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Social Justice Against Terrorism

14 October 2001, by Solidarity

Like everyone else we are speechless in the face of the sheer magnitude of this act of mass murder, while also profoundly moved by the solidarity and cooperative acts of people in the streets of New York helping each other in the disaster.

As socialists who are revolutionary opponents of United States imperialism, we rely on the development of the consciousness of the population, particularly of the working class majority in society, to confront this system of exploitation and world domination. Our methods of struggle have nothing in common with those who wield terrorist weapons against society, whether they be home-grown fascists like Timothy McVeigh, perpetrators of state terrorism, or forces proclaiming themselves representatives of the oppressed peoples of the world.

The September 11 attacks are a world-class crime against humanity. We condemn without reservation these acts and those who perpetrated them, whoever they may turn out to be. The thousands of working people incinerated in the World Trade Center are innocent of the crimes of imperialism, just as were the hundreds of African civilians killed in the streets of Tanzania and Kenya in the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies there.

As well as a slaughter of innocent people, these attacks are a severe blow against struggles for social justice-from the Palestinian struggle for self-determination to the mobilizations against the institutions of global capitalism.

We must also condemn acts of terror when these are perpetrated by our own government. Refugee camps and towns in Palestine are pulverized by American F-16 aircraft and helicopter gunships, supplied by the United States to the Israeli Defense Force. The U.S. bombing of Baghdad included the deliberate destruction of the water purification and electrical systems on which the civilian population depends. And the sanctions against Iraq have produced a death toll of 5000 Iraqi children every month-roughly equivalent to the estimated carnage at the World Trade Center.

Partisans of social justice must not forget that September 11 also marks the 28th anniversary of one of the great acts of terror in recent history: the U.S.-sponsored Pinochet coup in Chile, unleashing a regime of mass murder against the labour movement and the population of that entire country.

Those who perpetrated the September 11 attacks have nothing in common with the struggles of oppressed peoples. Yet it is a tragic reality that many people in the world-those who have lost hope of seeing a better life for themselves or their children in a world ruled by the United States-have found something to applaud in the "success" of these atrocities. Let us remember that those oppressed by racism and the institutions of global capitalism are among the victims, not the perpetrators, of terrorism.

It is therefore all the more critically important that the people of the United States must not give the U.S. government the free hand it desires to retaliate against the victims of U.S.-dominated global capitalism under the catch-all claim of fighting terrorism.

To repeat the most important point: The enormous crimes committed by the United States government cannot be redressed by violent assaults on the ordinary people of this country. Nor will any justice be achieved by U.S. military retaliation that victimizes the population in the countries of whatever governments may ultimately be deemed responsible for the September 11 crime. We call upon all people to resist media and government-manipulated hysteria calculated to give the political and military establishment of the United States that free hand for a new round of massive violence.

We should all fear, and not accept, the danger of severe restrictions on democratic rights in the name of national security, against the targeting of Arab-Americans for harassment and demonisation, and against the possible crackdown on global justice protest. This will inevitably include new repression directed against the rights of labour in the United States. The repression of

democratic freedoms and civil liberties will be limited only by the population's will to resist. For partisans of social justice, now must not be the time to hide, but to stand up for democracy and the values of our struggle-a struggle for a world organized to truly value all human life, rather than profit.

Frankenstein's Monster (on the attack in the US)

14 October 2001, by Alain Krivine

Now we have to understand why there is such denial of the motives behind the attacks. George Bush's military cheerleading can not, in this regard, make the world forget the responsibility of the great powers, and the American empire particularly, for unleashing the violence which has put the planet permanently on the edge of the abyss. To guarantee unlimited power for a handful of industrial and financial giants, these powers have never hesitated to destroy Third World economies, to support the worst dictatorships while they incited coups d'etat themselves, to hit with embargoes those countries they have taken upon themselves to label "outlaws", even to bomb them when it suits them.

Neo-liberal globalisation has thrown entire regions into total chaos. They have happily financed and armed pawns, made over for the moment as "freedom fighters". And since it came to office, the new American administration has made a point of opposing any treaty which might impede its hegemonic freedom to act — even opposing ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

No one knows, so far, who is behind the murderous actions of September 11. But it is not unlikely that a Frankenstein's monster may have turned against its creator, using that creator's own weapons against it: blind cynicism, brutal force, sophisticated military technology and financial power. How, for example, can we ignore the fact that Saudi billionaire Bin Laden, toward whom so many accusing fingers are pointing, would never have found himself leading a terrorist multinational without initial help from the CIA?
This must move us to vigilance, that no one can begin taking advantage of the mood created today, to direct public outrage against the Muslim world, the Palestinians or Arab peoples. Not to mention immigrant peoples, the designated targets of the Vigipirate plan, [French public security "anti-terrorist" crackdown during the Gulf War and other crises - trans.] which has just been reactivated

September 12, 2001

– translated by Torvald Patterson

A new escalation

14 October 2001, by Michel Warschawski

The assassination signalled the will of the Israeli leaders to push the Palestinians towards increasingly violent reactions, which will allow the Israelis to deepen still more their measures of collective punishment against the people of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Ariel Sharon's political objective is becoming increasingly clear: to bring the Palestinians to their knees so that they agree to negotiate a "provisional long term treaty" which will give Israel control of around 50 per cent of the West Bank as well as its borders and water resources and allow not only the maintenance of existing settlements but also the construction of new ones.

In exchange for which the Palestinians would have the right to manage the rest of the occupied territories in a "broad autonomy" under Israeli supervision. The state of siege which confines the population in increasingly reduced spaces and prevents any normal movement of people and goods, the assassinations of political leaders, the bombings and increasingly systematic incursions in the autonomous zones are intended then to crush the will to resist of the Palestinians so they accept a pure and simple capitulation. However, Ariel Sharon and the generals who surround him have got it wrong again.

It is clear that the Palestinians will not agree to capitulate: the price paid in the course of the last year has been too high for any backwards movement now. Everything indicates that the heroic resistance of this people will continue: a passive resistance to the state of siege and the daily aggressions of the Israeli regime and an armed resistance against soldiers and settlers in the occupied territories, which will sometimes spill over onto Israeli territory in the form of suicide bombings.

If the suffering of the Palestinians is great, nothing seems to indicate a falling off of resistance to the Israeli occupation. The same cannot be said in relation to Israeli society, which has seemed in recent months to show a certain breathlessness. After tasting seven years of a "normality" which

combined security and prosperity, Israelis find it hard to accept the end of the seven fat years.

There is a growing sentiment of insecurity, added now to clear signs of economic recession (exports down by a third, crisis of tourism, rising unemployment and so on), which will get worse in the coming months. Beyond this, the need for a mass mobilization of army reservists to supplement the conscripts in the task of repressing the Intifada concerns Israeli leaders, for if the majority of public opinion still supports Sharon's repressive policy, those who wish to participate directly in it are rare.

In this sense, the number of reservists evading the call-up is surprising if one takes account of the fact that there is still no broad movement against the repressive policy carried out by Sharon and Peres in the occupied territories. A veritable war of attrition has been going on over the past 10 months, in which Israel's overwhelming military superiority is far from a guarantee that the Palestinians will crack first. However, this war of attrition will still demand an enormous price from the Palestinian civil population and it would be absolutely criminal to allow the blood to flow until the exhaustion of the combatants.

It seems, nonetheless, that this is the cynical choice of the imperialist powers. While the Palestinians are unanimous in demanding the dispatch of an international protection force, the international community turns a deaf ear and seems to await a further deterioration of the situation before finally accepting its responsibilities.

It is criminal to leave the Palestinians and Israelis in their unequal standoff and be content to propose certain measures, such as those included in the Mitchell report, while avoiding forcing Israel to implement these decisions. For the US and the Europeans, the rapist has a right of veto on the intervention of the police. The Palestinian national leadership knows it must take Ariel Sharon seriously when he says that we are only at the first stage of the "colonization of Judea and Samaria" and that there is then no question of freezing it as demanded by the Mitchell report that the Israelis have supposedly accepted, albeit with multiple conditions attached.

Only fierce international pressure can oblige the Israeli government to fulfil its commitments and the international solidarity movement must mobilize to demand that the governments decide finally to take the measures necessary to end the suffering of the Palestinians.

The civilian protection missions initiated in France by various organizations are a means to hasten the dispatch of an international protection force. Nevertheless, until this arrives, the Palestinians will have no choice but to continue to resist and fight with all the means at their disposal.

(note - this article was written before the events of September 11)

After Genoa

14 October 2001, by François Vercammen

The final - provisional - result is not in doubt: a heavy moral-symbolic defeat for the assembled imperialist governments; the Berlusconi government, which wanted to throttle the movement, has given a kick-start to the remobilisation of workers and youth. And above all, a new political generation based on "contestation of the system" has arisen on an international scale.

The political-ideological climate is changing: a new period of reconstruction of the movement of the exploited and oppressed has opened, while the capitalist offensive continues apace, while part of the world economy is going into recession. Hope is on the side of the movement. This latter comes out strengthened at all levels, it will undergo a new geographic extension and amplify its influence in society. It is now imposing itself in political debate.

However, to disturb a meeting of the imperialist institutions is one thing, to stop their functioning, indeed to "stop" capitalist globalisation is another. All of a sudden, more quickly and more strongly than might have been thought, the strategic, programmatic and tactical debate opens inside the movement.

Having shattered the climate of resignation, recreated the hope of "a better world", reinvigorated the struggle of the proletariat, this new movement is henceforth engaged in a complex dialectic with the "real" workers' and popular movement.

It has become an issue for all the conservative forces of capitalism: bosses, governments, social democratic bureaucratic apparatuses. Starting from its new responsibilities, it should broaden its analyses and sharpen its proposals. The victory at Genoa has opened a new phase in the class struggle.

A highly symbolic victory

It is the dominant class, and particularly that of the US, who have highlighted the role of the G7 (the seven biggest imperialist countries: the US, Canada, Japan, Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy). What had initially been a relatively discreet and practical meeting (in 1975, the big capitalist powers met for the first time to deal with the biggest monetary crisis of the post war period) became transformed into an attempt to impose a powerful international leadership which watches over the planet. Genoa was the perfect example of this.

However, to create world "state"

institutions is a gigantic task for the dominant classes of globalised capitalism. They experience considerable obstacles in setting up world "state" institutions. The contradictions between them are too strong, the "new" institutions lack any popular legitimacy from the beginning. [1] To overcome these difficulties, there was first the enormity of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), intended to impose secretly a universal protection for "foreign" investments which would override the laws of national states!

The odious structural adjustment plans imposed by the IMF in countries experiencing difficulty in their payments were able to create an illusion of efficiency. After the Asian, Russian, Brazilian and now Argentine crises, the political orientation of the IMF is in a complete impasse.

The most solid point of this institutional framework was, in the absence of a world "government" the G7: the governments of the main imperialist countries, under the guidance of the US (and Russia, admitted to the table for certain matters, transforming the G7 into G8). Prior to Genoa, there were some patching up exercises: a last minute invite to a few African and Asiatic heads of government, as a gesture to "Third Worldism". Some "seduction": the declarations by Ruggiero, Italian foreign minister and former Fiat bigwig, that he "shared the same objectives" as the planned demonstrations. A sharp turnaround: Berlusconi's adoption of an "old fascist" tone, saying that "those who demonstrate against the G7 are against the West!"

The day after the killing of Carlo Giuliano, we witnessed the defeated expressions of the great leaders, while Chirac was supportive of rights of the demonstrators. The final outcome was the precipitate and dispersed departure of the members of this world government, when the brutalised and tortured victims of the "blitz" on the headquarters of the Genoa Social Forum (GSF) were shown on television screens around the world. Then the height of cynicism: to create a fund to fight AIDS.

The sum is derisory [2] but in reality, it is not even new money, but simply a reorganisation of an already existing budget! What significance will the battle of Genoa take? Its impact will spreads out in time and it will act at different levels according to the country.

It is difficult to "gauge world public opinion" but the lasting image which will remain (beyond the violence) is the group of superpower leaders, isolated in a boat, surrounded by barbed war and a "new wall" besieged by hundreds of thousands of demonstrators - old and less old, but above all youth, coming from all over the planet, from all progressive political tendencies, an impressive variety of movements, associations, committees, and so on.

An immense mobilisation of youth, generous, combative, internationalist, which is demanding "another world". The masters of the world wanted this battle to win over public opinion; they have lost it. The attempt to impose a kind of world government has foundered.

That said, "capitalist globalisation" has not been stopped, nor the functioning of these political, technocratic and financial meetings. Hence the strategic debate imposes itself.

Italian upheaval

In Italy the entire political society (which chased him from government in 1994 because he was not able to keep civic peace) was going to judge Berlusconi on his capacity to manage the G7 meeting. Thus, the impact of "Genoa" was making itself felt from before the beginning of the demonstrations.

We know the result. One month later, the consequences of Genoa have not been absent from the media for a day: the effect of the police brutality, the parliamentary commission on the "events", the questioning of some ministers (especially that of the Interior), the tense relations of the Italian government with some EU governments whose citizens were arbitrarily arrested. The struggle to organise solidarity has not ceased.

On the political level, the government has gone on the offensive, relying on the cowardice of the ex-governmental left (Rutelli, part of the DS, ex-PCI leadership). It has sought to criminalise the whole radical milieu (beyond the "Black Block"). It is trying to involve the "Olive Tree" in a political sacred union ("bipartisan"). And as if by chance, bombs explode accompanied by communiqués signed by the "Red Brigades". Playing on the fears of people and the "sense of state" of social-democracy, Berlusconi seeks to block the trade union mobilisations planned for the autumn! The shock of Genoa, which is traversing Italian society, has suddenly overthrown the political chessboard in Italy.

Not because of the violence and its consequences, but because of the extraordinary political force that had accumulated and set up the Genoa Social Forum (GSF), which Berlusconi had totally underestimated. Hence the battle against the G7 has also become a battle against the Berlusconi government and its politics.

It was Berlusconi who wanted it, in having theatrically erected "his" summit as symbol of his political maturity. The opposition which met the challenge was not the ex-governmental left, nor the CGIL (the big trade union confederation, member of the European Trade Union Confederation), but a vast alliance between "the movement against capitalist globalisation" and significant trade union sectors, some of which were in struggle, which has allowed an extraordinary mobilisation of student, high school, unemployed or insecurely employed youth.

The GSF has shown a great political maturity, welding together its different elements, with the specificity of their demands and modalities of action, stretching from important Church sectors to very radical socio-political currents, via the FIOM (the metalworkers' union, led by the left). What was most spectacular was the "red" mobilisation where the radical (social and political) left, national and international, played a determinant

role.

That is explained largely by the role of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC). The contingent of Communist Youth was impressive in its combativity; the federations of the PRC provided the infrastructure of the mobilisation. They formed a good third of the big demonstration of between 200,000 and 250,000 people! Fausto Bertinotti, PRC leader, has been entirely involved in the movement, he has shown a total respect for the autonomy of this latter; he has not given in to the very strong pressure to defend the bourgeois state, its stability, its right to repression and so on; he has understood the radicalisation of youth, its political culture, its modes of action. The PRC positions itself as the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist party.

The detonator

The most extraordinary contribution of the movement against capitalist globalisation, of a universal significance, is to have broken the feeling of resignation and political impotence which had massively affected the popular classes and activist circles, and to have restored cohesion and perspective to a resistance that had never ceased.

After the defeat of the proletariat on an international scale, the impasse seemed total and durable: historical crisis of the traditional popular/workers' movement and its dominant currents (social democracy, Stalinism, anti-imperialist populism), major doubt on the socialist perspective, quasi-disappearance of the revolutionary left.

One could legitimately ask how far the neo-liberal tidal wave would go. And especially: from where could come the spark, the founding event strong, deep, with universal significance, liberating to break with the 20 "years of lead" which came at the end of the 20th century. Now we know the answer; it is the "anti-globalisation movement"!

Once again, as in 1968, the detonator came from outside of the "historically constituted" traditional labour movement. And again it is related to a new radicalisation of youth. In 1968 there was a massive explosion of a combative student offensive in conditions of prosperity and optimism, which impacted on a working class whose cohesion and combativity - sterilized by the still powerful apparatuses of the trade unions and socialist or Communist parties - were released, culminating, in certain countries, in general strikes and popular mobilizations, indeed revolutionary or semi-revolutionary situations. The socialist revolution was on the agenda.

Radicalised youth drew the conclusion that it was necessary to link up with the working class and to build "new" Marxist and revolutionary parties. Today it is all more complicated, more difficult, more fragile.

Firstly, an uninterrupted capitalist offensive of great width is continuing. Secondly, the traditional labour movement, thirty years after 1968, has gone several stages further in its degeneration. It has now lost any reference to self-emancipation and global contestation, determination and militancy on everyday demands, the broad aspirations of society (women, the Third World, war and peace, internationalism, ecology). Its attraction for youth is about equal to zero. Finally, since 1980, two generations of youth have experienced the neo-liberal "culture" of individualism, anti-political attitudes, consumerism, careerism, a fascination with new technologies which project an exciting but virtual future. [3]

The "movement against capitalist globalisation" was born "negatively", in pain, under the whip of a terrible regression on all levels (social, democratic, humane, individual, community) and the abandonment of its aspirations by the traditional labour and popular movement, now completely aligned behind neo-liberal policy.

The opening in Seattle

The real breakthrough was the "discovery" that a mass demonstration targeting the international institutions could jeopardize the "functioning" of globalised capitalism. There were preceding indicators. In June 1997, 50 000 demonstrators from the "European Marches Against Unemployment, Job Insecurity and Exclusion" filled the streets of Amsterdam at the time of the EU Summit.

The quasi-total failure of this meeting, "gratuitous" police brutality and the total negligence of the European Trade Union Confederation suddenly made it a world event because CNN broadcast it throughout the world. [4] The first symbolic "victory" over the bodies of globalization was the "peaceful" encirclement of the Parisian head office of the OECD, which succeeded in obliging the French government to abandon the MAI. [5]

Since the battle in Seattle, this new consciousness of "taking on" the globalised political framework re-engaged the offensive spirit, the militant determination, and therefore the process of accumulation of political convictions and activist commitments. Through the Internet, this spirit was very quickly diffused on a planetary scale.

At the same time it reinforced and multiplied local and national initiatives, and gathered together, on each "global" occasion, the cadres of the still fragmented and dispersed movements.

It was in the United States that the combination took place between the beginning of a youth radicalisation and a labour-union movement in dramatic decline which, in 1995, turned to the student milieu to help it to reorganize. Seattle did not fall from the sky.

There was a pre-Seattle. It was necessary to "build" the movement through small scale and dispersed work, until the force of the globalisation of capitalism imposed a centripetal dynamic on the multitude of initiatives. Already daring initiatives had drawn the attention of broader circles on an international scale.

