an important factor in understanding poverty. Among the rural poor in China, illiterate or semi-illiterate peoples account for an exceptionally high proportion. Unfortunately the Chinese government has withdrawn from providing universal educational opportunities to its citizens. Although the Chinese economy has grown over 600 per cent since 1979, the share of expenditure on education relative to GDP has grown little. Between 1979 and 1992, the average annual expenditure on education accounted for 2.88 per cent, which is far lower than the 4 per cent average of many developing countries. The figure has further been lowered to 2.49 per cent in 1997.

What money there is for education is siphoned off into urban areas at the expense of rural, and post-secondary education eats up a disproportionately large part of the fund. Rural education expenses are largely met by local

towns and villages. However, many of them are simply too poor to build and maintain school buildings and pay teachers adequate salaries. Currently, there are 50,000 village and township governments in debt to the tune of RMB 200 billion. And although official enrolment rates for primary schools are as high as 98.9 per cent, the drop out rate is also high.

A report by the World Bank in 1999 stated that 30 million children were not enrolled at all, of which two thirds were girls. A survey indicated that, among 125 villages and towns, the wages for over 60 per cent of teachers were not paid on time. Many schools survive by forcing pupils to work with little or no pay. In March 2001, an explosion in a Jiangxi primary school killed 50 students as they were assembling firecrackers.

In urban areas the situation is also deteriorating. College students now have to pay large sums of money to enrol, a far cry from the situation 15 years ago. Free elementary education has evaporated in many cities. Due to a lack of funding, and also an eagerness to get rich, many schools now engage in commercial activities ranging from renting out office space to direct involvement in business themselves. These conditions have given rise to a new type of school; so called 'sparrow schools', thus named for their size.

In a primary school in Guangzhou, one of China's wealthiest cities, 820 students crowd into a small school with a total usable area of 1,700 square metres. The school can only afford one small basketball court in which the children can play. This is a luxury compared to several other schools nearby, which possess no play area and allow their students to do exercises on the footpath. According to the law, property developers should build one primary and one secondary school for every 100,000 people housed. However, in the course of redeveloping old areas, it is common for developers to simply ignore these laws. Hence the 'sparrow schools'.

As to the children of rural migrant workers, their right to education is simply denied. Urban officials do this on the grounds that they are rural residents under the hukou system (or household registration system). This means that rural migrants are not officially regarded as urban residents even though they may have worked and lived in a city for years. When Li Sumei, a migrant to Beijing from Henan province, founded the Xingzhi Migrant School in 1994, there were nine pupils. It has since grown to accommodate 2,000. Yet the city government still refuses to grant any school educating migrant children an official school permit, therefore leaving them at the mercy of officials.

In this environment Xingzhi School has been forced to relocate five times in seven years. The flip side to this coin is that entrepreneurs and high-ranking officials are able to send their children to elite private schools or send them abroad.

In the health sector, while the rural population continues to be excluded from free health care, the free or at least partially free health care system which the urban working population once enjoyed is now largely gone or being privatised. During the past 10 years, 'user pay' has become the guiding principle, mainly on the grounds that the old health care system was thought to encourage wastage of valuable medicine and resources. Now employees have to contribute 2 per cent of their wages - which are already very low - and employers 6 per cent to workers' personal medical accounts. Most medical expenses are to be funded by this account. In the past there was no ceiling for an employee's medical expenses, but under the new system a limit equal to an average wage for four years now applies.

The emphasis on profit and the discipline of the market has had a profound impact on medical institutions. It is now common for hospitals to charge patients who are covered by the social medical fund higher fees. Logic suggests that those who are not covered by the fund enjoy lower fees, but the reality is that many who are not covered simply cannot afford to visit hospital.

The government devotes around 2.4 per cent of its budget to national health care, which is by any standard far too little. Dealing with the spread of AIDS alone will consume a large proportion of that amount. According to official figures, there are now 600,000 HIV carriers, but some scholars put the figure at one million or more. A recent story which emerged from Xincai County in Henan vividly demonstrates the scale of the problem. In what can only be described as a man-made disaster, some villages in Xincai County have registered HIV infection rates as high as 60 per cent. Almost all HIV carriers in the region contracted the virus by supplying blood for money to local

blood banks.