To mention a few: the spectacular

commemoration of Bastille Day in 1989 in Paris, where the cancellation of the Third World debt was demanded, subsequently taken up by the Belgian CADTM; neo-Zapatism and its international conferences since 1994; the initiative of Le Monde Diplomatique on the Tobin tax which led quickly to the constitution of a significant organization, ATTAC-France. [6]

Several not so spectacular efforts prepared the ground. Initially, there was the work of intellectual development (analyses, arguments, alternative proposals). It gave a solid base to the movement, encouraged self-confidence among activists, established a tone of authority in the media, and finally generated a spirit of the offensive against the upholders of neo-liberalism.

Let us not forget that the latter current of thought was massively dominant in the universities, the media, the schools, the educational programmes of the traditional labour movement. Prior to Seattle, through the extent, plurality and quality of this work, "the movement" constituted a enough strong trend in public opinion to impose a previously "forbidden" debate on the neo-liberal ideologists.

Its extraordinary aspect it is that it was (and remains, for the moment) bipolar: no intermediate current social democracy for example participates. The SPs (and governmental CPs) still have not made up for this lost time which pushes them to the margin, indeed outside of, the movement.

This initial "cultural" victory played no little part in establishing a dynamic of the offensive among activists. This is especially true of France with a "left" intellectual re-engagement of a significant intellectual current.

At base, there is the struggle of workers: the strike movement of the winter of 1995 against the Juppé government. Then, there is a "micro-sociological" generational factor. Twenty years of depoliticisation, de-ideologisation, demobilisation succeeded in discouraging youth from concerning themselves with the public sphere and diverted its energy towards the private or commercial sphere.

Thus, the movement began thanks to the thin layer of "the generation of 68". It renewed its commitment but within an organisational framework which was more "relaxed" than that of the revolutionary organizations they had known previously. Seizing this "second chance", they brought their experience and knowledge.

Within this more convivial and less constraining framework, centred on the burning questions facing humanity, combining practical proposals and theoretical and analytical debates, the engagement with the younger generations took place the beginning of a new youth radicalisation on a planetary scale.

There is no other explanation for the extraordinary success of this truly fragile unitary dynamic of a movement which was "incoherent and chaotic", according to a hostile media. The Genoa Social Forum is the most complete example.

Finally, "Seattle" was preceded by a growing activity of campaigns, conferences and demonstrations outside the meetings of the international institutions. While establishing itself in an increasing number of countries the "international movement" favoured an increased participation of "local" associations and organizations, and solidified the links between the active "international" nuclei.

The "movement against (neo-liberal or capitalist) globalisation" is indeed organized, in its manner, according to its activities, according to its own methods. [7] The proof was provided in Porto Alegre with the World Social Forum (January-February 2001) and the World Economic Forum at Davos.

"Porto Alegre" represents the equivalent of Seattle, but at the level of organization. It would never have taken place however without the accelerated sequence of big meetings in Cologne (June 1999), Bangkok (February 2000) and Geneva (June 2000). Along the way, the first real social and trade-union movements joined in (ATTAC-France where significant trade unionists take part, Via Campesina, the Korean KCTU).

These three factors provided sufficient strength for the transition made at Seattle, from a trend of opinion to a mobilized movement capable of fighting for practical-political objectives. But one should not hide that our successes are also due to the weaknesses of our enemy, and that in spite of the extraordinary material strength it possesses.

The increased contradictions between the three great powers (the United States, European Union, Japan) have developed more freely since the collapse of the USSR. The globalisation of capitalism in its current form has an endemic instability because of the massive deregulation ("liberalization") as well as the increased weight and volatility of financial capital. In this context, the international organizations of Big Capital have much less credibility among the population inasmuch as they have assumed responsibility for the most antisocial policy for half a century. To this has been added, recently, the unilateral international policy of the Bush government and the systematic inefficiency of the IMF/World Bank coupling from the capitalist point of view.

There was something completely new at Genoa: political confrontation was stripped of all concrete content. The G7 agenda was not worth a nail. Their goal was "to hold the meeting" and attract the maximum media coverage, in short impose themselves as a world leadership. The demonstrators disputed that, in massive numbers. The political stakes were colossal: to win over public opinion.

Imperialism's counter-attack

Since the battle of Genoa, the problem of violence has been omnipresent in the media and the debates within the movement. The reason is clear: in Seattle, the US government decided to launch an exceptionally brutal attack [8] against massive non-violent disobedience. This latter proved very effective: the meeting of WTO barely took place (and foundered due to the

internal conflicts between great powers). Since then, the dominant classes have begun to grasp the dimension of the problem which had emerged. [9]

Experiencing systemic instability, lack of political legitimacy and the attenuation of social control over the working classes, they now take account of the possibility of social explosions of great breadth, urban risings, peasant revolts in the countryside and so on. Seattle was a very nasty surprise for them. The immediate reaction was to try to "choke" the movement which appeared "imperceptible" in the absence of the usual "reliable" interlocutors.

Their strategic schema was to dislocate the movement in the short term by a combination of two elements: the criminalisation of all the politically radical currents (not only the more violent ones); the co-option of the collaborationist currents, [10] in the image of the leaders of the traditional trade-union and political labour movement.

But for "class collaboration" to function, it is necessary as a preliminary to destroy the rising radicalisation and to dislodge the anti-capitalist currents often initiating and leading the movement. It is difficult without a political reversal of the dominant neo-liberalism and in the absence of solid moderate currents.

Thus, it is brutalisation which prevails. The violence in Prague was obviously a case apart (if only because the state apparatus originating from the Stalinist bureaucracy had never learned a gradual response, and because of the weak participation of the indigenous labour movement).

In Nice, the Jospin government was very careful suspending Schengen, putting his confidence in the trade-union bureaucracies. Gothenburg, on the other hand, was the first attempt, prepared within the European Union. The demonstration was massive and peaceful, the vandalism of the "Black Block" isolated and tolerated. That very evening the campaign of criminalisation of the movement was launched, throughout Europe and lasting several weeks.

It was in this context that the dominant classes in Europe had prepared for Genoa, together with the American government. With the Berlusconi government to apply it. Thus, Genoa became the real attempt at subduing the movement by state violence. It was a project prepared by the European social democratic regimes, in particular France, Germany, [11] Great Britain and, until Berlusconi's victory in May, in Italy.

To attribute this project to Berlusconi would be to give him too much credit. [12] Because it was Italian social democracy (DS, Left Democrats, ex-PCI) which initiated the EU's tactical project at the time of the demonstration in Naples (March 2001), conceived as a dress rehearsal for Genoa.

They had obtained the suitable instruments by replacing the heads of the various apparatuses of repression, installing their right-hand men. They had also refused any preliminary meeting with the GSF, the organizers of the counter-summit. They had inflated the symbolic significance of the G7 meeting.

Berlusconi accepted all this as a gift! What he did was to introduce a manoeuvre of rapprochement with the GSF, to exploit the internal contradictions of the latter and try to break up or impose discipline on the movement. This was accompanied by a mollifying discourse on the part of Foreign Minister Ruggieri, who said "we agree on the objective to help the third world - but not on the means". The end result is known: Berlusconi applied the violent strategy elaborated by the EU, adding selective terror and torture.

There has never been such a directly globalised transparency in a political combat between the imperialist leadership of the planet and a mass contestatory movement.

Tactics within the movement

The passage from a trend of opinion to a movement of massive mobilization aiming at highly symbolic objectives of the adversary transformed it into an effective factor. The novelty was mass disobedience with the aim of disturbing the functioning of ameeting with a high media profile. That implied a limited confrontation, dependent on the actions of the apparatus of repression.

In Seattle, the effectiveness of the tactic was shown. It rests on considerations which modern capitalism had inculcated in us for ten years. An activity becomes "a fact" only to the extent that the media talk about it. Activity, interesting ideas, mass demonstrations are worthwhile only if accompanied by "incidents". The feeling is widespread that we live under a cynical democracy and that voting is irrelevant.

The parties in government do the opposite of what they promise during the election campaigns. And then there is the abuse of power, its arbitrary character: a Serb general is legally kidnapped and brought before the International Court in the Hague; but Israel, with the support of the United States, can defy the resolutions adopted by UNO and continue to kill Palestinian youth.

It is all the more unbearable than there is a global consciousness in gestation: there is urgency, a duty to act, stop the destructive machine, the threatened planet, the existence of humanity in danger, the unbearable cruelty in the Third World, the generalized social insecurity, the desolation of refugees and immigrants.

In such a global context, youth have risen up to resist and to protest. Anti-authoritarian by nature, they have no problem in transgressing the rules of the game (which have become ridiculous), occupying (prohibited) public space, practising democracy, fighting to win, "to change the world"!

This completely legitimate youth radicalism is one thing. Another thing altogether is the application of a violent tactic by an organisation which bears political and moral responsibility before the entire movement and public opinion. Like

any tactic of any current, it must be judged and be subjected to political discussion.

We do not compare the anarchists to the Black Block. We do not approach this latter as an agency of the police infiltrated by the fascist far right, even if their methods lend themselves to this (hoods, commando operations, blind destruction). But we consider this starting from a principle: our movement aims at the emancipation through self-activity of the working and popular masses, solicits its active participation and applies democracy in its own ranks.

We are opposed to minority violence which replaces mass action, or worse: which uses the mass of the participants as a cover to carry out violent actions which attack the demonstrators. We will withdraw our sector of the demonstration from any inopportune interference which tries to use us for this purpose.

Yet the problem will not be solved by an excommunication of the "violent ones" and their denunciation in common with the moderate wing of the movement which is a candidate for "dialogue" with our worst enemies. The problem is bigger: it is to convince the radical youth which wants to fight and win, of a revolutionary socialist strategy instead of a succession of increasingly violent battles against the repressive apparatus.

Strategy and political problems

This problem raises the question of the strategyof the movement in its multiple aspects: Initially, there is in its activity and its current success a double time-lag: between its capacity to hinder the operation of certain meetings of the "Masters of the World" and the frustration of their objectives (MAI in Paris, WTO in Seattle, the abandonment of the WB meeting in Barcelona, the rout of the G7 at Genoa) on the one hand, and on the other the difficulty in realizing its most "globalist" demands, such as the cancellation of the Third World debt and the imposition of the Tobin tax, but also halting neo-liberal capitalist globalisation. Secondly, the dynamic of the movement has developed virtually outside the control of the official institutions and the bureaucracies of the labour and popular movement.

This fact gives it a subversive aspect. Because of its prestige and its attraction for youth, a section of the intellectuals and the vibrant parts of the trade union movement, it will be confronted more andmore with a policy of integration which starts with small steps.

The World Bank invites a dialogue during the next summit in Washington. The Belgian presidency of the EU promises a great convention for the year 2002, preparing a "constitution" for Europe.

There will be many more attempts to create a "civil society" within the framework of "governance", with the material means to support it. Basically, the margin for a compromise based on another policy "more to the left" is thin, even non-existent: acceleration or slowing up of the economic situation, the dominant class does not yield anything. At each stage, it finds arguments to reinforce the neo-liberal policy.

The choice remains: neo-liberalism or anti-capitalism. Will it be different in the case of a genuine world economic recession, coming after the so-called financial crisis of 1998-99? Will the imperialist bourgeoisies be driven back to calling on the intervention of their States to save their system? Will social democracy re-appear on this occasion, carried along by a massive wave of "re-regulation"?

Thirdly, the radicalism of this movement and its autonomy of thought and action constitute a direct threat to the survival of international social democracy.

It tries without much success to make us forget that it has been in the forefront of implementing neo-liberal polices for ten to twenty years (according to the countries), that it has actively deregulated by supporting and propagating the benevolence of this globalisation, and that its strongest leaders (Blair, Jospin, Schröder, D' Alema) are in the bunker of the "Masters of the world", whereas young people, workers, trade unionists and feminists demonstrate against them.

Since Genoa, the French PS supports the demonstrators, Schröder and Jospin agree to put the Tobin tax on the agenda of the EU (in order to propose it to Bush), the president of the Belgian PS (Walloon), di Rupo, invites himself to Porte Alegre. The Italian DS has emerged crushed by the shock of Genoa, so much so that they are fighting for their survival as a significant autonomous party.

Politics, including party politics, will enter in force into the movement. [13] It is moreover an objective given, impossible to circumvent: a strong demand supported by a strong movement inevitably comes up against the need to impose it on the political regime. The problem is, in which form will the movement approach the political-institutional ground?

Fourthly, the principal challenge of the movement (besides its consolidation), in the stage which has just opened, it rooting itself on the national terrain, which means more concretely: the active participation in the struggles of the exploited and oppressed and the construction of a relationship with their organisations for the defence of their conditions of existence.

The first successful collaboration between the movement and the trade unions take place in Seattle. The reorganization, under Sweeny from 1995 onwards, of the AFL-CIO had in fact prepared the ground. In Italy, the dialectic between the two was from the start stronger.

Prior to Genoa, in Porte Alegre, the GSF was constituted with the involvement (in particular) of the trade-union left of the CGIL (the FIOM) and COBAS. Following that, the FIOM invited the GSF to speak at meetings of metalworkers who were preparing a general strike and big demonstrations.

There was a very strong trade-union participation in the demonstration of

250,000 people on July 22. Will the GSF, with its multiple components united on globalisation, but very heterogeneous in relation to the social aspects, be able to assume the multiple and specific demands raised by support for a large scale social struggle, such as the predicted "hot autumn"?

Spontaneous and conscious anti-capitalism

Coming events (EU summit in Belgium, second meeting in Porto Alegre) will show where the movement and its various components are at, in its multiple national and international dimensions, political and social.

And if it succeeds in maintaining its unity of action, around which initiatives and with what centre of gravity. As the political debate will become extensive from the strength acquired by the movement and because of increasing interference from outside political actors in the movement, revolutionary Marxists will have to intervene with their analyses and proposals.

Three questions should be developed.

First, the overall strategic question: how to overcome neo-liberal capitalist globalisation? That will depend more and more on the analysis made; if one fights against its excesses, effects or bases; if one establishes the adequate link between globalisation and neo-liberalism.

But in all cases, we have to note that it is the mass of workers, driven to defend their conditions of daily existence, who form the majority social force. That should rule out any vanguardist and substitutionist short cuts. That is not obvious any more - in particular in the eyes of the younger generations and the very significant currents focussed completely on the "Third World".

It is necessary to start by deploying a full analysis of the conditions of exploited labour (not defined by direct membership of the traditional labour movement) so that the movement against globalisation and the radicalised youth takes up the class struggle. The "new" working, insecurely employed or unemployed youth - super-exploited, in any event - will undoubtedly be a component. In addition it is vital to reconstitute, in a certainly complex analysis, the unity of the proletariat on an international scale.

It is certainly not easy, because it still goes against the current today. It is a decisive element of the reconstitution of internationalist class consciousness. It is a question of going beyond moralistic analyses (poor/rich) or of not confusing basic analysis and tactical proposals (dialectical between social sectoral movements: child slavery, the treatment of women, the informal sector, the young unemployed who have never had a job, the "working-poor", employees on temporary contracts).

It is a question of highlighting the determinant role of the labouring classes of the imperialist countries the most numerous, the most combative, the best organized and from which big multinational capital extorts the mass of its profits. It is only by starting from this reconstituted unity of a proletariat which has never been as numerous [14] and at the same time heterogeneous that solidarity and common struggle can find a solid basis.

Secondly, and linked to the role of workers, there is the anti-capitalist objective. It can be said that the "movement against globalisation" is animated by a spontaneously or empirically anti-capitalist spirit. There is certainly an anti-systemic consciousness, and among youth a global contestation. But it is necessary to note the distance which currently separates this spontaneous consciousness from an anti-capitalist orientation which implies an overthrow of the structures and bases of society.

Two considerations

First, there is a widespread attitude or feeling which seems anti-capitalist by simple contrast with a neo-liberalism which remains radical, rigid, omnipresent, in fact totalitarian (examples: the massive demand for the taxation of profits; the spontaneous questioning of the sacrosanct rights of employers on dismissals - radical, popular, demands but ones which Capital, driven back, could satisfy).

This game of contrasts could lead to an impressionistic overvaluation of concessions which the bourgeoisie could be forced to make, after years of brutal offensive, accompanied by a policy of "opening" to the movement.

Then, the dominant tone today is to criticise the international institutions and to denounce their policy against the South; the general solution being to propose another development of the Third World, by a transfer of incomes from the rich countries of the North towards those of the South (Tobin tax, cancellation of the Third World debt, aid funds). That reflects well the ambient consciousness, particularly among youth.

As revolutionary Marxists we put at the heart of all true (anti-capitalist!) solutions the question of private property, and the unavoidable need for the expropriation of Big Capital. The responsibility for the reigning barbarism is not dispersed between the IMF, the multinationals, the financial markets and the governments of the great powers.

There is unity and coherence in this neo-liberal policy. It rests on an extreme concentration of economic and political power. We must then demonstrate and popularise the idea that it is necessary to break capitalist domination to well as put an end to neo-liberal policies and trade globalisation, to realize the demands and proposals of the movement. That will inevitably raise a discussion on the post-capitalist, Socialist society.

Finally, it is necessary to raise the question of forms of organization, including the Party. Among the

"historical" cycles which have been just concluded, there is that of a certain form of the Party which was born in the Second International at the end of the 19th century (1880) and which the Russian revolution (of 1917) absorbed while transforming it according to the period of war-revolution (the vanguard party; the anarchists adopted a similar form, it is often forgotten!). In spite of the differences between the two periods, they had in common the idea that the Party incarnated the maximum of socialist consciousness and militant commitment, and for this reason, had the right to direct the social movement in its entirety. This idea of preponderance is strongly rejected.

In addition there are neo-liberalism's attempts to suffocate politics in general (to the benefit of a technocratic-commercial management of society). The idea of the reconstitution of a Party, composed of active members who fight for the self-emancipation of the proletariat, therefore for a self-managed socialist society, has some ground to cover before being recognized as a useful, even essential, tool.

The current situation is full of imponderables. The "new" social movements occupy centre stage. The working class will settle, during the future revival of its struggles what is living and what is dead in the "historic" workers' movement, political and trade union, in decline.

The new young generation will make its own experience and will certainly adopt surprising organisational forms. The fragments of the revolutionary left who have survived the "years of lead" without succumbing to sectarianism will play a significant role.

The landscape is then strongly dispersed, with diverse dynamics and trajectories, but it is clear that a new period of the class struggle has opened up. The question of new parties and a new socialist-anti-capitalist International is posed.

Footnotes

[1] They do not all fall into the same category: the UN with its General Assembly, as well as a series of its social "agencies" has acquired a certain credit; that is not true of the World Bank and still less the technocratic IMF; the situation of the EU is more ambiguous: it is less its lack of democratic representativeness than its antisocial policy which is in question. The G7 meeting on the other hand undoubtedly represents the maximum of political and symbolic arrogance - more still than the UN Security Council.

[2] As our comrade Gigi Malabarba, leader of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) in the Italian Senate, told Berlusconi in this assembly, "the funds are less than you have invested this year in your football club [AC Milan]".

[3] This is reminiscent of the ideological situation after the disastrous defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871: when the alternative was to hang on to the distant perspective of socialism or emigrate to America.

[4] Without any tangible result moreover. Outside Europe, it was too weak as a symbol of globalisation. In Europe even the EU felt itself obliged to organise, in Luxembourg, a "summit" for jobs while the ECTU held a "demonstration". But - the sign of a still very unfavourable relationship of forces - the intergovernmental co-ordination on jobs decided on has become an instrument of neo-liberal war against the world of labour.

[5] The draft Multilateral Agreement on Investment sought to create an international legislation, overriding that of the national states and freeing foreign investments from virtually all social and ecological constraints. While the main imperialist powers have not been able to agree on its adoption, the US keeps up the pressure, integrating its chapters in the agreements it imposes, NAFTA (with Mexico and Canada) and the draft FTAA (see article in this issue).

[6] See Christophe Aguiton, "Le monde nous appartient", Plon, Paris 2001, which gives a virtually complete image of the movement, its history, its components and its activities.

[7] We should then distinguish the "organized movement" from the innumerable and anonymous actions carried out by the oppressed and exploited throughout the world to defend their conditions of existence against capitalist globalisation. The two elements the organized movement and the actions rest on the same objective base: the internationalisation of the capitalist system. This latter makes possible the meeting between the two. It is an objective to strive for although not yet realised. Confusing the two would be to exaggerate the current force of the organized movement, and underestimate its remaining strategic and tactical problems.

[8] "Exceptionally" faced to white workers and students. For in the ghettos of the people "of colour", brutality and arbitrariness are the rule.

[9] In a prescient article written in 1996, an establishment ideologue made this warning: "The world is undoubtedly heading for one of those tragic moments which will lead historians to ask why nobody did anything in time" (Ethan Kapstein, "Workers and the World Economy?", Foreign Affairs, May-June 1996, p.18).

[10] They could find themselves in a structure of dialogue or better inside a "civil society" created from above by the same state institutions, underpinned by subsidies, material means of functioning and why not, personal careers. This civil society would become a cog of "governance", which would progressively substitute itself for classic parliamentary democracy.

[11] Otto Schilly, German Minister of the Interior, went to Rome after Genoa, not to protest about the police but to demand that the Italian government assume and defend the monopoly of violence of the "democratic state". See Corriere de la Sera, July 26, 2001.

[12] Although Berlusconi won the elections in May 2001, his government did not take office until the beginning of July. He is not then lying (although it is revealing of his personal cowardice) when he says that all the preparation of repression was the work of the preceding centre left government.

[13] One was given a foretaste when Bernard Cassen, president of ATTAC-France, parachuted his friend Chevênement, ex-minister of the interior and scourge of "illegal immigrants" to the front of the demonstration and meeting at Porte Alegre.

[14] So much the worse for Jeremy Rifkin's "end of work" thesis (US edition, 1995).

Historic breakthrough for Australian left

14 October 2001, by John Tully

Six months ago, there was an extraordinary breakthrough when nine socialist organisations [1] came together to form the Socialist Alliance. That breakthrough was consolidated at the first national conference of the Alliance, held over the weekend of 4-5 August at the Melbourne Trades Hall.

We run little risk of hyperbole if we use the word "historic" to describe the conference. It was probably the first time since the formation of the Communist Party of Australia [2] in the early 1920s that there has been such unity.

One hundred and fourteen delegates from 29 local groups from every state and territory of Australia worked together in a spirit of constructive non-sectarianism that would have been inconceivable even 12 months ago.

The conference agreed on a fighting electoral platform with which to contest this year's federal elections [3] and adopted the most democratic and inclusive of any constitution of any political organization in the country.

The delegates also agreed to campaign jointly on a number of issues, including the anti-globalisation protests against the Commonwealth Business Forum later this year. [4]

The two main political slogans with which the Alliance will contest the elections are: 'Fight Racism' and 'Fight Economic Rationalism' (as neo-liberalism is known here).

Although the Alliance is dominated by the nine socialist organisations that made the original call, significant numbers of unaffiliated people have joined.

These include the prominent environmentalist and former construction union leader Jack Mundey; [5] Annie Delaney [6] from the Textiles Union; Ken Fry, a former Labor Party parliamentarian and minister; and Craig Johnston, the Victorian Secretary of the Amalgamated Manufacturing Workers Union.

It is a sign of the healthiness and maturity of the Alliance that the conference debates were spirited, but comradely. There was little sign of the old "winner-take-all" mentality that used to blight relationships between left organizations.

Differences

There were, however, some big differences, the most important of which was over the nature of the Alliance.

A minority of delegates wanted the Alliance to adopt a "maximum" program and to proceed rapidly to form a revolutionary party.

A clear majority of delegates rejected this position, arguing in favour of a broad formation that could go far beyond the membership of the existing constituent organisations.

The majority position was that the key task was to bring the broadest possible layers of people into struggle. If it is to grow beyond the existing far-left ghetto, Socialist Alliance must be easy to join.

As long as people want to fight back against neo-liberalism and racism, then they should be able to find a political home in the Socialist Alliance. Talk of soviets, workers' militias and suchlike is not very helpful at this stage. The other danger, of diluting the socialist, anti-capitalist thrust of the Alliance, was also avoided.

Socialist Alliance is not perfect. We have a long way to go before we can become a pole of attraction strong enough to draw significant numbers of people away from the Labor Party. There was also a problem with gender balance on the newly elected national executive. However, given the unprecedented unity and goodwill that was consolidated at the conference, we can work together to overcome the internal problems and come out fighting.

PLATFORM OF THE SA

An amendment moved by Socialist Democracy specifically entrenches tendency rights in the constitution.

The amendment was adopted overwhelmingly. The national conference also agreed to prioritise the following areas in election campaigning:

- scrap the GST (Goods and Services Tax) and tax the rich;
- action against poverty including an immediate 25% increase in all pensions and benefits;
- restore funding to public education; no state aid to private schools;
- stop privatisation;
- for a treaty now to ensure justice and genuine reconciliation with indigenous people;
- cancel Third World debts to Australia;
- stop uranium mining, save the forests;
- maintain and extend the public health system, no subsidies to private health companies;
- withdraw from the WTO;
- repeal all anti-union laws;
- close the detention centres, defend asylum seekers;
- stop casualisation and outsourcing; 25 hour week to create jobs;
- no to the Star Wars missile program, cut military spending;
- end all forms of discrimination, no to racism, sexism and homophobia.

Footnotes

[1] The nine organisations are: the Democratic Socialist Party (affiliated until 1985 to the Fourth International), the International Socialist Organization (linked to the British Socialist Workers Party), Workers Liberty, Workers Power, the Freedom Socialist Party, the Workers League, the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq (Australia), Socialist Alternative and Socialist Democracy.

[2] The Communist Party of Australia dissolved itself in the early 1990s.

[3] Australia has a three-tier system of government: local, state and federal or national. The federal elections must be held this year. All the signs are that the incumbent conservative Coalition government will be voted out in favour of the Australian Labor Party, which is led by the Blairite Kim Beazley.

[4] Members of the constituents of the Socialist Alliance were active in last September's S11 protests against the World Economic Forum in Melbourne.

[5] Jack Mundey was a central leader of the militant Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) in the late 1960s and early '70s. Mundey, who was a member of the former Communist Party of Australia, became legendary because of his union's "green bans" policy, which saved much of Sydney's architectural and environmental heritage from the developers.

[6] Delaney is a key organiser of the "Fairwear" campaign against the use of sweated labour.

Tampa crisis sparks furore

14 October 2001, by John Tully

The St Louis, which sailed from Hamburg in 1939, was refused permission to land its cargo of German Jewish refugees in Cuba or the United States and all other countries in the Americas. The refugees returned to Hamburg and many were subsequently deported to the Nazi death camps. The Tampa case has highlighted the lengths to which a xenophobic government is prepared to go to maintain racial "purity".

The Tampa was first alerted by the Australian Coast Guard. After rescuing the refugees just as their boat was breaking up, the Norwegian ship steamed directly to Christmas Island, an Australian dependency far out in the Indian Ocean off Java. The Government refused the refugees permission to land and ordered the Tampa out of Australian waters. The captain declined to leave: pointing out that his vessel was not equipped to carry so many passengers.

Prime Minister Howard responded by sending heavily armed SAS troops to occupy the ship. The standoff was resolved by an expensive deal stitched up with New Zealand and Nauru (the latter is a client state of Australian imperialism) in order to save Howard's face. The refugees are currently en route to Port Moresby aboard an Australian warship prior to being "processed".

Australian human rights groups, left wing political parties and trade unions responded angrily to the incident. The vast majority of Christmas Islanders made their support for the refugees clear. Paddy Crumlin, from the Maritime Union of Australia pointed out that Howard had made it likely that ships' captains might in future ignore the law of the sea and leave refugees to drown. Senator Bob Brown, from the Australian Greens, lambasted the government for its inhumanity. The Socialist Alliance, which will field candidates in the federal elections this year, also slammed Howard's racism and hypocrisy. After being called a "traitor" by Conservative MP Peter Slipper and radio talkback "shock jocks", Brown received death threats. However, Kim Beazley, the leader of the main opposition party, the Australian Labor Party rushed to support the Prime Minister's actions. As a result, the Government is riding high in opinion polls.

One reliable poll indicated that perhaps as many as 77 per cent of the population supported the Government's actions, with only 20 per cent opposed and three per cent undecided. The Prime Minister's personal standing has also been enhanced and it is even possible that

his hard-line stance will win him the election. Howard is an astute politician and it is an open secret that he seized hold of the opportunity presented by the Tampa to wage a racist crusade to claw back support.

In doing so, he has let the racist genie out of the bottle. This year marks the centenary of Federation. In 1901, the six British colonies on the Australian continent voted to amalgamate into the Commonwealth of Australia. The first piece of legislation passed by the new federal government entrenched the White Australia Policy, which barred the immigration of "non-whites" into Australia. Ironically, while the Tampa was lying off Christmas Island, the Prime Minister attended a ceremony commemorating the invention of the Australian flag at the site of the first federal parliament in Melbourne. If anyone had any doubts that the White Australia Policy was still alive, the Tampa affair ought to have made them think again. The wave of public hysteria whipped up by Howard and his allies on talk-back radio is eerily reminiscent of the darkest days of the Policy.

For all Howard's bluster about Australia being "swamped" by hordes of "illegal" boat people, Australia is simply too far away from the regions of the world in which refugees are created to be a realistic choice for most. Four hundred and fifty traumatized people at Christmas Island are a tiny fraction of the estimated 2.6 million Afghan refugees, most of whom languish in squalid camps in Iran and Pakistan. Australia admits around 10,000 refugees per year, most via an overseas settlement program and very few are allowed asylum after arriving by boat or plane. Most of the burden of caring for refugees falls onto Third World countries.

Howard's racism also mirrors that of other western governments, many of which have cut their contributions to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. (Last year, UNHCR had a shortfall of US$100 million for its existing projects.) Howard's racism is underlined by his silence on the presence in Australia of up to 55,000 Britons, Americans and others who have overstayed their visitors' visas. None of these is ever locked up in the country's immigration "detention centres" (read prisons) but then they have the advantage of being born with white skins.

Howard also rants about the nefarious activities of "people smugglers" who bring refugees to Australia by boat, implying that they are the root cause of the problem. In fact, there are perhaps forty million refugees and other "displaced persons" in the world and if the activities of the "smugglers" were curtailed, the problem would not be any smaller.

Howard also conveniently forgets that Australia is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. As such, the country is duty bound to accept as refugees any who arrive here fearing persecution in their home country, regardless of whether they arrive here without a passport or other documents. Howard claims that "illegal" arrivals are "jumping the queue" but there is not and never was any queue.

Australia is also the only developed country in the world with a policy of "mandatory detention" of asylum seekers who arrive without papers. Such people - including children - are locked up in medium security prisons, often in remote and inhospitable locations. Sometimes they spend years behind razor wire while their applications are processed. In recent times, inmates have staged strikes and hunger strikes to draw attention to their plight. Former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser has called the detention centres "hell holes" and the Anglican Bishop of Perth called them concentration camps. In one incident last year, a three-year-old child was put in irons and in another a leading official of the private company that runs the centres handcuffed a man to a bed frame and beat him with a truncheon. The centres are overcrowded and often unsanitary, yet Australian Corrections Management - a subsidiary of the American private prison operator Wackenhutt - makes a nice profit from this human misery. One estimate is that it costs the taxpayers AUS$170 per night to house the detainees; enough to put them up in luxury at the Hilton Hotel.
Back in 1937, John Howard's political ancestor, Bob Menzies earned himself the soubriquet of "Pig Iron Bob" because of his attempt to force Port Kembla waterside workers to load the Dalfram with scrap steel for Japan. The "wharfies" [dock-workers-ed.] refused because they feared that the Japanese government would use the steel to make bombs and shells for use in its invasion of China. Howard has now deployed Australian warships in a "shield of steel" across the Indian Ocean. Like Menzies, he will be remembered as a reactionary racist armoured behind invincible ignorance.

Campaigners for refugee rights are more determined than ever to end this shameful blot on humanity and are confident that once the real facts are made known, that Howard's support will wane.

The Latin American left - Search of a new model

14 October 2001, by Ernesto Herrera

No discourse on modernization, no promise to combat poverty, no fiction of equity can henceforth contain the popular rejection of the adjustment programmes and counter-reforms.

The Latin American political panorama today comprises resistance by peasants, indigenous peoples,

trade-unions, urban and popular organizations, the unemployed, the homeless, alternative networks of woman and young people, and movements against impunity in the area of human rights.

This increasingly broad and polarised resistance has in part linked up with a movement of radical civil disobedience which opposes capitalist globalisation. The neo-liberal crisis no longer generates despair, as was the case a decade ago.

A new period of the class struggle has opened, certainly transitory, but indicating very clearly the tendencies at work. The wind has changed direction.

Failed paradigm

As the document drawn up by the Working Group says, one of the more striking elements of this period is the failure of the "neo-liberal paradigm", in terms of its international power, capacity for political cohesion and social legitimacy, which is translated openly by a crisis of the hegemonic conservative discourse and the so-called single system of thought. [1]

The continent is currently experiencing a major political convulsion and the most acute popular insurrection. Simultaneously, the combination of three processes (social protest, recession and austerity, repression) has unleashed a series of crises of the political and institutional regimes, ungovernable situations and also serious democratic regressions. That indicates both the inability of the existing system to satisfy basic social needs and the progressive delegitimation of the governing elites. [2]

Indeed, this social protest and its radicalisation in numerous countries develops in a context of aggravation of the social and economic crisis, reflected in the majority of these countries by recession, adjustment plans, the deceleration of growth, the foreign debt and the attempts to deepen neo-liberal policies: privatisation, deregulation, labour flexibility and so on.

This situation is accompanied by a recrudescence of repressive measures, social control and "criminalisation" of poverty and actions of protest. [3]

Two lessons

One can learn two lessons from this description. The years of fraud and peaceful conquest by neo-liberalism are over. To the extent that the crisis acquires a brutal dimension, social protest broadens and political instability becomes a distinctive trait of the region.

Everywhere on the continent, albeit in an unequal fashion, the model unravels, while struggle and resistance grows. The situation of antagonism is exacerbated by the disastrous socio-economic consequences of capitalist globalisation and the reinforcement of the semi-colonial status of the Latin American countries.

It leads to an acceleration of (often violent) confrontations, of the recovery of class consciousness, a concrete anti-capitalism and a militant anti-imperialism.

The programme of these struggles could be summed up thus: to settle the enormous social debt and end the attacks on rights that have already been conquered (economic, social, democratic). In these conditions it is correct to affirm that the new period allows the left and the popular movement to examine other propositions and advance to the overcoming of organisational and programmatic dispersion which continues to characterise the current stage of resistance to neo-liberalism. [4]

The structural causes of the economic crisis have to do with the four transformations that have taken place in the region:

1) the increase in the foreign debt from the 1980s onwards; [5]

2) the dislocation of the industrial tissue in several countries, with the decline of industrial branches linked to development (strategy of import substitution) from the 1930s to 1960s, and with the implantation of sectors closely linked to the export strategy of the big trans-national firms ;

3) the growth of poverty and exclusion; [6]

4) the deterioration of the terms of trade or in other words of the respective values of the exports of these countries in relation to imports.

To these structural causes, [7] one can add another, as Claudio Katz has done: the trade deficit. The vulnerability of the Latin American economy and political and military dependence are then intimately linked.

Some recent examples provide the evidence: the recent accords signed by Brazil and Argentina with the IMF and World Bank (US$15 billion for Brazil, US$8 billion for Argentina); the decision of the Pastrana government in Colombia to transfer judicial power to the military in the zones of armed conflict, the rupture of the dialogue with the ELN, the offensive against the FARC in the framework of "Operacion 7 de agosto"; the implementation of operation "Cabanas 2001" in the Argentine province of Salta; the justification, by Brazil's minister of "Institutional Security" of operation "Pescado", devoted to spying on the MST; the elite anti-insurrectional corps in Guatemala, responsible for appalling massacres.

New modalities

All these events cannot be dissociated from the new modalities set up by the US and the international institutions to overcome the crisis of bourgeois political leadership and the loss of legitimacy of the Latin American governments in the context of economic crisis: "aid" and the authorisation to integrate into the framework of "globalisation" are conditioned by the acceptance of the militarisation of conflict and social protest.

Thus the mechanism of protection comprises three elements: economic, political and military. The FTAA (Free Trade Zone of the Americas), for

example, in addition to being an imperialist project of recolonisation, [8] is also a "security bolt" for the counter-reforms, for it prevents any reversibility by left governments by consecrating several key elements as "commercial" norms of the hemisphere.

Plan Colombia, now renamed the "Andean Regional Initiative", [9] is for its part a synthesis of the renovated strategy of counter-insurrection, inaugurated with the Plan Dignidad in Bolivia, and which includes the reconstruction of military espionage bases throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, with a special attention to the "Bolivarian triangle" (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador) and the island of Vieques, off Puerto Rico. In the strictly economic sphere it should be stressed that this protection is not limited to financial assistance supposed to prevent bankruptcy and chaos, and thus allow the payment of the foreign debt.

It includes obliging the governments to observe fiscal austerity, reduce social payments, increase privatisations and labour flexibility, political initiatives on the continental scale (introduction of a "democratic charter" in the OAS and a "democratic clause" in MERCOSUR), and regional accords drawing up a web of protection.

Combined process

Thus a project of continental and regional domination and of stabilisation-reproduction of the current model of the dominant bloc, exclusionary and anti-democratic, is drawn up (essentially by the US). It is a combined process which includes dollarisation and regional trade agreements inspired by the model of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement, made up of Canada, Mexico and the US) as the propositions of the WTO.

Here again examples are many : dollarisation in Ecuador and Salvador; free circulation of the dollar in Guatemala; trade agreement between Mexico, Guatemala, Salvador and Nicaragua; signature of a similar treaty between the Central American region and the Dominican Republic; Plan Puebla-Panama (launched in June by Vincente Fox, the Mexican president, after the approval in Mexico of a law on indigenous rights rejected by the Zapatista communities and the EZLN) which extends the US border towards the south and which opens the door to the intensive exploitation of natural resources by the multinational firms in territories claimed by the indigenous communities; finally, the desire of the governments of MERCOSUR to implement the "4+1" agreement with the United States.