Local authorities had collaborated with the 'heads of blood businesses' to purchase blood from peasants, but in the process had used unclean needles repeatedly. Under these conditions the virus spread out of control. Impoverished peasants repeatedly sold blood, seeing it as a quick and easy way to earn money. Some journalists now put the figure for HIV carriers in Henan alone at around 700,000. The figure is speculative, but it seems clear that the central government is incapable of grasping the seriousness of the issue. As with the coal mining tragedy, local authorities tried by all means to cover up reports of contaminated needles thus exacerbating the problem.

China's accession to the WTO may further negatively affect the health of Chinese people. For years, 97 per cent of domestic medicine production was based on copying foreign pharmaceutical companies without paying royalties. This practice will be prohibited after the accession to the WTO, which will drive up prices for medicine substantially, making them unaffordable to many poor people. In addition, traditional Chinese herbs and medicine will also be in jeopardy in the face of increased imports of foreign-made Chinese traditional medicine. Although the cultural legacy of Chinese people, Chinese-made traditional medicine is not competitive if compared to Japanese and Korean products. The latter countries hold the lion's share of the global Chinese traditional medicine market, while China accounts for less than 7 per cent. After China's accession to the WTO it is probable that some domestic pharmaceutical companies will go bankrupt, and in the long run put Chinese patients at the mercy of TNCs.

The right to medical care should come before the profits of TNCs. As such it is the duty of public authorities to regulate the health care market in favour of the most vulnerable sectors in society.

## **Environmental destruction and the drive for modernization**

China is huge in terms of its territory and population, and this fact alone implies the importance of it fighting against global environmental destruction. China is now the greatest coal burning country in the world, and as a result accounts for 15.1 per cent of the world's total sulphur dioxide and 9.6 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions. China's awareness of environmental protection is growing, and it has endorsed many international conventions. The ban on logging and the summer ban on fishing in the South China Sea are recent efforts by the government in promoting sustainable development.

On the other hand, the drive for modernization through the implementation of a self-regulating market poses new challenges to the environment. The elite appears to have uncritically accepted as a model for development the consumerism of the West. The decision to promote the increase in ownership of private cars is one of the manifestations of such a mentality. Again, it is impossible for China to copy the Western model in this aspect. If China's auto industry could deliver one car to every household, a level of ownership still lower than the US, it would lead to an environmental disaster.

One may argue that this prospect is remote, but one must not lose sight of the fact that China's development has led to widespread and massive consumerism over a relatively short period, and the damage to the environment is reaching the point of no repair. Between the 1920s to 1970s the Changjiang (Yangtze River) flooded every six years. From the 1980s onward it flooded every two or three years and on a much larger scale. The 1998 flood led to 3,656 deaths and Rmb300 billion in damage. Premier Zhu admitted the main reason for flooding was over-logging along the big river. Between 1949-1979, forest coverage was already

decreasing. Since the reforms, however, the situation has worsened. Experts reported that China requires at least 35 to 40 per cent forest coverage in order to retain water in the soil. China's current forest coverage has declined to a mere 14 per cent. In 40 years, the upper reaches of the Changjiang have witnessed an increase of soil erosion from 1.3 billion tons of soil annually to 1.57 billion.

The Changjiang is rapidly becoming the second Huanghe (Yellow River). In many parts of the river, dikes are now as high as 13 metres so as to accommodate the ever-rising riverbed. In the past, the scene of the so-called 'hanging river' only appeared along the Huanghe, but now it is spreading along the Changjiang. Due to corruption, the dikes are of bad quality and often collapse in flooding, thus compounding the seriousness of any flooding. Premier Zhu refers to these dikes as 'doufu dregs projects'. [3]

A logging ban was implemented in 1999, and a major portion of the one million woodcutters was reassigned to tree planting instead. In theory this was a good idea, but in reality local governments had little incentive to implement the ban. A rise in wood prices resulted in even less incentive, and in fact encouraged local authorities to unite with private business to engage in illegal but profitable logging.

Lacking an independent media and systems of accountability rooted in democratic principles, the central government simply does not know if and how its policies are implemented at the grass roots level. Moreover, simply banning logging in the context of an essentially normative model of modernization does not address fundamental issues relating to sustainable development. For example, demand for wood is still growing, partly because China now consumes at levels approaching consumption in developed countries. The use of disposable chopsticks, for instance, is a clear example.