Different scenarios

Obviously, the situation is far from being homogeneous. Throughout the continent, the neo-liberal crisis, the degree of political decomposition and popular resistance are rooted in different scenarios.

We can sketch three of them:

1) the Andean area (Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia), characterized by economic crisis and war, the appearance of a new populist nationalism, the collapse of governments and political transitions.

This area has a decisive strategic importance for the United States (production of coca, biodiversity, impact on the world oil market). It bears comparison, from the degree of mobilisation and social organisation and the level of institutional decomposition, with the Central American situation in the 1980s.

2) the MERCOSUR region (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay), characterised by recession and socio-economic crisis. It is conceivable today that in two of these countries (Brazil and Uruguay) the left will come to power.

3) In central America, in Mexico and in the Caribbean, the economic and social crisis worsens, and the social protests multiply (Guatemala, Jamaica). Mexico is going through a phase of recession while the Zapatista struggle in Chiapas persists.

Certain countries (like Honduras and Nicaragua) are victims of rural poverty. While the anti-imperialist mobilisations continue at Vieques (Puerto Rico), the crisis of the left organisations (FMLN, UNRG, Sandinismo) continues without beginning to be resolved, despite possible electoral victories.

It is in this context of socio-economic crisis, political instability and imperialist protection that the Latin American left prepares for the 10th meeting of the SPF. The participants at the meeting of the Working Group found agreement on several questions: the new character of the period opened by the neo-liberal crisis and the appearance of an anti-globalisation movement, of which the most significant expression has been the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre; the diagnosis of the political and socio-economic conjuncture; opposition to the imperialist project of the FTAA (in spite of the hesitations of the Mexican PRD) and the need to propose another form of integration (the Brazilian PT proposed the formula of the "Latin American Community of Nations"); the condemnation of the dominant bloc and the necessity to reinforce solidarity with Cuba faced with the aggressive new Bush administration.

Dilemmas and contradictions manifested themselves in relation to the programmatic perspectives, in particular, and at the initiative of the PT, the question of the model of alternative development.

Within the current framework of capitalist globalisation, which generates crises and dependency, what project can the Latin American left have which would not be vetoed by the economic, political and military regimes?

Strategic project

Aloizio Mercadante, PT secretary for international relations and one of the principal leaders of the party majority, has developed the idea that this alternative model of development must not be understood as a strategic project of the left, nor as anti-capitalist rupture, but as a stage of transition of the neo-liberal model

towards the market of mass consumption, the rebuilding of the Nation, in which the focus will be on redistribution within the internal market and on essential needs: basic commodities, popular consumption with attention to food, popular habitat, sanitation, education and health. Mercadante insisted on the external opposition which will confront a left government on the continent and the heavy heritage of neo-liberalism: crisis of exchange rates, debt, denationalisation of the State, unemployment, poverty, and productive structure dominated by foreign capital.

From the point of view of a left government, in particular in the case of Brazil, Mercadante said that it will not be possible to repeat the De La Rua experience (in Argentina), but that we did not want to repeat Allende (i.e. a program of nationalization and of rupture with big capital and imperialism). Obviously, the Venezuelan Chavez does not constitute an alternative way either, because if he has established a plebiscitary political regime (mass democracy), his economic project does not represent a rupture (and Venezuela is one of the principal oil producers in the world).

This "model" would be based on four macroeconomic pillars of "transition" and could be summed up broadly as follows:

- role of the State as pivot of public and private co-ordination, of production and distribution of goods and services, and as support for investment;
- reduction of external vulnerability both in its financial and commercial dimensions, reduction in dependency on flows of capital, in particular of a speculative nature;
- reorientation of direct foreign investment to accelerate the introduction of new technologies and to improve commercial integration. Stimulation of exports and import substitutes in order to turn the trade deficit into a surplus;
- private foreign debt will no longer count on the various mechanisms of statisation and socialization of risks and losses. The public foreign debt will be renegotiated, in order to relieve public budgets and encourage programmes of investment and social policies. On the strictly political level, the PT like the Frente Amplio (two organisations with comparable perspectives of coming to power) agree on the necessity of broadening their system of political alliances to "neutralise" the reactionary and destabilising right wing sectors and on the fact that a veto of the military and employers sectors would not be opposed to a left government.

Illusions? Political realism? Joao Machado, in response to a report of the Institute of Citizenship (linked to the PT majority) [10] whose ideas were presented by Mercadante at a meeting of the Working Group, described this programmatic proposal as inconceivable and anachronistic His criticisms are many and rigorous but they centre on the national question.

To sum up his thinking:

- if one stresses denationalisation, external vulnerability and political instability to justify a programme of reconstruction of the Nation, there is no consensus on the way to reverse this process of denationalisation ;
- if the role of the state is defined as being to co-ordinate and encourage investment, reorient foreign investments and the shares of the multinationals, denationalisation could no longer be stopped ;
- in this sense, the reconstruction of the Nation would involve a sort of association between the state and the foreign companies;
- privatisation is criticised largely for the manner in which it is carried out, and for the absence of regulatory framework. One continues however to have confidence in private investment, without saying that this latter is one of the main sources of the process of denationalisation;
- are moderate proposals still realistic? Difficult to believe: it is not possible to rebuild the Nation having confidence in the multinationals and accepting (even partially) neo-liberal ideology;
- the conditions for a radically different policy, with popular support, are now present. The resistance to neo-liberalism is gaining strength throughout the world, programmatic adaptations only become more anachronistic. The same debate runs through all left forces who aim at governmental power. What should be a strategic opportunity to modify the relationship of forces and develop an alternative model of development and popular self-management becomes a waltz of hesitation, confusion and programmatic adaptation. But it is precisely in these moments of grave crisis that the possibility arises to experiment with innovative ruptures, doing what has not been done before. If the Latin American left does not show audacity in this new period, it risks remaining prisoner of a pseudo-realism and cutting itself off from mass social movements which give a radical content to the anti-capitalist struggle.

Footnotes

[1] Preparatory document for the 10th Meeting of the FSP. Editorial Commission, Montevideo, August 18-19, 2001.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Advance draft national resolution, 6th national Conference of the Socialist Democracy tendency of the Workers Party. Brazil, August 2001.

[5] The summit on Social Debt and Latin American Integration, held in Caracas in July, confirms it: the weight of the foreign debt is one of the main sources of poverty and inequality. "Upon being born, each inhabitant of our region owes on average US$1,550" says Otto Boye, permanent secretary of the Latin American Economic Service (SELA). In 10 years, the debt has nearly doubled: US$430 billion in 1990 and US$750 billion in 2000. The servicing of the debt compromises the future of the country, given that it amounts to 39% of the GDP and 201% of the exports of the region; but also any idea of an alternative programme, for foreign indebtedness acts as a

mechanism for the transfer of income towards foreign creditors.

[6] Even CEPAL (the Economic Commission for Latin America) recognises that an average growth of 6% annually is needed to face "social problems", lower the "poverty level" and "reduce technological backwardness" in relation to the industrialised countries (Panorama social, 1999-2000). However, all predictions agree on a rate of growth of around 2%. The macro-economic indicators are also unsatisfactory: from 1997 to 1999, the rate of variation of the GDP per inhabitant went from 3.7% to 1.6%. During this time, 220 million people were poor (93 million in absolute poverty) and the average period spent in education is only 5.2 years (whereas according to CEPAL, "10 years of education are necessary in order to avoid poverty").

[7] See Claudio Katz, "New economic turbulences", IV 331, May 2001.

[8] See article by Claudio Katz in this issue.

[9] See IV 324, September 2000.

[10] The text is called "Another Brazil is Possible". Joao Machado's reply was published in Correio da Cidadania number 258, Sao Paulo, 2001.

FTAA - illusion and reality

14 October 2001, by Claudio Katz

The implementation of this project has accelerated abruptly in recent months because of three conjunctural needs of the great power; to attenuate the effects of the imminent economic recession, halt the European advance into the zone and strengthen the region's military alliances given the deterioration of a number of Latin American political regimes.

The FTAA began to be sketched out 7 years ago but remained on paper until 1998.The initiative has gained a new momentum under the Bush presidency. The immediate motivation of the US is the search for a foreign trade boost given the slowing up of its economy. Unlike Europe and Asia, the region is a niche for the exports of US companies, which could increase their sales considerably if the dollar begins to fall in value in the coming period. [1]

The FTAA is intended to restrain European competition by hindering the negotiation of other free trade agreements, particularly that proposed by Spain at the Iberian-American summits. Faced with this challenge the 500 US corporations with the closest links to Latin America have exerted pressure to speed up the FTAA.

The negotiations, initially secret, have passed into the public domain and have met with strong opposition inside the US from the non-internationalised sectors of industry. Their representatives in Congress did not grant President Clinton (nor, so far, President Bush) the "fast track" required to sign the agreement without delay.

The political-military pressures to sign the FTAA are less visible, but more decisive. For some years there has been an escalation of popular revolts, rural and urban, with a high level of organization and clear social demands, in several Latin American countries.

These movements have accentuated the erosion of the various political systems, which have lost legitimacy because of their incapacity to respond to popular demands. This loss of credibility on the part of the regimes has led to the interruption of presidential terms (Peru), disintegration of governments (Ecuador), the collapse of states (Colombia) and the break-up of traditional parties (Venezuela, Mexico).

To preserve stability faced with these convulsions is a priority for the US government, which identifies this crisis with the weakening of its responsibility for continental security.

Through the FTAA, Washington hopes to strengthen its covert military intervention in Colombia, regional rearmament linked to the war on drugs, war exercises like that at Vieques in Puerto Rico and diplomatic pressure on the Latin-American countries to apply sanctions against the countries demonised by the state department (Cuba, Iraq, Libya, North Korea).

The US hopes to deactivate Brazil's independent nuclear development and that of Argentina and hope to generalize this to the international level, to advance the project of the antimissile shield.

The old neo-liberal arguments

Nobody doubts that the FTAA is a hegemonic project of the US. Indeed, after a decade of neo-liberal primacy there are those who idealize this domination. If it is traditionally the case that the supremacy of a great power becomes the object of immediate criticism and accusations of imperialism and colonialism, in our days we hear arguments favourable to this domination.

Anthropological, geographical, or racial justifications are invoked by those who claim the FTAA will serve as a counterweight to the absence of a spirit of enterprise among Latin Americans. They predict that if the region misses the chance to fall in behind US leadership it cannot escape

its destiny of poverty and decadence. [2]

The last decade of economic and social regression hardly bears out this argument, however. The four big disequilibria that the region has encountered in this period - foreign debt, export specialization, unequal exchange and the contraction of purchasing power - are not the consequence of a distancing from the US but on the contrary the expression of closer relations of subordination to this power. Economic crises in the region are not due to endemic defects among Latin Americans but rather to an increasing dependent insertion of the zone in the world market. [3]

Other analysts claim that we will never emerge from underdevelopment through internal markets and say that the FTAA will help improve our export performance and favour the region's entry into the world's biggest market. [4]

But what are the symptoms of exhaustion of internal markets? The opulence of the purchasing power and levels of consumption of the population? Moreover, how will Latin American products penetrate the most competitive and demanding market of the world? How will the yawning differences in productivity which have frustrated this entry until now be overcome?

Each of these questions throws doubt on the naïve belief in a regional takeoff supported by the FTAA. Indeed, the opinion formers do not assess their illusions against the real course of evens; they only reiterate their confidence in the growth of exports and the flow of investments.

Some backers of the FTAA are also partisans of dollarisation, even if they do not seek support for their argument from the economies of Central America who have adopted this policy (Guatemala, El Salvador). They also ignore the fact that in Ecuador this orientation has been implemented as an emergency measure owing to financial collapse.

The only country which has experimented with dollarisation over a prolonged period (Panama) can hardly be cited as a model of eradication of poverty and unemployment. In recent years this country has suffered - like any other regional debtor - no less than 17 IMF stabilization programmes. [5]

Although dollarisation is associated with the FTAA project, it is not a precondition for it, notably because inside the US government there are strong divergences on the pertinence of this choice. Up until now Latin American nations who have renounced control over their currencies have not gained any commitment from the Federal Reserve to act as lender of last resort in the event of banking crises.

If the impact of this asymmetry can be tolerable in smaller economies that are commercially integrated with the US, for Argentina or Mexico an inequality of this order would have devastating consequences.

For the moment, the US interest in the FTAA is above all commercial and not subject to the advance of dollarisation. Like any ruling class initiative, the launch of the FTAA has been surrounded by a big marketing operation peddling fantasies reminiscent of those that accompanied the privatisation plans of the 1990s. As always with neo-liberalism, the benefits are a promise for the future, while the sacrifices demanded are immediate.

Areas of concession

In the area of services, US corporations are looking for entry into the insurance, teaching and health markets. These are particularly profitable activities because the upper middle class of the region tends to use the private sector given the debacle of public services.

In the area of investment, a law is being debated which would give foreign companies the right to appeal to international tribunals with greater powers than national legal systems. Such regimes are already in force for NAFTA and have upheld the claims of various US companies against Canada and Mexico. [6]

On the level of public sector purchasing, the talk is of eliminating the mechanisms of preferential purchasing of goods from local suppliers. In the construction sector especially, US consortiums could beat any competitor without comparable access to international credit. [7]

US negotiators are also seeking a total customs opening of Latin American economies without accepting any concomitant dismantling of their own discriminatory system.

Agriculture is the key sector of the agreement, because while proceeding with the destruction of the regulations protecting small Latin American peasants, the agro-business corporations do not intend to practice free competition in the US itself.

US trade secretary D. Evans has said that agricultural subsidies of around $97,000 million a year in the US are not part of the FTAA discussions. [8] This decision does not depend moreover on negotiations with Latin America but rather on discussion with the EU to reduce subsidies equivalent. Already some estimates predict the outcome of this agreement for Argentina will be a growth of 30-35% in imports and a reduction de 4% in exports. [9]

The FTAA will revise intellectual property rights in favour of US high tech sectors. A first casualty will be Brazil's anti-AIDS programme which saves lives and cares for the sick but does not satisfy the lucrative demands of the international laboratories.

Finally, the FTAA authorizes the US to continue to violate environmental protection treaties. The NAFTA has converted various frontier zones of Mexico into toxic dumps and an estimated 40% of the forests in the state of Guerrero have been destroyed because of pollution. [10]

The FTAA will also lead to greater wage flexibility on the model of the Mexican maquiladoras. There is no doubt that the FTAA will favour the dependence of the regional economic cycle on the evolution of US GDP which will accentuate the vulnerability

of productive activity of the region.

The defeat of Mercosur

In its current form, the FTAA implies the disappearance of Mercosur, because this sub-regional customs union cannot subsist inside a general free trade zone. For the US corporations Mercosur constitutes an area of dispute with their European rivals and an obsolete framework for the protection of their activities, with custom rights and national or regional subsidies. The US intention to destroy Mercosur is clearly expressed in the proposals for bilateral accords with Chile, recently extended to Argentina. In fact, the situation of the two countries is very different, because Chile has a narrow manufacturing base and has developed a complementary trade with the EU in mining, fruit and forest products. Argentina still has a certain industrial development of its own, which would be killed off by the FTAA. [11]

There is no doubt that the heavy US artillery is targeting Brazil, which has the most appetizing market and the most autonomous industrial complex in relation to the US corporations. Unlike other nations, Brazil cannot accommodate itself to the FTAA without renouncing the positions it has won on all markets. Thus its government seeks to slow down the coming into force of the treaty and envisages a strategic alliance with Venezuela. These centrifugal pressures sharpen the internal tendencies towards disintegration of Mercosur. On its 10th anniversary, the weakening of this association is recognized by all its backers. [12]

It has not been able to advance to the formation of a single currency, nor towards the setting up of regional political and legal institutions. The customs accords will not be realized either, because the common customs system has never succeeded in establishing itself, no body for settling conflicts has been created and divergences on the subject of subsidies and systems of governmental purchasing have not been resolved. Indeed, these divergences are deepening with the reaction of each country to its debt crisis. While Brazil has opted to devalue the real and increase tariffs, Argentina has gambled on convertibility and greater openness.

The range of economists and political personalities [13] which continues to propose entry to the FTAA after Mercosur have not explained how the former could succeed if after a decade there has been no success in realizing much more elementary accords in the framework of the latter.

Another possible world

Unlike the European Community the FTAA is not about creating homogeneous zones: no backward countries will be brought closer to the motor economy of the accord. There is no provision for budget transfers from North to South and the gulf in living standards which separates all Latin American countries from the US will remain.

The cause of the differences between the European Community and the FTAA is obvious: the first association is projected as a dominant bloc intended to challenge the US while the second is an instrument of US domination intended to fight this battle.

Thus, it is very pertinent to characterize this initiative as an imperialist project aimed at recolonising Latin America. If this process happens, the nature of the regional bourgeoisie will change completely and the current discussion around its nature - dependent or trans-national - will be settled. [14]

The inability of the dominant class in Latin America to realize its own project of integration is obvious. The Andean and Central American pacts will meet the same defeat as Mercosur now.

If in the 20th century the regional bourgeoisies were unable to develop the program of Bolivar, now they have lost all interest in this objective because their degree of association with metropolitan capital is substantially greater.

The 10 years of Mercosur were also marked by unprecedented attacks on the living conditions of workers. Instead of common labour regulations and measures of protection of wages, the countries involved developed greater labour flexibility and unemployment.

This experience allows us to conclude that a genuine project of integration of the peoples should start from other principles. First, it should be founded on the satisfaction of fundamental demands like an increased minimum wage, unemployment benefit and free education and health.

The coordination of policies to reach these objectives should encourage solidarity and not competitiveness, encourage stability of work and not mobility of capital, promote higher standards of living and not the efficiency of trade.

Second, there is no real integration without the removal of the foreign debt as obstacle to sustained development - as shown by the Mexican crisis of 1995, the Brazilian crisis of 1998 and Argentina in 2000-2001.

Finally, integration should have the perspective of a process of socialist transformation, because capitalism is an insurmountable obstacle to overcoming the peripheral status of the countries of the region.

There is a link between the old dream of Latin American unity and the establishment of new forms of property and collective management of the economy.

The debate on these proposals takes place in the new political climate created by the protests against globalisation. The negotiators of the FTAA have already directly faced this hostility in the streets of Buenos Aires and Quebec.

The novelty is that a large number of demonstrators no longer limit themselves to saying that another world is possible, they are defining the nature of this desirable universe and explaining how to get there.

Footnotes

[1] See Luis Bilbao, "Democracia amurallada", Le Monde Diplomatique (Argentine edition) May 2001, Buenos Aires.

[2] See Andres Oppenheimer: "Geografia y cultura: factores de progreso?", La Nacion, August 1, 2000, Buenos Aires; "La posible particion de las Americas", La Nacion, August 6, 2000; and "Que se espera para America Latina", La Nacion, January 2, 2001.

[3] See Claudio Katz, "New Economic Turbulences", IV 331, May 2001.

[4] Mariano Grondona, "America Latina: se salvara con el ALCA?", La Nacion, April 12, 2001.

[5] Sebastian Edwards, "El dolar no es la cura magica", Clarin May 13, 2001, Buenos Aires.

[6] Maude Barlow, "Zone de libre-echange et menace pour les programmes sociaux", Le Conseil des Canadiens, 2001, <[www.canadians.org-> http://www.canadians.org]>.

[7] IDEP, "Los capitales unicos ciudadanos del ALCA" in Nosotros-ATE, March 2001, Buenos Aires.

[8] Quoted in Pagina 12, April 10, 2001, Buenos Aires.

[9] Eduardo Lucita, "ALCA un proyecto hegemonico", Realidad Economica number 178, March 2, 2001.

[10] Document of the Comite Argentino contra el ALCA, March 2001, Buenos Aires.

[11] Argentina's definitive position is a mystery, because the country is on the verge of the cessation of payment and a possible deflationary collapse. Until this chaos is overcome the government will not decide in favour of Mercosur or the FTAA. In the current crisis means are adopted which seem to lean towards one or other of these options, but in reality these are improvised means without any clear objective.

[12] See Roberto Bouzas, "El bloque puede desaparecer", Pagina 12, April 12, 2001.

[13] Marcela Bordenave, "Mercosur o ALCA", Pagina 12, April 10, 2001; and Alieto Guadagni, 'El ALCA desde el Mercosur', La Nacion, March 29, 2001.

[14] James Petras suggests that this change has already happened. See Rebelion, March 17, 2001, and Pagina 12, May 13, 2001.

Argentina's Economic Crisis: Interpretations and Proposals

14 October 2001, by Claudio Katz

The effective interest rate is five times greater than the international average, and thwarts each appearance of economic revival. Consumption has fallen because of the drastic contraction of purchasing power. Unemployment is at 30 per cent and the income of half the country's wage earners is less than 500 pesos (US$320). Poverty affects 37 per cent of the population. There is no precedent in the history of the country for a social disaster of this magnitude.

The critical point of this recent crisis, which has now confronted Argentina for a year, was the virtual cessation by the Government of its foreign debt payments. This has threatened the continuity of all the economic measures brought in by Domingo Cavallo, the Minister of the Economy.

Mr. Cavallo hoped to achieve a breather by postponing payments on the debt through the megacanje, [1] a financial package comprising of a partial exchange of old bonds for new ones with more prolonged maturities. However, the US Treasury and the European Central Bank have refused to guarantee the flotation of these issues and the cost of this operation to the government has thus been scandalous. Liability has increased by US$47.4 billion. When the period of grace ends in two or three years, the impossibility of dealing with these maturities would reappear. Long before this date, the creditors will return to exact their privileges of collecting their payments before the needs of pensioners and public employees are met.

As the megacanje did not open up the road toward an economic upturn, Mr. Cavallo gambled on encouraging an increase in exports as a solution to the crisis. Thus he opened the floodgates of the process of devaluation with the introduction of an exchange market, divided between the commercial and the financial sector.

Even though he has said that he would maintain a strict convertibility in this first attempt at a half-euro and half-dollar parity, already an argument is now being put forward by the Government to justify devaluation if the slide is not stopped. Meanwhile the slide of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) continues.

Any one of Cavallo's measures could lead to a major crisis that will include the wholesale general abandonment of

public bonds, peso deposits and Argentine commercial paper. If such a run appears, a more radical economic switch toward maxi-devaluations, dollarisation or both will be established. The context of this crisis is reminiscent those great economic collapses which happened during each of the past few decades (Rodrigazo of 1975, the nationalization of the debt at the beginning of the 1980's, hyperinflation of 1989) and thus invalidates the latest conjunctural explanations that attribute the crisis to the "corruption of Menem" or the "lack of skill of Fernando De la Rua" (the President of Argentina).

Justifying neo-liberalism

Until the past year many neo-liberals reduced their explanations of the Argentine crisis to that of a regrettable coincidence of external difficulties such as the appreciation of the US dollar, the devaluation of the Argentine currency, the fall in the price of exported goods, the lowering of the value of the Euro and the collapse of the other economies on the periphery of the advanced capitalist economies.

But in the past these kinds of adversities have been frequent. The only thing new today is the Argentine economy's accentuated defencelessness in the face of these dangers, a consequence of the liberalization of the financial system, the industrial privatisation process, the commercial opening to foreigners, and the renunciation of monetary and exchange sovereignty by the Government.

But because a recognition of this would be equivalent to them admitting their own failures, the orthodox economists fall back upon their favourite explanation: the high level of public expenditure by the Government.

They say that "only the private sector has made the adjustment" as if big business and the workers form a collective solidarity which shares sacrifices in common. In their crusade against the deficit, they conceal the fact that this imbalance does not arise from social expenditure on salaries or education but from the multiple mechanisms of direct and indirect subsidies to the ruling class.

The neo-liberals especially omit from their explanations the idea that the principal sources of the collapse of public finances are the interest payments on the foreign debt. These have contributed to the tripling of the Government's administrative expenses, consuming seven times more funds than social assistance, for example, and twenty-three times more than the state employment schemes. State public expenditure automatically multiplies with each refinancing of the debt and there is no way of eliminating this lack of equilibrium with new privatisations.

The neo-liberals also forget that the financial deficit ran out of control with the elimination of employers' contributions to the system of social security. This "incentive to investment" actually contributed to generating a record level of unemployment, provoking a loss of revenue to the state, equivalent to a third of the public debt.

After accumulating a substantial amount of reserves the Argentine Association of the Retired and Pensioners (AFJP) has been converted into a large creditor of an insolvent state while a high level of poverty amongst pensioners is maintained and threatens to drive the next generation of retirees into an even worse situation than presently exists.

Faced with this perspective and to protect the pension fund business, the Government is proposing to increase the retirement age and to reduce the minimum wage. Reinstating employers' social security contributions to the state and eliminating the parasitic system of management of the AFJP could begin to remedy this lack of fiscal equilibrium that the neo-liberals question so much. But because this corrective measure would affect the profits of the establishment, the orthodox economists do not even consider this alternative.

Privatisation

Because of the impact on the public of the failure of Aerolineas, the national airline of Argentina, some neo-liberals have begun to accept the idea that, in their words, "badly carried out privatisations" have contributed to the present crisis. But what happened to this airline company is a typical case of fraudulent depletion of funds and cannot be classified, correctly or incorrectly, in terms of just a "giving away" of a public asset.

As for the remaining privatisations: were they carried out well? The railway subsidies and the toll system? The sale of the telephone companies at ridiculously low prices? The granting of monopolistic exploitation licenses to the electrical companies? It is evident in any of these cases one cares to name, that the Argentine state, far from "withdrawing itself from the economy", strengthened its subsidizing role, guaranteeing, in a deflationary period, increases in tariffs to these companies that range between 40 per cent and 100 per cent.

If the privatised companies had to confront the same external competition that exists for the rest of the economy, they would have had a fate similar to Aerolineas. In spite of this evidence, the economists who monopolize the television air-waves continue to speak of "necessary privatisations" (national banks, provincially owned companies, the lottery and so on) and the "pending reforms" in health and education as if this kind of transformation would have some beneficial effect for the bulk of the population.

Their arguments exhausted, the neo-liberals resort to asking us to "have faith". They promise that dollarisation of the currency "will complete the reforms" and assure the currency's stability so that there will be an increase in the rate of flow of foreign capital into Argentina.

But they avoid all commentary about the US Federal Reserve Board's lack of interest in helping the banks and big business. They avoid mentioning external monetary signals, nor do they look at the effect of the system of

dollarisation on nations such as Panama, which is still subject to the same kind of crisis that affects any Latin American country one cares to mention.

The new monetary regime, coming after a period of very profound deflationary adjustment, will only facilitate the transfer of property on more favourable terms to those groups who manage foreign exchange.

The neo-liberal discourse combines amnesia with schizophrenia. They speak highly of the "transformations of 1991 and 1995" as if these changes were unrelated to the later disaster and excuse their own trickery and all their responsibility for the impoverishment of the country.

On other occasions they attribute the crisis to Argentina's technological and scientific backwardness, forgetting their active militancy in favour of budgetary cutbacks at the universities and the closure of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Investigation (Conicet).

The neo-liberal policy has been orchestrated at three levels.

Firstly, there was the response of former finance minister Machinea who, faced with the financial crisis, reduced the salaries of public employees and raised taxes on the middle class declaring that there was no alternative. Later came the outright attack by Mr. Lopez Murphy (Economics Minister), who introduced the economic adjustments we are now suffering from. And finally came the pragmatism of Cavallo, who contradicts in the night that which he proposed in the morning, managing to accumulate a record number of initiatives that are abandoned before they are announced.

He spoke of prioritising the revitalizing the economy with increases in tariffs, a reduction of the nation's financial reserves and the reduction of financial subsidies to various sectors, but then he turned towards more drastic financial measures, such as the generalization of IVA (the 21% value-added consumption tax) and renewal of the tax collection goals that had been set by his predecessor.

He questioned the state's ruinous debt, but issued bonds that assured higher prices and tax privileges to the banks. He spoke about "a cleaning up" of the government which was immediately suspended. In one breath he proposed distancing the peso from the dollar to bring it closer to the euro, in the other, he contradictorily abandoned Mercosur and the trade alliance comprised of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay to unilaterally enter the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) while promising to maintain the Argentinean currency's convertibility as he opens a war of competitive devaluations throughout South America.

Critics of neo-liberalism

Of the many economists who oppose the government's policies the majority focus their questions on the neo-liberal model, but characterize this policy in a variety of ways. In its most current form, it is identified with convertibility of the currency.

To suppose that the crisis could be resolved by a change from the policy of convertibility is as illusionary as imagining a viability of some kind of mechanism of "popular devaluation" that avoids the depreciation of wages or the expropriation of the small savings accounts.

By maintaining as invariable the promises of paying the debt and attempting to control economic resiliency through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), any devaluation will have the effect of impoverishing the population.

Many of those who question the government's economic policy explain the recessionary consequences of convertibility, especially the permanence of high levels of interest as being due to a "lack of active policies" by the government.

But this deficiency does not derive exclusively from the exchange rate trap. What prevents all the "nations on the periphery" from applying Keynesian policies to reactivate their economies is their dependence on the inspectors from the IMF, who restrict internal credit for investment and consumption to ensure the fulfilment of payments on the debt.

Even though the magnitude of this liability is, on a percentage basis, not greater than that of the dominant countries, it is nominated in foreign currency and dependent upon periodic external refinancing.

Because of the economic cycle in these countries, they are more subject to monitoring by the creditors (and the consequent inflow and outflow of capital) than the internal economic conditions demand. This explains why the new elites of the financial organizations are replacing the old national bureaucracies and have assumed direct macroeconomic management in the indebted countries.

Frequently one hears statements about the weight of the debt having consolidated the supremacy of the "parasitic financiers over the productive industrialists." In this view the privileges of the bankers who do well with their high-wire juggling acts and profiteering as middlemen are especially contrasted with the misfortunes of big businesses burdened by the rising price of credit.

But this line of argument forgets the enormous interlocking between both groups and the financial diversification of the large businesses, which handle, moreover, an important portion of the government's public bonds.

The industrialists participated fully in the privatisation frenzy and have been the principal beneficiaries of the increase of productivity that the workers contributed to the economy during the first half of the past decade.

The victims of the neo-liberal model have been the wage earners, whose remuneration fell half a percent with each point of an increase in production and it has been the capitalists who took advantage of and enjoyed the precarious situation of labour during the 1990s.

It is evident, however, that the neo-liberal policies of currency convertibility, monetary adjustment, the social exclusion of important parts of the population from society and the opening to the outside for imports, deepened the Argentinean economic crisis. But this model did not cause the depression. This depression, which affects all of those economies that are on the periphery of the major capitalist economies, has its roots in the dynamic of world capitalism.

Collapse of dependent countries

The Argentine crisis constitutes a link in the economic upheavals that has hammered all the "emerging markets": Mexico in 1995; South East Asia in 1997; Russia in 1998; Brazil in 1999 and Ecuador in 2000. This latest escalation has developed as a "domino effect" indiscriminately impacting the dependent economies, no matter their location in the world or their monetary or fiscal policies.

In all these cases, the fall in prices of export products and the flight of capital has had a powerful social impact. Even though one can identify the existence of a neo-liberal policy common to all these affected countries, the methods of this orientation were diverse, whereas the existence of a dependent capitalist class is common to all of them.

The consequences of the world polarization of investments between advanced countries and backward ones can be seen in these dependent economies and has provoked the reorganization of capitalism during the 1990s.

These peripheral nations have been particularly affected by the general bosses' offensive against the workers, by the geographical and sectoral expansion of capital and by the competitive frenzy accompanying globalisation of the economy.

It is estimated that the chasm of inequality between the developed nations and the underdeveloped nations increased thirty to sixty times in the last three decades, re-enforcing the concentration of 86 per cent of total consumption by 20 per cent of the world's population.

The dependent nations have supported a systematic and growing transfer of resources toward the great corporations of the advanced countries because of the unequal exchange in commerce, the payment of the external debt and the profits that result from the low salaries in the international sector of the industries of the peripheral countries.

The backward technology, the financial fragility, the industrial duality and the prevailing commercial disadvantages in these economies sharpened markedly in recent years, provoking this recent sharp crisis. The economic debacle Argentina is enduring is in this way similar to the suffering of the bulk of the countries of Latin America, Asia, Africa and East Europe.

A related policy of this degradation has been a process of re-colonisation, that is to say, the loss of autonomy by the local ruling classes as a consequence of their growing interlocking with foreign capital. By this means, the functionaries of the IMF have attained a level of power over government policy decisions that is without precedent. This new situation can be summed up with the old concept: the intensification of imperialist oppression.

As in the other dependent nations, the Argentine economy suffers intensely from the consequences of overproduction. It endures the impact of the falling rate of profit in the central developed economies (both in the phase of full economic decline and in the stages of partial recovery) and also suffers from a lack of purchasing power by a great part of the population. This imbalance constitutes the basis of the speculative financial operations associated with indebtedness.

But merely characterizing these actions as the "immoral actions of a shareholder capitalism" prevents us from seeing in the background, the systematic transfer of wealth to the imperialist corporations. If the same financial parasitism has had different effects in the United States or Great Britain compared to any of the peripheral countries, it is because of the existence of this process of imperialist polarization.

The direction of the Argentine economy accompanies the general trend of a degradation of Latin America's position in the world market, indicated by the predominantly low growth rate, beginning from the lost decade of the 1980s.

As in the rest of the region, this contributed to the US's hegemonic economic recovery by financing the restructuring of banks in the United States that were impacted by the regional debt. It opened new markets for exports by the dominant power and facilitated the shipment of profits from corporations situated in the peripheral countries.

The Argentine ruling class made this process of revenue transfer out of the country viable, thereby impairing the internal market. It failed also in its project of establishing Mercosur, intended to establish a geographical area of business activity with some autonomy from the major capitalist countries.

The ruling class now appears to be sharply turning away from Mercosur and going towards Argentina's incorporation into the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which the United States is promoting in an attempt to displace its European competitors in South America.

The Argentine crisis forms part of the world economic capitalist reorganization that does not favour the underdeveloped nations. The effects of this reorganization are particularly sharp because it is combined with a regression of the economy, which over a long period has seen the erosion of Argentina's traditional position among those countries at a higher level on the periphery.

The real per capita product today is just at the level that was reached in 1974. The significant growth of the

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 127 per cent between 1949 and 1974, contrasts sharply with the languid advance of 55 per cent from 1974 until the present time.

Unlike South Korea, the Argentinean economy is not collapsing because of unavoidable competition with large corporations, but is steadily losing its position in the world market. The same is happening with the new peripheral countries which are travelling in the direction of capitalist restoration, like Russia, whose economic viability is supported by a systematic destruction of its economic achievements from the past, where these countries for the first time face a situation of extreme poverty, typical of the economies of the weak periphery.

But this kind of slump is not a novelty under capitalism, a system structured around profits and allowing the flow of capital toward the regions that promise the greatest returns.

Inside this "stable architecture" that separates the imperialist nations from the peripheral countries, a "variable geometry" governs the underdevelopment which generates a repositioning, the rise and falls on the internal map of the excluded nations.

A "mafia state"

The seriousness of the Argentine economic crisis has induced many analysts to inquire at the policy level into its causes. Some intellectuals argue that the decline in Argentine production arises from the institutional instability created by the consolidation of a "mafia state".

Others try to deal with these same difficulties with the notion of the effect of the "military inheritance", the "lack of respect for the law", and the "breaking down of constitutional order in 1930" in Argentina.

But even though it is evident that the accelerated erosion of the political regime has taken place because of the impact of graft, money laundering and narco-trafficking, these disintegrative forces, however, are a consequence of the continuing economic debacle that is systematically destroying the rules of the game which the various wealthy sectors enforce and as a result is undermining, in the eyes of the population, the authority of the parties of the ruling class.

The belief that corruption is antagonistic to capitalist economic growth is inspired by an idealized vision of this system, which continuously produces a mixing of the legal and illegal spheres among businesses. It is sufficient to observe the weight of the "crime economy" in the US financial system or the incidences of shady business in the spread of investments in the most recently industrialized countries, to corroborate this fact.

It is an unsupportable fantasy to imagine that the IMF or the World Bank gives out prizes for transparency. Was it not IBM, Siemens, Telefonica or Iberia who promoted the obtaining of fraudulent contracts with the state? Didn't the embassies of the United States and the European countries directly favour those operations? Corruption feeds the same search for greater profit that dominates all capitalist activities and affects the same competitive blindness that undermines these processes.

On certain occasions it accelerates the accumulation of capital and in other circumstances, it perpetuates the crisis.

Another very topical way for some analysts to approach the current crisis is to inquire into its "cultural roots", taking up once again the old questions about "the character of the Argentines." Invariably these views note the "absence of a national project."

The "creole character" of the population is criticized, as is the "the lack of a work culture". But in these laborious explanations it is supposed that any citizen - symbolized as a kind of sociological ideal-type - has the same responsibilities as the powerful owners of wealth for the present depression. This ignores the fact that it is the ruling classes who define and orchestrate economic policy. It is simply incorrect for them to project these failures onto the entire population.

Of course the economic decadence of a nation such as Argentina with so many natural riches has historic foundations. But they can't be tied to the temperament of its inhabitants. Instead, they are tied to the agro-shareholding configuration of the Argentine social structure during the 19th century, to the later economic distortions of a substituted industrialization and to the recent systematic transfer of resources out of the country.

This same situation is prevalent in many underdeveloped countries also lacking a "business class that takes risks and is innovative." But what is most important is not to conform to this reality: neither to assume it as a fate, nor to conclude that nothing could be expected from the groups that traditionally have managed power.

The future of the country depends on the action of the popular sectors of the population who while in full social retreat, have learned how to maintain their old traditions of struggle and incorporate new forms of resistance into them.

The active workers and the unemployed constitute the only social force capable of constructing an alternative for overcoming the present crisis.