As for the Huanghe, soil erosion now leads to the interruption of water flow for longer and longer distances. The

phenomenon began in the 1970s, and by the 1990s the stretch of the river through which water does not flow extended from 100-200 km to 300-600 km. In the 1970s it occurred in April or May, but now happens as early as January or February.

Rapid modernization has created impressive material wealth, but at the expense of the environment. In 1995, Chinese emissions of greenhouse gases came second only to the US, and in 1999 topped the list. The government decided, beginning from 2000, to ban the production of leaded gasoline. This is a step forward, but still too small compared to the needs of protecting the environment. For the same unit of output, China expends 3 to 10 times more energy than developed countries. The more China produces, the more critical its impact on global warming. In China, as elsewhere, cost cutting firms in a competitive market have few incentives to install environmentally protective devices. Instead they attempt to shift the costs of such technology to society and the biosphere. It is at this point that public authorities often intervene, with new laws, monitoring, and hefty fines for despoliation and its after effects.

However, this is an up-hill struggle even for the most committed governments. In China, because of widespread corruption and the semi-paralysis of many local authorities which has resulted, many environmental laws are simply ignored and all kinds of industrial pollution continues to wreak havoc on the environment.

## **The new dimension of gender inequality**

Compared to many developing countries, China's women enjoy higher status in certain respects. While the ratio for illiteracy among women between 15-24 is as high as 21-50 per cent in many developing countries, in China the figure is 13 per cent. Rates of labour participation among women between 15-64 are as high as 80 per

cent. The Chinese government has also endorsed a series of international conventions aimed at protecting women's rights, like the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on Equal Pay for Equal Work and so on.

However women remain the second sex in many regards, and market reforms have further marginalized women in certain areas. Between 1990-1995, women accounted for 70 per cent of the illiterate population, but only constituted 35 per cent of those who had senior college or above education. Urban working women's wages were 77 per cent of men and rural women's income was 81 per cent of males. The difference in income owes less to unequal pay for equal work, and more to segregation of jobs between genders. For instance, women account for only 45 per cent of doctors, 30 per cent of college and secondary schools teachers, but make up 96 per cent of nurses.

Rural women continue to suffer from a lack of medical care which poses a threat to their own lives and that of their children's. In 1995, 60 per cent of rural women gave birth at home, and thus the death of women in childbirth was several times higher than in cities. In an impoverished province like Guangxi, the mortality rate of women giving birth is 10 times higher than Beijing.

Rural women also remain marginalized in education. When households cannot afford to send all children to school, it is usually boys who go at the expense of girls. Hence, 84 per cent of illiterate women live in rural areas. Women's opportunities for development are also significantly less than men. While some rural men can leave agriculture via entering universities or serving in the army, these routes are not so accessible to rural women. When husbands migrate to urban areas seeking jobs, it is the women who are left behind to till the land and look after the elders and youngsters. Since such work generates much less cash than working in cities, women continue to be viewed as economically less important. It is true that young rural women also migrate in great numbers to the cities, but it seems that women

migrants are lower in proportion to their male counterparts.

Between 1985 and 1990, among the 35.3 million rural migrants, 56 per cent were men. Female migrants are substantially better educated than non-migrants, as is also the case for male migrants, implying a rural brain-drain to cities. However, even in the cities women migrants are more restricted in relation to attaining residence. Under the hukou system, children will inherit their rural identity from their mother rather than their father. It follows that while a rural male migrant may be able to attain an urban residence permit through marrying an urban women, a rural women migrant will find it difficult to do likewise. This is largely due to urban men resisting marriage to a women to whom his children would receive the status of rural hukou. Thus even when millions of women migrate to cities to work, their chances of remaining permanently in cities is significantly lower, so returning to the countryside for marriage is the only option.

Another aspect of female migration is those from poor villages migrating to more prosperous rural regions through marriage. For many poor and under-educated women, this remains the only viable route to improve their livelihood. 85 per cent of females who migrate due to marriage work in agriculture, which implies that they occupy an inferior position if compared to the first type of female migrant. Very often they have to be content with marrying rural men who are much older and poorer than their fellow villagers. In many cases such unions are arranged simply for money, which in turn reinforces the commodification of women and subjects them to all kinds of maltreatment.