Proposals for change

There is nothing that will favourably improve the Argentinean economy for the people unless the level of material well being of the population is restored to the level of the years 1970 to 1980.

This is a conclusion that is shunned by all the neo-liberal economists who propose continuing the "adjustment" and by all the anti-liberals who focus on the solution of a kind of change based upon "competitiveness" or customs protection.

Assuring a minimum, guaranteed income, for all the unemployed and increasing wages and pensions to

recreate purchasing power is a basic condition for any progressive alternative to the present government's course.

The "confidence of the consumers" will be restored by repealing the labour reforms and ensuring the stability of employment and not waiting for the "trickle down" effect from the benefits which big business has obtained.

Cavallo persists in introducing a tax on current accounts which the banks manage to the detriment of the small businesses to reduce the burden on the upper middle class or by modifying the tax norms authorizing part payments to the large businesses, meanwhile maintaining a real regressive percentage for VAT.

An immediate improvement and a better standard of living for the waged and the unemployed is essential for reducing the gap in incomes that separates the richest 10 per cent from the poor sector of the population, a gap that has widened by 57 per cent in the last ten years.

Resources

Are resources lacking for this change? On balance if one looks at the "winners in the model", one quickly discovers who appropriated that which was taken off the incomes of the workers. In the midst of the country's complete misery, four Argentines feature on the list of the 538 richest people in the world (Perez Companc, Rocca, Noble and Fortabat).

Many trades unionists and community leaders have shown, to the point of weariness, that by eliminating the evasion by the large business groups in the paying of US$20 billion annually and by reintroducing the employers' contributions to social programs, the amounts necessary for implementing emergency plans for employment and family support could be raised immediately.

In this view, a program of economic reconstruction cannot advance without first eliminating the squandering actions of the privatisations through regaining state control of strategic businesses.

It will be said that these initiatives would "violate the contracts." But over the last decade, were all the laws that protected labour, social and pension rights recognized? The only differences now would be that for the first time, the same "juridical insecurity" would fall upon those who have enriched themselves by manipulating the country's laws for their own private benefit.

Of course, this decision will unleash financial reprisals, but no one must forget that the electricity plants, the petroleum complexes and the telephone networks are not assets that can be transferred outside the country.

In every way the most critical aspect of the Argentine economy is the national debt. While it persists, the daily pressure from the creditors on public finances will not leave any room for the adoption of measures conducive to popular well being. Therefore, under the present conditions it turns out to be more advantageous to declare suspension of paying this debt than passively awaiting for the next crisis, which will be the moratorium.

Such a declaration would constitute a sovereignty decision allowing the reorienting of resources toward the priorities of social expenses and economic reactivity.

It is customary for some to assert that this measure will marginalize the country in the international markets. But hasn't this displacementbeen accomplished already by the government having tried to take responsibility for an untenable compromise? Some also caution against the "flight of foreign exchange" forgetting that all the promises to honour the debt did not induce any return of the US$100 billion that have been deposited outside the country. The bulk of the creditors are not some kind of ghostly saviours, but are concentrated groups of businessmen spread throughout the country.

Many tactical ways exist to confront the suspension of paying what is probably a fraudulent debt. The library of juridical reasons to justify this method is huge. The only real challenge rests in substituting concrete actions for high-sounding declarations. But it is necessary to remember that any fight against the creditors will be viable only if it is adopted as part of an integrated plan of economic reconstruction.

For example, a moratorium divorced from direct control over the banks and external commerce will drive us towards chaos similar to that created by Alan Garcia in Peru in the middle of the 1980s.

The present day debate about economic programs is dominated by the anti-liberal proposals in opposition to the prevailing model. In these discussions capitalism is considered as an immovable reality, omitting from consideration the idea that this system recreates periodic crises, which brings terrible suffering for the majority of the population. Therefore one must consider a third option, socialist, which points to overcoming the tyranny of the market through democratic planning. A popular alternative constructed from an improvement of the people's purchasing power, reversing the privatisations and suspending paying the debt, is a starting point in this perspective for social emancipation.

Footnotes

[1] A word coined by Argentines to describe the Government's financial measures and manoeuvres to deal with the crises.

Social movement revitalised

14 October 2001, by Eduardo Lucita

Tuesday, August 7: throughout the day, hundreds of roads and streets are blocked, public service employees hold rallies in the street and in front of public buildings, academics give public courses and occupy the faculties. Street musical shows in support of the struggles emerge from nowhere. Almost 100,000 people take part in the marches and mobilizations of various types throughout the country.

Wednesday August 8: thousands of people from different trade unions in struggle, neighbourhood organizations, community cafes, [1] students, small traders, academics and intellectuals, answer the call of the CTA and assemble in front of the Plaza de los Congresos.

They warmly welcome the column of piqueteros who have marched 20, 30 or 40 kilometres from different districts of the Buenos Aires conurbation to arrive at the rallying point, defying the intimidation of the government, accompanied by the main leaders of the CTA, by the Mothers de la Plaza de Mayo, by personalities from the world of the arts and of culture and by the different political organizations of the Left. The piqueteros take the head of the approximately 40,000 people who march to the historic Plaza de Mayo.

The crisis shaking Argentina is of such a magnitude and depth that it is without precedent in the country's recent history. The destiny of the nation seems to be at stake. Beyond the economic and political problems, it is a crisis of the future. There is no horizon except a worsening of the current conditions of fragmentation, social exclusion and submission to big indigenous and foreign capital.

The foreign debt (public and private) stands at 200,000 million dollars - more than 50 per cent of GDP. The government cannot pay the interest on the public debt, which amounts to more than 11,000 million dollars per year.

In a speech on July 9, national independence day, the President recognized publicly that the country "was not independent". The finance minister added that "the local and international credit lines are cut for the country", which means that Argentina has virtually suspended payment and is on the verge of the collapse.

After 18 months of government, the current administrators have not succeeded in ending the recession, which began in the middle of 1998, and is entering its fourth consecutive year. In 1999 GDP fell by 3 per cent, in 2000 again by 0.5 per cent and the year 2001 should record a new decline of 1.6 per cent. The national economy is plunged into a cycle of stagnation and depression.

Under the pressure of the international credit bodies and the national bank and with the top priority of obtaining the resources necessary for the payment of the debt interest, the government has introduced the so-called "zero deficit law".

As it would be suicidal to continue to pay the ruinous interest to finance the fiscal deficit, the law says the state can no longer spend more than its receipts - that is it cannot continue to run up a debt.

As the law gives priority to the payment of the interest on the foreign debt, the government has imposed a reduction of 13 per cent in the wages of public sector workers and pensions, a reduction that will be variable from one month to another according to tax revenues.

As this measure has proved insufficient, it has also imposed adjustments and cuts in the whole national budget, which will seriously affect indirect wages and welfare payments. The social impact of more than a decade of neo-liberalism is highly visible: unemployment affects 16.4 per cent of the active population (non-official calculations put the rate as 22 per cent), while under-employment is about 15 per cent.

On the whole more than 30 per cent of workers experience serious employment problems. Almost 40 per cent of the population is poor and 7 per cent among this latter are destitute. Wage earners receive only 19 per cent of national income. The richest 10 per cent appropriate 48 per cent of wealth produced, while the poorest 10 per cent account for only 1.4 per cent. Each day 55 children aged less than one year die of hunger and easily curable diseases.

If Argentina remains the least poor country of Latin America, it is also the country that during the last decade has recorded the highest indices of growth of poverty.

Crisis of hegemony

In the space of a few months, the crisis has consumed three finance ministers; the institutions of parliamentary democracy have been emptied of their substance; the government and even the system of domination have lost a broad part of their social legitimacy.

As could already be foreseen during the final stage of the Menem government, the crisis of hegemony inside the dominant bloc, that the Cavallo Plan had succeeded in constituting since 1991 through the sinecures of privatisation, has begun to reopen with the exhaustion of the neo-liberal model.

An expression of this is the strong conflict over economic policy between the various fractions of big capital, local and foreign. The big economic groups and the trans-nationalized companies propose generalized devaluation on the one hand and total dollarisation of the economy on the other, while the big banks seek to maintain the current situation and continue to make significant profits through the refinancing of the debt

and the cashing of commissions.

Under the domination of finance capital, all fractions push for the reduction of public expenditure, affecting to be unaware that the balance sheet of the national budget is in surplus if interest on the foreign debt is excluded.

This conflict is also expressed inside the government and the big parties of the system. These tendency and factional struggles lie behind the advances and retreats of the government, the atmosphere of improvisation and hesitation over what decisions to take.

Before the clear absence of hegemony - understood in the Gramscian sense as the capacity of a fraction of the bourgeoisie to impose a program on the rest of the population - the different fractions of capital and the political tendencies mutually neutralize each other.

What is at stake is a re-composition of political alliances, in harmony with the degree of concentration and centralization of capital reached, which seeks to render viable the adjustment underway and which can impose the necessary social control to develop a program for emerging from crisis.

Revival of social movement

As a counterpart the social movement in general gives indications of a qualitative leap. Throughout these years, the struggles of employed and unemployed workers and of various social movements have multiplied, although they amount to partial, fragmented struggles and there is a certain inability to centralize them and ensure their continuity. However, the great political crises have an incalculable a priori value.

With the exacerbation of the crisis, the social movement has shown signs of re-composition, under forms of independent self-organization and self-management of its own needs, the fabric of class solidarity seems to recompose.

For the moment it is not a generalized tendency, but there have been several edifying examples. The piqueteros and unemployed of the Province of Buenos Aires [2] block roads and express solidarity with the piqueteros of the Province of Salta in the north of the country, brutally repressed by the police (two workers killed and several detained).

The state employees, from the airline and teaching have demonstrated in solidarity with the piqueteros; the latter have mobilized in favour of the civil servants and teachers. And so on.

Several of these struggles unfold on the margins of traditional structures and methods, with embryonic forms of self-organization and direct action, while others are led by trade-unions, in a social process of objective convergence whose distinctive feature is the deep democratic content which runs through the movement. This culminated with the "First National Congress" of the social, neighbourhood and unemployed organizations" (see next page).

The depth of the crisis and the revitalization of the social movement has had strong repercussions inside the party system. The governing Alliance is divided, the Government is experiencing serious difficulties in disciplining its own supporters, the principal opposition force cannot fix a definite orientation, there are a number of rupture of party structures and some new political formations which seek the votes of the big parties.

From various sectors, there are calls for the formation of a "government of national salvation" but nobody defines with any clarity its objectives and makes no specific proposals.

The Left is reinforced in this process on the other hand. Its various parties and organizations present, although in a limited manner, a greater social insertion and a greater public recognition. One sees it in its intervention in the social struggles and its electoral perspectives. Overall, and despite its division into several currents, there is a significant perspective of growth in the voting intentions for the left in society.

Shadow of the police State

This portrait of the situation will undoubtedly change during the national parliamentary elections in October of this year. Everything points to a great dispersal of votes and an electoral catastrophe for the government. Thus, the political situation is very dynamic but also very dangerous.

The pressure of the financial sectors has constituted a veritable civil coup d'état. The president of the Banking Association initially and the Rural Company then, meeting the President and his ministers, have demanded repression of the social movement, speaking about anarchy and the pressure of the road blockades.

Within various influential circles the talk is of a form of a state social control and the shadow of a police state - with the national police transformed into a militarised police force - hovers over all these circles.

In this game of pressures, predominant is that which comes from US hegemony, seeking to force Argentina's rapid adhesion to the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) with the double objective of displacing European capital and achieving the maximum mobility for their own capital, and also to isolate Brazil, whose position is much more autonomous that that of Argentina.

There do not seem to be too many alternatives. Either the government advances on a path of deepening of the economic policy currently being followed and of political authoritarianism policy, or the social movement advances, strengthening its autonomy and its independent forms of organization and, by defending public liberties and expanding democratic space, it imposes a way out of the crisis.

Footnotes

[1] "Comedor comunitarios" or "community cafes" play the role of

self-organized "popular soup kitchens".

[2] This province surrounds the capital, Buenos Aires, but does not include it.

National Assembly of "Piqueteros"

14 October 2001, by Eduardo Lucita

More than 2,000 delegates from all over the country attended. Organisational responsibility fell to the piqueteros of La Matanza whose main leaders are members of the 'Federation of Land and Life' of the CTA (Central de Trabajadores Argentinos) and the CCC (Corriente Clasista y Combativa) influenced by the Partido Comunista Revolucionario (a Maoist group), but also there were smaller groups like the Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados -Teresa Rodríguez, the Polo Obrero and others. Not just the unemployed also there were trade union leaders, workers in education and universities; retired, neighbourhood leaders and associations, agricultural workers were also numerous, as well as others. The Secretary General of the CTA, Víctor De Gennaro was warmly received and applauded for his intervention while Hugo Moyano, Secretary General of the 'rebel' CGT was booed and practically was unable to speak.

The reaction was very marked when Carlos Giuliani was killed in Genoa. The Assembly rose for an ovation to his memory and he has taken his place in the gallery of martyrs that already includes the piqueteros killed by the Argentinian police.

The convocation of this national assembly had clear and precise objectives: to advance in the coordination of the struggles at national level; to improve levels of organization; and to confront a new adjustment. The debate was broad, democratic and open to all. Each speaker had 3 minutes, and thus followed the piqueteros from the north to the south of the country, leaders of neighbourhoods, associations, social organizations, and political parties, the deputies from the left parties: Patricio Etchegaray, from the Partido Comunista, Vilma Ripoll of the Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores and Jorge Altamira of the Partido Obrero.

The Assembly defined a Plan of Struggle national consistent including road blockades and paths of communication of the 50 main cities of the country with a duration escalating weakly from 24, 48 and 72 hours, to culminate in a national general strike convoked by the CTA and the 'rebel' CGT. The political objectives of the Plan of Struggle: a) freedom for social prisoners; b) dropping of charges against more than 2,500 social fighters; and c) that the government drops the adjustment and wage cuts as well as budget measures.

There was no shortage of dissident views and controversial proposals, on the other hand the leaders of the Assembly were clear and categorical that the barrages should meet four conditions: big, peaceful, multi-sectoral and be found near an alternative road so as not to affect the movement of workers. Thus, one will avoid the governmental accusation concerning freedom of circulation. In the midst of the assembly's debates a piquetero from the north of the country said: "we know that when we block a road it is as if we block an artery of a human being".

The piqueteros know, without too much theorization, that in the current relationship of forces there will be difficulties met in acting in the centres of production and accumulation of the capital. They carry then the confrontation at the level of the distribution and circulation of commodities and persons, thus affecting the realization of profits. [1]

Footnotes

[1] See "Old and new forms of struggle", IV 328, February 2001.

Colonialism and the Death Penalty

14 October 2001, by Rafael Bernabe

The United States is one of the most active practitioners of the death penalty. As such, it has been a major target of the international movement against capital punishment. The fact that the US is now exporting the death penalty to Puerto Rico, where it was abolished in 1929, is far less known. This situation should be of interest for those involved in the struggle for democratic rights, which includes the struggle against both colonialism and the death penalty.

Puerto Rico became a US colony in 1898, as a result of the Spanish-American War. The death penalty, which had existed under Spanish rule, was retained by the new authorities. There were 23 executions between 1898 and 1929. All those executed were poor, at least 14 were black. [1]

Initially, even the old Spanish method of execution (the garrote) remained in use, but soon enough the process was Americanised with the introduction of hanging. Some of the last prisoners put to death with the old mechanism were among those convicted for

participating in the partidas sediciosas, raiding rural bands which took advantage of the dislocations caused by the war to attack and sack haciendas in the interior of the island (in at least some cases in retribution for years of abuse and oppression).

After a period of military rule (1898-1900), the US organized its colonial authority over Puerto Rico under the Foraker Act (1900-1917) and the Jones Act (1917-1950/52). Under the first, Puerto Ricans were allowed to elect the lower and, under the second, both chambers of the colonial legislature. The Governor as well as other executive officials, however, were named by the President of the United States. The struggle against the death penalty began soon after 1898. [2]

As opposed to what is sometimes said, this had, in most cases, little to do with Puerto Rico's Catholic traditions. The most visible early opponents of the death penalty were people like Rosendo Matienzo and Rafael Lopez, exponents of the liberal, pro-labour and enlightened currents influential among some professional sectors of the time, a current which combined its support for political democracy and (sometimes quite radical) social and labour reforms with anticlerical, anti-Catholic, "spiritist" and "freethinking" ideas. Matienzo, a radical democrat, influenced, among other things, by the US anti-trust and the New Zealand labour movements, introduced bills in the House of Delegates on at least three occasions (1907, 1909, 1910) providing for the abolition of the death penalty. [3]

Bills defeated

The bills were opposed by the President of the House, Jose De Diego, a figure strongly identified with Catholic and otherwise conservative and anti-labour views: his defence of capital punishment in particular was based on Lombroso's theory of "innate criminals". The bills were defeated. Opposition to the death penalty kept growing during the 1910s and 1920s, with the support, among others, of important leaders of the growing and influential Socialist Party, which had been organized in 1915. Future colonial governor Luis Muñoz Marín was among those who came to oppose the death penalty after witnessing an execution in 1917. [4]

The death penalty was abolished in Puerto Rico in 1929. All indications point to the conclusion that this decision enjoyed widespread support. During the 1930s, Governor Blanton Winship, best known for his brutal repression of the Nationalist movement in such events as the Ponce Massacre (1937), sought to reintroduce capital punishment, but the insular legislature, evidently conscious of the lack of support for such a move, did not follow his advice. [5]

A series of internal and international tensions led the US to reorganize its rule over Puerto Rico after 1950. It became necessary to convince the world that Puerto Rico was no longer a colony, that it had somehow achieved full self-determination within a new and unique relationship with the US Congress approved legislation which allowed Puerto Ricans to write their own constitution, an exercise which was presented both as a "compact" between Puerto Rico and the US and as an extension to Puerto Rico of the principle of "government by consent".

Nevertheless, the new Constitution and the government of the Estado Libre Asociado (ELA) which it organized only have jurisdiction over local matters: most dispositions regarding the relation of Puerto Rico to the US under the previous Jones Act remained unchanged (renamed as the Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act of 1950).

Convention

Within the limits imposed by Congress, a Constitutional convention was convened. A majority of its delegates were members of the Partido Popular Democratico (led by Muñoz), a party which had dominated island politics since 1940, when it had won the elections under an agrarian and social reform program in many ways influenced by Roosevelt's the New Deal.

Article II, Section 7 of the new Constitution declared in no uncertain terms: "The death penalty shall not exist". (In fact, during the constitutional debate, Luis Ferre, grand old man of the statehood movement sought, unsuccessfully, to soften the terms of this prohibition).

Nevertheless, as we pointed out, the Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act, sister document of the ELA Constitution, provides that federal laws "not locally inapplicable" will have the same force in Puerto Rico as in the rest of the US. What happens then, if an act of Congress comes into conflict with the ELA Constitution?