Urban women workers have seen their welfare provisions disappear largely as a result of the restructuring of the economy. In 1996, women accounted for 37 per cent of urban workers but accounted for 60 per cent of xiagang, implying that when downsizing occurs it is women who are the chief victims. In the past, women workers in SOEs enjoyed paid leave during menstruation, maternity and

menopause. These benefits have in the main evaporated in the face of SOEs maximizing profit in ways similar to private companies. Women's ability to bear children becomes a burden to these competitive enterprises. In 1997, the All China Federation of Trade Unions conducted a survey of 660 SOEs, in which 90 per cent of managers did not want to hire women due to the cost of paid leave for them. Even government departments openly discriminate against women by refusing to hire women or putting a limit on numbers hired. It is no wonder that the re-employment rate for unemployed women workers is 35.7 per cent lower than men.

## Civil society, the market and the state

It is a widely accepted thesis that the marketisation of a former command economy will bring about the growth of civil society. In China's case the situation proved to be much more complex and contradictory. It depends, of course, how one defines civil society. If we define civil society merely within the context of a state-market dichotomy, then one may say that civil society exists in China. The once all-powerful state is now giving up much of its economic power over resources and factors of production to domestic and foreign firms.

The command economy was dismantled to give way to a self-regulating market. It is true that there still exist numerous governmental interventions, sometimes totally unjustified, in this national market. Nevertheless, the prices of the absolute majority of products and consumers goods fluctuate according to supply and demand. Furthermore, a new class of entrepreneurs enjoys political, economic and social privileges which were once the privilege of high officials only.

However, if we regard the growth of the so called 'third sector' (i.e., organizations which are neither subordinate to the state nor are private firms) as something essential to our concept of civil society, then

our view of civil society will be markedly different. For instance, can we really say that civil society exists in China if no truly non-government organizations (NGOs) exist? Since the 1990s China has opened its markets at an ever-increasing rate, but in the wake of such action have followed more restrictive laws against NGOs.

After the crackdown in 1989, the state council approved a new regulation on registration and management of social organizations, which required every social organization to affiliate with a supervisory unit. In 1998, a new regulation was implemented with more restrictive details. For example, only one organization in any particular sphere of activity may register at each administrative level. Moreover, initial capital of Rmb100,000 for national organizations and Rmb30,000 for lower level organizations are required. The notion that an opening of the market will inherently bring about the development of civil society, and along with it the liberty to associate and express itself, simply does not hold water. Rather, the fact is that the opening of a capitalist market brings about the development of an entrepreneurs' civil society at the expense of a civil society of the grass roots. Without democratically reforming the state, it is hard to imagine that political liberty will arise automatically.

The right to be heard is a necessary condition for any balanced growth of civil society. However, the Chinese government is particularly restrictive towards the right to free association. All 'mass organizations' are required to accept the 'leadership of the party', from trade unions to religious organizations. The suppression over Falungong (a religious sect - ed.), for example, reveals the degree of government intolerance. Peasants are particularly discriminated in this respect. For instance, there are national and local organizations - legal and officially endorsed - for students, workers, youth, women, writers and so forth. However, there is not a single officially sanctioned organization for peasants. Although the CCP declares itself to be representing peasants and workers, and that the CCP came to power thanks mainly to a peasant army, since 1949 peasants have been



sacrificed at the altar of urban development. Therefore, even though there was an association for poor and middle-income peasants before the Cultural Revolution, it was never able to acquire the status which the national trade union, for instance, enjoys. During the Cultural Revolution this association was disbanded along with many others. Afterwards all official 'mass organizations' were allowed to function again except the peasant association. Without official representation, albeit paternalistically dominated, it is no wonder that peasants are still regarded as second-class citizens.

Still, it is probably true that the eagerness to be heard only grows stronger following profound economic restructuring and redistribution of national income. Both the new rich and the new poor demand a hearing. Therefore, despite the repression of the state, legal or semi-legal NGOs have mushroomed over the past 10 years. One way to set up an NGO is to create a second-level organization and then attach oneself to a registered social organization or university. Another way is to register as a business organization. These methods are of course not always accessible to common people, so a third way has been developed. That is, people form informal groups like networks, salons and clubs. These legal or semi-legal ways to form NGOs have many defects, and in no way could they substitute the need to enjoy full right of association. But nevertheless, for the moment they help to promote a limited development of the third sector.

Among the rural population, there are already 100,000 local farming groups organized by produce farmers, such as the orchid-grower's association of Shaoxing in Zhejiang province, and the grape-growers association in Shandong province. Some of these have linked up to lobby for changes to existing policy. China's entry to the WTO may further fuel the desire amongst peasants to form organizations to protect themselves from foreign competition.

Another incentive for organizing is to protect members from corruption. However, sometimes such efforts are

met with state violence. For instance, the Three Gorges project will displace two million peasants in the region. For years, ever since the project started, hundreds of thousands of peasant households have been forced to migrate, while billions of dollars which were supposed to compensate them has been pocketed by officials, provoking widespread discontent and efforts in organizing to have a voice. However, when villagers from Yunyang County sent five representatives to the authority to voice their grievances they were sent to jail and tortured.

Workers' informal organizations are also growing. In 1999, it was reported that there were 30 informal workers' organizations in Beijing alone, a 23 per cent increase compared to 1998. In the south, there has been a rise in informal migrant workers' organizations. One of the favourite forms is organizing along tongxiang (referring to fellow villagers or those heralding from the same provinces), where members speak the same dialects and share familiar cultural forms. There have been efforts to organize independent trade unions, but they have met with serious repression once exposed or detected

Serious efforts have been made by people from all walks of lives to develop many kinds of NGOs, from simple mutual help societies to organizing calls for reform. These efforts can no longer be stamped out by force. If the government maintains its policy of intolerance towards the growth of organizing initiatives from below, it may only encourage confrontation and violence, thus upsetting the very stability which they value so highly.

## China and the world

For some, China is developing into a major power and is expected during the next twenty years to pose a threat to US hegemony. For others, China will disintegrate in a decade. No matter which forecast comes true, China will still shake the world, given its huge population and vast territory.

If the first forecast is true, then it may sharpen contradictions between China, the US, Taiwan, and Japan, reinforcing the arms race and the possibility of war. If, however, the second forecast comes true, then it will spell disaster to the whole of Asia if not the world. The number of illegal migrants fleeing from a disintegrating China will be enough to make one aware of the seriousness of the problem.

There is, of course, a third possibility; namely, that China continues to remain more or less the same, and that dramatic events will not occur in the foreseeable future. Even in this case there is no reason to be indifferent to the course which China is undertaking.

We must continue our effort in monitoring the course of reform, because what characterizes China's specificity is not only its volatility, but also the crisis resulting from reforms. Even at the current pace, the environmental destruction, the number of people living in poverty, the crisis in health, the spread of corruption and so on will reach intolerable dimensions in the short term and is surely capable of rupturing the social fabric.

In foreign relations, China's accession to the WTO implies a more fierce competition between Asian countries to lure FDI and to fight for increased market share. Indeed, when China conceded to drop its agricultural support from the 10 per cent (a level which developing countries legally enjoy according to WTO clauses) to 8.5 per cent, it raised serious concerns within many developing countries. They feared in the main that such a policy may give rise to a new round of cut-throat competition between developing countries. India indirectly expressed its discontent over China's concessions to the USA. Many Asian countries still remember how China's decision of depreciating the Renminbi in 1995 led to a race to the bottom among Asian countries, which to some extent contributed to the Asian crisis in 1997.

To conclude, the rejoining of the global market on the part of China may imply new opportunities for some

countries and some sections of the population, but it remains true that it also implies a race to the bottom among many developing countries, which in return may someday negatively affect China herself.

Thus it is essential for us to maintain our effort to understand the impact of China's reforms and its harmonization with global markets so that an early alarm can be sounded before disasters occur.

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## Failed crusade?

15 April 2002, by **Olivier Régol**



Cohen apparently does believe that the American elite is motivated by the loftiest intentions toward Russia, but that its arrogance and ideological blindness, based on the generous but misplaced desire to transform Russia into a facsimile of the United States, have led to catastrophe. Russia is undergoing de-industrialization and the worst socio-economic crisis ever experienced by an industrialized country.

The US elite is convinced it knows better than the Russian people itself what and how to do for Russia. US scholars, 'specialists' and 'economic advisers' are blinded by an ideology that is a holdover from the cold war and by their hatred of the former Soviet economic system. As for

journalists, they are basically conformists who follow closely the official analyses.

The book seems addressed first of all to American leaders. The author desperately wants to enlighten them, to make them understand that the current reform strategy is the worst failure of the American foreign policy since the Vietnam War. It poses very real dangers to international stability, since Russia is a nuclear power that has become unstable and is one step from chaos. But most damaging, in Cohen's eyes, is the moral harm to 'America': 'Yeltsin may have lost Russia, but we are losing our soul there.'