The political consequences of how one answers this question are not insignificant: for one thing, if Congress can act in Puerto Rico in contradiction with explicit provisions of the ELA Constitution, where does that leave the notion that the ELA implied a "compact" between Puerto Rico and Congress? Even if one adds the argument that other states of the US find themselves in a similar situation (their state constitutions overridden by federal acts), the fact is that the ELA has no representation in Congress: thus, if Congress, in which Puerto Rico has no representation can override a Constitution which Puerto Rico did approve (I leave aside the many flaws involved in that process) where does that leave the notion "government by consent"?

This is the problem, the problem of the colonial nature of the existing status, which has now been posed point blank around a - literally - life and death issue: the applicability of the FDPA to Puerto Rico.

On July 2000 Federal Judge Salvador Casellas in San Juan forbade federal prosecutors from seeking the death penalty in Puerto Rico under the FDPA. [6] One must admit that his decision, far from avoiding controversy, posed some of the political issues implicit in this case quite forcefully.

Judge Casellas based his decision on two arguments. The first hinges on the specific nature of the death penalty and on the fact that the FDPA contains no clear expression of the intent of

Congress to extend its provisions to the island.

While recognizing the fact that in the past the courts have upheld the applicability in Puerto Rico of federal acts which did not include such an expression and which, like the FDPA, contradict the local constitution (such as those which permit wiretapping, also prohibited by the ELA Constitution), he nevertheless argues that this case is different.

It is different precisely because of the "unique and extreme" nature of the death penalty - a matter of life and death for the defendants and of profound political and moral implications for the whole community, a matter, therefore, on which a much higher degree of precision in all decisions and determinations can and should be demanded.

Since the ELA Constitution forbids the death penalty, since the Constitution was reviewed by Congress, which could have, but did not modify that provision (as it did with other passages, such as the one recognizing employment as a fundamental right), since the Constitution was presented to the people of Puerto Rico as part of a "compact", and last, but most importantly, given the extreme nature of capital punishment, it must be concluded that, had Congress wished to extend the FDPA to the island it would have not left such a momentous question to "mere inference" or interpretation, it would have done so explicitly.

Since it did not, Casellas argued that it cannot be concluded that Congress wished to extend the FDPA to Puerto Rico. It is therefore inapplicable in Puerto Rico.

But what if Congress did intend to extend the FDPA to Puerto Rico (or explicitly did so in the future)? The second argument deployed by Casellas addressed this question. His conclusion was that, even then, the death penalty would be inapplicable in Puerto Rico. His argument can be briefly summarized: the ELA was created in 1952 both as a "compact" and in accordance with the principle of "government by consent".

Two processes

Nevertheless, since 1952, two processes have progressively "eroded" this principle in Puerto Rico. On the one hand, federal initiatives, particularly since the 1960s, have shrunk the areas where the local government has or, may have, real authority. However as opposed to the States that have undergone a similar process, the ELA does not have representation in Congress.

At the same time, Congress has repeatedly blocked all attempts to enhance the powers of the ELA or to facilitate a transition to statehood or independence. Deprived of the possibility of opting for another status, or of extending the powers of the existing one, Puerto Ricans are thus being subjected to an increasing series of federal initiatives in whose elaboration they have no representation.

This "gradual erosion during the last forty eight years of the principle of government by consent" is, according to Casellas, serious enough already. The extension of the FDPA to the island would be yet another, major, step in the same direction. Thus, loyalty and respect for the principle of "government by consent" would dictate declaring the FDPA inapplicable in Puerto Rico.

It cannot be said, as I pointed out, that Casellas aimed low. According to his decision, extending the FDPA to Puerto Rico would imply a departure if not a betrayal, not only of the alleged "compact" of 1950-52 but also of the basic democratic principles on which the Federal system and Constitution claim to stand.

Evidently Judge Casellas' decision did not come out of a void. It was of course related to his desire to defend the ELA, which he supports, against further encroachments, as well as his probable personal opposition to the death penalty. But it cannot be divorced from the fact that the leaders of all the three electoral parties in Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rico Bar and other professional associations, a significant number of religious leaders, as well as the smaller but visible left organizations have taken a stand against the death penalty.

The few public officials (such as former Police head Pedro Toledo) that, at one time or another, have made statements in favour of the death penalty have found little or no support. The growing threat of convictions under the FDPA also spurred the creation of Ciudadanos Contra la Pena de Muerte, a coordinating committee that has led an effective and unceasing effort (through vigils, press conferences, media appearances) to keep the issue in the public eye.

Needless to say, Casellas' arguments were not the end of the matter: on June 5, 2001 the First Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston struck down his decision, rejecting his two main arguments. The decision is brief and blunt. According to it, the applicability or inapplicability of federal acts to Puerto Rico is strictly a matter of Congressional intent.

Any law not explicitly made inapplicable by Congress is applicable in Puerto Rico. The limits and rules set by the ELA Constitution only apply to local courts and authorities. Granting the people of Puerto Rico the opportunity of adopting it did not imply that federal penalties would not apply to federal crimes in Puerto Rico.

According to the decision, what is being criticized here (extension of federal acts to Puerto Rico even if they contradict the local constitution) has been done before. To denounce it now, according to the Court, is to present a "political" and not a "legal" argument.

Unclear

It is not yet clear whether the case will be appealed to the Supreme Court or whether the latter will agree to review it. The decision as it stands will allow for interesting debates on both issues involved (capital punishment and the status question).

Opponents of the death penalty will be working on several areas: educating the public on the evils of the death penalty, carrying out activities in opposition to capital punishment,

extending the public opposition to the death penalty to a wider number of professional, trade union and social organizations.

Judges, prosecutors and jurors must be made aware that Puerto Rico opposes the death penalty even if Congress, via Puerto Rico's colonial subordination, allows them to impose it.

Internationally, the opponents of both the death penalty and of colonialism should denounce how the US is trying to impose that destructive practice on a people that have clearly and repeatedly rejected it. Socialists have and will continue to participate in all these efforts.

In this process two fine but important distinctions should be made: while not defending the ELA, we do defend any and all the democratic rights recognized in its Constitution - in many ways it is a more advanced document than the US Constitution.

While struggling for independence we do not oppose federal legislation that may improve our lives under US rule (a complex problem, for sure, which requires a flexible analysis of each concrete problem).

In this case, we should point out that the Court of Appeals was right in describing Casellas' argument as "political" and that Casellas was right in raising a "political" argument: the problem (colonialism and the right of people to live under laws of their own making) is political. Furthermore, the Court is reiterating something the left has pointed out many times: that there is no such "compact" between Puerto Rico and the US, that colonialism is inherently undemocratic and that it can only be legalized at the cost of separating the law from the democratic principles on which it supposedly rests. [7]

Struggle

The Court's decision now forces us to redouble our struggle against the death penalty in Puerto Rico. Many in Puerto Rico rightfully feel proud of the positive aspects of the ELA Constitution.
As socialists, we should also see the struggle against capital punishment as an opportunity to bring them a step, or two, closer to the understanding that, in the final analysis, those admirable provisions can only be guaranteed through our constant mobilization and, indeed, through a "compact", not with Congress, but with the working and oppressed peoples of North America: a "compact" in the struggle to transform both our colonial structures and their archaic and undemocratic political institutions into participatory democracies, truly governed by their peoples, and thus able to freely collaborate with each other on an equal footing.

The writer thanks Rubie Alicea and Ruth Arroyo for their help in gathering information for this article.

Footnotes

[1] Their photos may be seen in Moises Echevarr'a, La pena de muerte, La Tribuna, Ponce, 1938.

[2] For early arguments against capital punishment see: Rafael Lopez Landron, Apuntes sobre la pena de muerte, Madrid, 1885; Manuel Corchado, La pena de muerte, Imprenta "El Criollo", Aguadilla, 1903; Edelmiro Huertas, Porcin de argumentos contra la pena de muerte, Tipograf'a Fenix, Coamo, 1911.

[3] Matienzo is a fascinating figure, an enlightened democrat who, disillusioned with the results of U.S. rule he had initially supported, progressively became a proponent of independence. On this current see: Rafael Bernabe, Respuestas al colonialismo en la politica puertorriquena, R'o Piedras, Huracan, 1996; Nancy Herzig, El Iris de paz, Huracâ€in, R'o Piedras, 2001.

[4] Luis Muñoz Marín, Memorias, Universidad Interamericana, San Juan, 1982.

[5] Echevarr'a wrote the book quoted above as a response to Winship. The latter's proposal was opposed by the Socialist and Liberal parties, and supported by some Republican legislators.

[6] The case in question is United States of America v. Hector Acosta Martinez, Joel Rivera Alejandro.

[7] This debate goes back to the Insular Cases of 1900, an interesting chapter in the rise of US imperialism that we cannot go into here.

Basque rights and Spanish democracy

14 October 2001, by José Ramón Castaños "Troglo"

This conflict goes back a long way in history but the most immediate antecedents of the current battle relate to the pro-independence Lizarra Agreement in 1998. [1] In this pact, open formulae were put forward for peace, national self-determination, the territorial unity of Euskadi and the political sovereignty of its institutions of self-government; because of this it caused fear among the political classes who uphold the scaffolding of the Spanish state.

The Spanish government presented the Basque elections as a plebiscite between Spain (presented thus as the paradigm of democracy) and Basque nationalism (presented as the paradigm of violence). A plebiscite that it has lost and which has led to an entirely new political situation.

2. The fear of losing a part of the

territory of the state has produced a conservative regression throughout the structures of power.

This alarm was activated as always by the powerful neo-Francoist "lobbies" reinstalled under the government of the Popular Party (PP) of Aznar. They exert a decisive influence on the PP and the government; on the judiciary, the police and the army chain of command; on the employers' associations (CEOE); on the media and the Spanish Episcopal conference. All sought the same thing: to reinforce the authority of the state and recuperate Spanish identity among the nationalities of the periphery.

In Euskadi, their opportunity was handed to them on a plate by ETA itself with the breaking of the ceasefire and the political alliances established at Lizarra. For the Spanish right, it was a dream opportunity to make the link between the moral rejection that ETA's killings had provoked in society and the identification between nationalism and violence. This provided a basis to delegitimise the peace initiatives of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) as if the latter were "an immoral attempt to obtain political advantages associated with violent ends".

Thus, with the pretext of "putting an end to the connivance of democratic nationalism with terrorism", the "Spanish reconquest of Euskadi" was launched. Note in passing that the objectives of this new affirmation of Spanish identity against the internal enemy were largely shared by Spanish public opinion. It was about putting Basque autonomy on ice until the conversion of its institutions into an appendix of the central state; reversing the policies of linguistic normalization of Euskera [2] in favour of Castilian; braking the development of Basque national identity, and reducing the Concierto Económico (fiscal sovereignty) to a smokescreen.

The means to do it was to remove the PNV from the Basque government, and the abertzale (pro-independence) left offered the possibility for this with the rupture of the Lizarra Agreement and the abandonment of parliamentary institutions. Democratic nationalism was thus put at the mercy of a hypothetical Spanish-centralist alliance between the Popular Party and the Socialist Party, and ETA contributed to this with its campaign of assassinations of Socialist leaders and municipal councillors.

This pushed the PSOE into the arms of the centralist right, which advocated state repression against the abertzale violence. The "antiterrorist pact" concluded thus between the PP and PSOE was in reality a veritable campaign against Basque nationalism starting from an intense parliamentary blockade, the taking hostage of the Basque institutions and the criminalisation of democratic nationalism, equated with violence, fascism, gulag, holocaust and xenophobia.

3. The Spanish left has not measured up to the height of the circumstances.

Lizarra was an opportunity for Spanish leftists and democrats, because the possibility of resolving the national problem and democratising the state was posed; but in Spain such citizens (democrats respectful of the rights of others) are a minority overwhelmed by the tidal wave of state nationalism. Thus this minority is all the more courageous.

We can mention the United Left (IU), the Madrid Forum for Dialogue, the nationalist movements of Catalonia and Galicia, the Socialist Party (Maragall), or some independents like Herrero de Miñón. What of the others? Until now, they have fully submitted to the discipline exercised by the Popular Party through the state bodies.

Perhaps it is understandable that the powers that be (monarchy, police and employers' associations) accommodate themselves to the government. We say "perhaps" because it is not very farsighted to refuse prevent the normalization of the life of the nationalities, but at the end of the day one understands this "unity of action" or "communion of interests".

One also understands why the government wished to discipline the Spanish Episcopal Conference to obtain a supplementary moral legitimation, or its quest, or why it has sought through money and sinecures to gain the collaboration of the media. However, it is difficult to forgive those intellectuals who have become apologists of the regime (except Saramago, Vásquez Montalbán and some others), or the Socialist Party's participation in the choir of the right, or the transformation of some unions (CCOO and UGT) into allies of the state against the rights of the nationalities.

4. The election result nonetheless amounts to a defeat for the state and an imponderable victory for Basque nationalism.

The table below leaves no room for doubt. The rate of electoral participation was among the highest registered in a western democracy (80% of registered voters), which gives an idea of the enormous mobilization of citizens in defence of Basque autonomy.

There was very little change in relation to 1998 if one compares the relationship between the "self-determination bloc" (the parties who signed the Lizarra Declaration) and the "Spanish centralist bloc" (PP-PSOE), but this fact is very significant if we consider the very difficult context of the victory of democratic nationalism: the very tough intervention by the state on one hand, and the equally tough campaign of political killings by ETA on the other.

Of interest also are the modifications inside of each bloc. The defeat of the project of the Spanish centralist right which sought to put the Socialist Party in the minority (the relation between these parties remained unchanged) and the spectacular displacement from the abertzale left (Euskal Herritarrok, EH) towards democratic nationalism (PNV).

The political interpretation of these results offers in our opinion a great opportunity to analyse the perspectives for Basque politics.

Party	2001 Vote	%	Seats	1998 Votes	< %	Seats
PNV-EA	604,444	42.72	33	458,967	36.96	27
HB-EH	143,139	10.12	7	224,001	17.91	14
IU	78,862	5.58	3	71,064	5.68	2
Total psd*	826,445	58.42	43	754,032	60.55	43

PP-UA	326,933	23.12	19	276,481	21.65	18
PSE-EE	253,195	17.90	13	220,052	17.60	14
Total SC*	580,128	41.02	32	496,533	39.25	32

* psd - pro self-determination parties

* SC - Spanish centralist parties

5. The Spanish centralist alternative to the Basque institutions seems a metaphysical impossibility.

The explanation given by the Spanish government for its defeat was that Basque society was not ripe for the change that it proposed. On this reading, one can conclude that the state will continue its centralist pressure against Euskadi under subtler and less aggressive forms. Nobody doubts it.

On the contrary if we observe the electoral tendencies of the last 25 years, we note that the nationalist majority has been a constant which oscillates between 58% and 60% of the electorate, and this fact authorizes us to suppose that Basque national consciousness is rooted in society to the point of no return and that it is then unthinkable that it can be dislodged from the institutions through the discourse and projects of Spanish national uniformity. To claim the contrary is quite simply a chimera.

6. Democratic nationalism has consolidated its political hegemony.

The PNV won in 96% of municipalities, including the big cities and the concentrations of worker and emigrant populations where socialism has been strongly rooted since the beginning of the 19th century. This concentration of PNV votes is a reaction of national pride against the external aggression of the state.

This aggression against produced a reaction of self-defence, which is at the base of the nationalist hegemony. However, this does not explain why it is so strongly identified with democratic nationalism. To seek an explanation we should refer to the categorical rejection by Basque society of ETA's killings and the complicity of the abertzale left.

7. The setback for the abertzale left is a vote of sanction against ETA by its own base.

Euskal Herritarrok lost 36% of its votes and 50% of its seats. These figures confirm that we were right when we said at the end of the ceasefire that ETA's killing meant the suicide of the Basque left. The 80,000 votes lost by the abertzale left almost all went to the PNV-EA coalition. In fact these are not lost but borrowed votes and they can be won back if the abertzale left decides to undertake a movement of political regeneration by imposing a definitive ceasefire on ETA or breaking with it politically.

The transfer of the political hegemony of the abertzale movement towards bourgeois nationalism is the inevitable consequence of the breaking of the ceasefire. The rupture of the Lizarra Agreement has reversed the course of the political initiative inside the abertzale movement.

Until that moment, the left had the initiative. The internal struggle between the partisans of the status quo (autonomy inside the state) and those of political sovereignty gradually swung the balance in favour of the latter, and the weight of the social left on the desirable content of national construction began to be decisive thanks to the powerful influence of abertzale trade unionism.

New allies were won inside and outside the country and it was only a question of time before a majority of public opinion could be consolidated around the ideas of self-determination. With the backing of this opinion and with a good policy of alliances with the historic nationalities (the Declaration of Barcelona between the Catalan, Basque and Galician nationalists) and the Spanish left (PSOE-IU-trade unions), the door could open to a democratic reform of the state.

It was possible to do all this while the arms remained silent and with a proposal of political articulation for Euskadi taking account of the opinion of each of its territories, as well as of the inequality of the consciousness among them, but ETA's reversion to armed actions has wasted this possibility, to the extent that the new political course is being undertaken under the hegemony of moderate nationalism.

8. The explanations of the electoral defeat given by the leaders of the abertzale left are not convincing.

All that they have managed to say is that the national Table was unable to explain its political alternative and that fear of the Spanish centralist right concentrated the vote around the PNV. They refuse to make a critique of their political strategy and are satisfied with the explanation that the Aralar current contributed to the dispersion of the abertzale vote by criticizing ETA's action.

To excuse its errors by accusing others is unforgivable because it means implicitly renouncing the critical analysis of the causes of the defeat and because this exercise in complacency encloses the abertzale left in a political autism. It blocks the possibility of bringing the abertzale left and Basque politics out of its current impasse.

It is very worrying that the invidious role played by ETA's actions is ignored as if it was a taboo subject. Worrying because it takes no account (or depreciates) the importance of the profound rejection by society and the EH electorate of the unjustified ending of the ceasefire. Worrying that instead of valuing this as the expression of the political maturity of a people, it is depreciated it as if it amounted to political cowardice on the part of the weak and fearful.

Worrying because the fact that the acceptance of ETA's political leadership by the abertzale left is at the base of its grave crisis of credibility is ignored. Worrying that there is no recognition that the breaking of the political engagements entered into at Lizarra and the abandonment of the Basque Parliament, have allowed the PP and PSOE to institutionally and politically obstruct autonomy. Worrying that there is no recognition that EH's electoral campaign was centred uniquely on criticism of the PNV (abusive and injurious recourse to the adjective "unionist" to accuse it,

without justification, of abandonment before the state).

The votes lost by EH are thus the fruit of a double rejection: a rejection of ETA's actions and a rejection of the politics of harassment of the PNV. The abertzale left can and must open a profound reflection on these questions and other similar questions, because it is the precondition for the recovery of the credibility lost and the votes lent to democratic nationalism. Otegui is right in saying that the 80,000 votes lost can be recovered even if he did not say that the condition for it was demarcation from ETA's actions.

9. The United Left (IU) faces objective difficulties (of its identity and its nature) in becoming a viable alternative for the abertzale left.