In the final part of the book, Cohen presents an analysis to justify a redefinition of the priorities as well as objectives of America. To begin with, it is essential that American leaders,

the President first of all, acknowledge US responsibility in what has happened to Russia and recognize that the initial approach ended in total bankruptcy.

Then, a constructive approach must give priority to seeking stability in Russia and reducing its nuclear arsenal. To achieve this, the US must give Russia massive financial support to allow it to pay wages and pensions and to promote productive investment to overcome the economic depression. This financial assistance must be linked to an end of the war in Chechnya. Furthermore, most of Russia's debt must be forgiven and NATO's expansion stopped.

In a more general way, the Americans must stop believing they can transform this country on their own terms. This task must legitimately be restored to the Russian people. And

finally, the new approach to Russia should be part of a global redefinition of American foreign policy: from unilateralism to multilateralism, placing the UN at the heart of the international system. Cohen ends on an optimistic note. He feels it is not too late to make these major changes.

Among the American intellectuals, Cohen is one of the few who have so openly criticized their government's policies in Russia. Unfortunately, Cohen's criticism leads the reader down the wrong path by its own blindness concerning the US government's motivations in Russia.

He supposes - without any supporting proof or argument - that American leaders are motivated by lofty goals: to make Russia as free and prosperous as the US. He belongs to a social-democratic intellectual current that believes, apparently sincerely, in America's professed mission to promote the development of the rest of the world. He never poses the question of interests. Yet, at the end of World War Two, George Kennan, Soviet specialist, former US ambassador to the USSR, and later a 'dove' himself, was absolutely clear: '[...] We have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. [...] Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; [...] We should stop putting ourselves in the position of our brothers' keeper [...].' (Kennan himself, it seems, was not immune to illusion about American 'idealism'.)

In reality, US policy in Russia has

been consistently motivated by two basic economic and geopolitical priorities. The economic chaos that Cohen decries, in fact, makes possible NATO's expansion into former Soviet territories and America's absolute hegemony in the world. A Russia that is so weak economically cannot pose any threat to US domination. And Russia's submission has been a perennial American goal since the end of World War II. According to a 1948 planning document: 'We should set up automatic safeguards to assure that even a regime which is non-communist and nominally friendly to us (1) does not have strong military power; (2) is economically dependent to a considerable extent on the outside world.'

The so-called 'Wolfowitz Doctrine', developed when the USSR was collapsing, calls openly for Russia's subordination to the West, particularly United States. 'Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival [...]

From a more purely economic point of view, shock therapy facilitates the flow of profits and super-profits to the Western financial elite, and, by its destructive effects, prevents Russia from becoming an important competitor in high-value added industries. The country's economic decline to Third World levels forces Russia to specialize in resource extraction and export to the West, especially of oil and gas. The large foreign debt locks it into shock therapy, i.e. neo-liberal economic policy or 'structural adjustment', the policy imposed though the IMF and World Bank on Third World for over 25 years.

The terrible crisis that the Russian population is living through is not, of

course, an end in itself of US policy. This is not a conspiracy aimed at destroying the Russian population. The suffering of the Russian people is a consequence that, on one level, might even be regretted by the US elite. But in the end, it is acceptable 'collateral damage' and certainly not important enough to cause it to rethink shock therapy. Yes, there are contradicting interests too and dangers even for the US, since, as Cohen notes, Russia is still a nuclear power. Moreover, the investment climate for Western capital is quite inhospitable (though Putin is working hard to fix that, mainly at the expense of Russian workers).

For all his own good intentions, which in this case are beyond doubt, Cohens criticism has the pernicious effect of directing our attention away from the criminal interests that are really behind shock therapy and from what it would take to change them - certainly more than an appeal to the US ruling class and intellectuals. Unfortunately, Cohen's blindness is far from unique. The great majority of scholars share it whenever they analyse their own government's foreign policy. As Einstein said, 'The world is a dangerous place. Not because of the people who are evil; but because of the people who don't do anything about it.' While one must admire Cohens passion and humanistic commitment to Russia, his appeal to the US elite and his refusal to denounce the interests that this elite is consciously pursuing in Russia and the world are, in practice, tantamount to doing nothing.