When we speak of IU-EB, we should begin by saying that its message in defence of national rights has been the most radical against the state and the most committed of its history. This commitment has earned it insults and calumnies from the media affiliated to the state but it has allowed it also to win the respect of the left and of democratic nationalism.

The IU-EB constituted a useful vote at these elections because it combined its left orientation with a commitment to support the president of the Basque government against the attacks of centralism.

Despite this, it was not able to win over the critical sector of the abertzale left, and this fact constitutes or should constitute an important factor of analysis when we consider initiatives of recomposition or regeneration of the Basque left. The fact that the loss of votes of the abertzale left was so strong (80,000) and the recuperation of these latter by IU so small (a little over 7,000 votes) has many causes.

Among these multiple causes are: (a) the ideological identification (nationalism) between ETA's critics and the PNV; (b) the strong pressure for a useful vote in favour of democratic nationalism to block the road to the Spanish centralist right; (c) the absence of Basque national roots, or what amounts to the same, the perception of IU-EB as a party of Spanish allegiance, dubious at the level of its Basque identity; (d) the (justified) absence of historic confidence by abertzalism in the Communist Party and its successors in the IU.

There were undoubtedly others but these seem to me sufficient reasons. Thus, despite its positive political evolution, IU cannot be the alternative pole of reference to the crisis of ETA; it is necessary to build this pole in collaboration, starting from inside the Basque left and outside it, jointly with the other lefts.

The necessary regroupment of the now dispersed Basque left demands national frameworks of organization and profiles clearly identified with Basque national construction. We do not say that as a critical observation starting from nothing, but as observation of a fact, which should be the point of departure for political reflection in the IU.

10. The triumph of democratic nationalism legitimates the offers made since the Lizarra Declaration, and this places the problem of national self-determination at the centre of political reality.

These questions are inevitable if we take account of the nature of the Basque problem, the intensity of these demands inside society, the promises made by democratic nationalism (the demand for shared sovereignty of the nationalities in Europe), and the expansion of this same idea in Catalonia and Galicia.

Hence one can also appreciate the recommendations that the Basque employers have just made to the Aznar government: "to relax the policy of autonomy and the model of the state", but even in this case, the resistance of the Spanish state to democratic reform will be too strong to suppose that the victory of nationalism at the ballot box will open the road to self-determination. The right of the Basques to decide freely their national future is posed as an unavoidable problem of political reality, but it is not for all that easy to obtain.

11.The ambivalences of the PNV stem from this difficulty.

Its electoral victory has given it a margin of manoeuvre as broad as the campaign of national aggression that it suffered was intense. But if this margin militates in favour of the "sovereignist wing of the party", there are political pressures, which are just as important from the two extremes of the chessboard (PP and ETA respectively), which would contribute both to narrowing its margin of manoeuvre and moderating its discourse.

One might anticipate a certain reduction of tensions between political parties, but that does not mean that the centralist pressures of the state on Basque autonomy will disappear. Recall that these pressures are the inevitable consequence of political change inside the structure of the state (conservative reaction of the neo-Francoist type) and that this regime implements them with as much strength as the political alliances between the nationalities of the periphery show weakness.

The opposed pole, ETA, will intervene with all the force of which it is capable. Its objective seems to be still that: "There will be no democratic normalization without dialogue with us"; and dialogue is only acceptable in its eyes on condition that "the territorial unity of Euskadi and the sovereignty of its political institutions is accepted".

While the collaboration of PNV and abertzale trades unionism is necessary, ETA will seek to block by all means the resurrection of the old alliances between the PNV and PSOE and as a consequence will act against the PSOE.

If this is the case, we should expect an escalation of attacks, which will push the PNV towards moderation and anti-terrorist alliances will occupy the privileged terrain that should have been occupied by political alliances for national construction.

This game of multiple pressures will lead to a tension between the political radicalism of the party - represented by Arzallus and Egibar - and the

pragmatism of government - represented by Lehandakari. [3] Ibarretxe is the symbol of this, torn between political audacity in the search for peace solutions and conservatism at the level of public management. The difference with the previous period is that the former attempts cannot be repeated because they have all failed. It is not possible to return to the Lizarra Agreement; nor to a police crackdown solution to a problem of a political nature; nor to a new version of the anti-terrorist pact of Ajuria-Enea (recognition of the political character of the problem, but postponement of solutions until after the prior abandonment of violence). Other political formulae are needed starting from the new situation, but the time needed to correct the strong inertias which exist will be longer than envisaged.

12. A new social majority must be rebuilt on the basis of the institutional declaration of the Basque Parliament in favour of national self- determination.

It is possible if we take account of the fact that the three pillars of the governmental programme of the PNV have a social legitimacy broader than that offered by the votes obtained by this party. Peace (the demand for a definitive ceasefire from ETA), dialogue (the search for formulae of democratic consensus) and respect for the free decision of the Basques on all questions of self-government and territorial unity are the elements of a collective sentiment, which transcends the frontiers of democratic nationalism.

Armed with this legitimacy and with the support of Eusko Alkatasuna, the IU and the majority of Basque trades unionism, the PNV can begin to resolve the problem of the internal division of Basque society. We do not envisage a general consensus which brings together all the parties, that is impossible, but a majority consensus which can exert political hegemony without too many somersaults or convulsions.

It is not stupid to think that the political basis for the development of the ideas of national construction and the integration of citizens can be provided by the declaration on the right to national self- determination of the Basque Parliament, elaborated and supported jointly by the PNV and PSOE in the 1990s. This precedent shows it is possible.

13. The second step would be to submit the political proposition, once signed, to a popular referendum.

The plebiscitary method is necessary to avoid what has happened so often with the solemn self-determinist declarations of public institutions. These declarations are only pious wishes if not accompanied by the will to convert them into action proposals and the problem has until now been that nobody in Euskadi has known how to do it.

On the left, we have always had a perspective of unilateral declaration of political sovereignty, according to the model of the proclamation of the Catalan Republic in the 1930s. Indeed, we know that current conditions are no longer those of that period and that the civil disobedience thus implemented is an act of political revolt of a revolutionary type that nobody is prepared for now.

There is an intermediary terrain where it is possible to find a road to resolve the problem we face.

This terrain is the popular referendum that allows us to pass from declaration of intention to action, without this action being an inopportune appeal to national revolt. By this method, we can seek political unity and the mobilization of citizens necessary to bring about democratic reform in Spain.

14. A new Socialist Party leadership is needed to return to the pact with democratic nationalism.

We do not believe that this can be achieved by offering the PSOE a place in government, as was suggested in the ranks of the IU, because that would only be a superficial change of image for this party, which would not affect the deeper problems of its identity. It must review profoundly its national discourse and political alliances, which would demand a collective catharsis and a change of guard.

The problem of the Basque socialists is that they act neither as Socialists nor as Basques. This party should renounce once and for all its anti-democratic idea that only governments of coalition between the PNV as representative of nationalism and themselves as representatives of Spanish centralism can guarantee pluralism and the common life of society.

This theory divides the Basque people into opposed communities and leads the socialists to take up the discourse of Spanish centralism to occupy the niches of power. The PSOE needs leaders who are more sensible to the national problem and the rights of peoples. Leaders who do not have national complexes, and who do not fear the integration of citizens in a political community different from the Spanish one.

The mobilization of citizens in support of initiatives of dialogue such as that initiated by the pacifist collectives, like Elkarri, can also be decisive for the removal of the obstacles to the necessary political turn the Socialists must make.

15. Euskadi is an opportunity for democracy for all the nationalities and for the Spanish left.

On the first point, José Luis Cerián of El País said he felt uplifted by the triumph of democratic nationalism in the Basque elections, opening the possibility of a democratic reform of the state rather than its opposite, conservative counter-reform. This should be a call to arms to this left alongside the rights of Basques.

If we pose the problem from our point of view - as Basques - we think also that the Basque country cannot make it alone and that even in the hypothetical case where we obtained a majority of votes supported by a citizens' mobilization, we will not have a relationship of forces sufficient to democratise the Spanish state by ourselves.

We need then to build a community of

interests shared by the nationalities and the Spanish left to confront the centralist state. Today this alliance necessitates solidarity with Euskadi. Democracy in Spanish society requires respect for the difference of the nationalities and their right to self-determination.

This society must cease its attachment to the imperial idea of a uniform Spain, because this only masks its submission to the power of the centralist state and its despotism towards those whose right of difference is not recognized.

The hour of the Spanish democrats has come. All those who feel themselves uplifted by the defeat of the state in Euskadi now have a good chance to take the open road of the Madrid Forum for Dialogue, the IU and Herreo de Miñon, the Declaration of Barcelona by the Galician, Catalan and Basque nationalists, the Peace conference promised by Elkarri to build links between the citizens' mobilizations and the solidarity of democrats. Moreover, it is possible.

Footnotes

[1] See IV 320, 321, 325 in 2000 and 331 in 2001.

[2] Euskera is the name of the Basque language.

[3] President of the Basque autonomous government.

Ecology debate

14 October 2001

The essential is lacking!

Manuel (Germany)

The draft resolution on Ecology and Socialism proposed by the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International is very good. It is an appetizing snack but the main course is missing, even if this latter only amounted to a small chapter.

The question is not only whether the workers' movement in general and the revolutionary Marxist current in particular has shown some backwardness in the area of considering ecological problems. That much is obvious and the draft resolution is a good point of departure for correcting this weakness.

The essential question is no longer whether Marx and Engels were "green" enough in their time. The response of the draft to this is balanced and thus correct.

I think that it would be right to stress more strongly the farsightedness of the two founders of scientific socialism a century before the report of the "Club of Rome", by quoting for example the very beginning of the Critique of the Gotha Programme (1875) where Marx rejects the thesis that labour is the sole source of wealth, saying that nature is just as much the source and that labour power itself is only a force of nature.

In fact, our spiritual "grandparents" were better armed than many subsequent socialists and ecologists to face problems which are today much clearer than in their time. For example, Marx spoke not of the "environment" but of the land as an "anorganic" (ie non-organismic) body of humanity. In what state is our "non-organismic" body now? Very sick, perhaps already dying.

But why does the draft resolution lack the essential?

I do not see addressed in this text the question of whether and to what extent the dimension and the new consciousness of ecological problems challenges the heart of our program and our specific emancipatory project. This question must be posed and met with an initial reply, which can provide the basis for a more fundamental response.

Our project of society is based on material preconditions: 1) on the degree of development of the productive forces by capitalism; 2) on the sources of accumulation of a society in transition to socialism; 3) on the sources of accumulation of a world socialist society.

Our project is a classless; self managed society, in which commodity relations are abolished. To avoid all false scholastic debate on the periodisation of a desired future, we say that we fight for a society with a dynamic involving the withering away of social inequality, the state, money and the commodity.

No, this does not presuppose an unlimited growth. We have long stressed the view that following a certain degree of satisfaction of material needs, human beings tend to flourish in creative and cultural activities rather than through the consumption of material goods. Nonetheless that presupposes two essential choices; a) a radical diminution of working time and b) a relative abundance of means of consumption.

A society with an emancipatory dynamic presupposes the liberation of individuals from existential economic constraints and a lot of free time for everyone; if not, the scarcity of goods will lead to a recommodification of relationships, or to bureaucratic means of distribution; if not, the scarcity of free time would recreate substitutionism, cultural, administrative and political elitism, paternalist conservatism in the workplaces, in personal relations and

in the entire society.

Devastation

Indeed, the destructive devastation wrought by contemporary capitalism and the growing consciousness of the destructive dangers of a good number of established techniques of production and products massively manufactured today weigh increasingly on the productivity gains made and on the potential of future means of accumulation.

We must then take into account this problematic, with 2 consequences:

a) the Ecology and Socialism resolution should adopt a new tone, it should sound the alarm.

Because of the accumulated ecological risks, humanity is threatened; already today scientific debate opposes those who think that the "point of no return" (in the area of extermination of the species, the water supply, the erosion of cultivable lands and so on) has already been reached and those who think that it is not yet completely the case.

From this very fact the emancipatory project is in danger - and that is certain. To the extent that ecological responsibility would force a humanity aspiring to humanize itself to preserve scarcity, extend the working day, conserve inequalities, accentuate the social division of labour, the material means of a universal emancipation would decompose.

b) the resolution should sketch the state of the wealth acquired as well as the potential funds of accumulation of a post capitalist society which would aspire to evolve towards socialism, taking into consideration the ecological problems. It should calculate the costs materially and in labour time of;

- a healthy production of food in an ecologically responsible fashion;
- the development of an ecologically responsible industrial and energy production (the draft refers to, for example, the problem of the chemical industry)
- the reconversion of production of ecologically irresponsible products (the draft refers to cars, one could add planes and so on);
- the work of repairing the damage already done (for example the management of the nuclear waste accumulated up until now);

We should calculate what remains to finance the material bases of an emancipatory dynamic, to finance the free distribution of consumer and service goods, and to reduce significantly the working day.

Without such a calculation, the emancipatory project remains a pious wish. The resolution should sketch the problem and the World Congress should establish a commission of economists to draw up an exact calculation.

The Fourth International should then rewrite such texts as, notably, that of Ernest Mandel in Marxist Economic Theory on "sources of international socialist accumulation" for the rich, intermediary and poor countries as well as for a world socialist society taken overall with the hypothesis of a short term victory of a world socialist society.

It should also encourage FI sections and comrades everywhere to elaborate similar studies for societies in transition to socialism in their respective countries and regions. A work moreover which should be renovated every five years as things evolve, worsen ...

Thus will be forged a clear consciousness of the real state of the material bases for our emancipatory project, as well as a consciousness of the urgency of replacing the existing regimes by socialist democracy everywhere in the world.

Another world is not possible without another mode of production

François (Switzerland)

The most important aspect of the draft resolution Ecology and Socialism is in my view the stress placed on the necessity of challenging the productivist illusion that Marxists have held to, whether intentionally or not.

"The ecology question is one of the greatest challenges for a renewal of Marxist thought at the dawn of the 21st century. It demands of Marxists a thorough critical reappraisal of their traditional concept of 'productive forces' and a radical break with the ideology of linear progress and the technological and economic paradigm of modern industrial civilization."

However, the justification for this necessary revision should flow from a critical balance sheet of the technical process of current production which emerged from the industrial revolution and not only from noting the devastation it leads to.

I would not say that this draft "lacks the essential" as Manuel from Germany has said in his contribution, but based as it is on an "ecological" vision of the process of production chosen by capitalism rather than on a global critique of this process, it can only lead to illusions and to political dead ends.

If the process is considered only as damaging to the environment and those who inhabit it, it would suffice to reduce production through a "halt to growth" where damage is reduced by encouraging people to 'act locally' without 'thinking globally'. Indeed we know that a part of current production is largely insufficient to respond to the needs of humanity and that on the other hand it is no longer possible to make it "respectful of the environment'.

These limitations of the capitalist process of production (CPP) do not stem from the priority given to the quest for profit nor from the damage wrought by the inevitable consumption of fossil fuels, by the

massive wastes of material that it inevitably involves or by the pathologies linked to the generalization and intensification of human labour.

The main limit is in the very nature of this process based on recourse to fossil energy resources on the way to being exhausted, on the massive use of non-renewable materials and on the insane exploitation of human labour.

Obsolete

If it seemed to be viable and promising when the planet contained six times less human beings and the integrality of its fossil reserves, after more than a century of intensive pillage this process has shown itself to be totally obsolete.

Its generalization from the industrialized regions to the entire world would lead very quickly to the exhaustion of the rare fossil resources that remain. Moreover, it is so dependent on human labour that the indispensable reduction of labour time proves less and less possible.

Certainly the possessors and defenders of the apparatus of fossil production argue that it can be reformed through new innovatory technologies - fuel cells, fusion, robotisation, improvement of yields and other measures to ensure its hypothetical "sustainable development'. However, these perspectives are illusory with no confirmation of their feasibility in the current state of knowledge and research.

One could imagine that capitalism can purely and simply abandon the process of production that it has chosen and imposed. However, this overlooks the fact that this choice allows the owners of the means of production to extract surplus value during the transformation by labour of non-renewable energy and material resources.

Beyond the disastrous economic and political consequences of an "industrial counter-revolution" it is hard to see how the dominant minority - six million millionaires out of six billion human beings - could bring it about without disappearing into the dustbin of history.

If technological mini-reforms - treatment of waste, recycling of materials, economies of energy - are so much tarnished by ideology, it is to better ward off the imminent crisis of the CPP.

The announcements of a coming recourse to clean energy, a healthy food production, habitat and health for all human beings or the end of work are alibis. If capital was really ready to consider a challenge to its method of production there would be evidence of the fact; indeed, what we know and see is all to the contrary; poverty, famine, pollution, catastrophes, conflicts ... in short, a state of affairs such that another world becomes impossible.

As the durable development of profit intrudes on that of humanity and its world, alternatives are only developed when they open up new perspectives of commodification and accumulation.

Thus, for example, the project of the harnessing of solar energy only seeks the concentration of this energy in order that it can at last be transformed into a commodity.

The CPP is out of breath. It withers on every front and aggravates the world crises - war, exoduses, pandemics, hecatombs - engendered by growing inequality in the face of scarcities of water, arable land, combustibles, materials, food, medicaments and public services.

There are several reasons why this crisis of the process of production is so badly perceived, including by many comrades:

Although recent, the fossil process born from the industrial, technical and scientific revolution of the past century appears to us the best and the only possible process, unavoidable and irreplaceable. Thus, we consider the numerous prior processes of production based on exclusive recourse to solar, hydraulic, wind, biomass, or wood as sources of energy as retrograde, outmoded and inefficient although they supported humanity through several millennia. Yet these alternative processes are all the more viable and powerful in that the extraordinary scientific and technical development in the course of the capitalist period could today allow the mastering of all of them.

Another obstacle to the comprehension of the limits of the CPP, its immediate advantages - cars, planes, material and energetic abundance - mask its inconveniences. We are only beginning to suffer the effects of it but current levels pollution are probably only trifling compared with the catastrophes to come.

The productivist illusion has turned our critical attention from the disillusionment that the CPP brings. If the proletariat takes control of the apparatus of fossil production, it is argued, it could be made efficient, generous and harmonious.

Such a blind optimism would postpone the critique of the CPP to the day after the revolution when the victorious proletariat would have the time to socialize it. It is why the technical and scientific contradictions of the fossil process have not been grasped as a weapon in the class struggle.

Lack of analysis of the technical process of production. We have seen capitalist exploitation as taking place only through human labour because it was immediately perceptible. The major capitalist exploitation of the resources of the nature, whose effects are much more serious but are differentiated in time, have not been perceived.

Thus the social factor has been limited to the exploited workers alone whereas the CPP exploits - indirectly but as much if not more - all oppressed human beings by the progressive deprivation of not only a part of their wage but also their means of existence and survival, their common well being.

The current productive impasse has repercussions for our political project, burdened by a propositional vacuum. We are between the Charybdis of a crisis of economic growth, catastrophic for the survival of the species and the Scylla of a disastrous

out of control commodity production of trash.

Without denouncing the process of production and opposing it to another possible mode the workers' movement is caught in a trap: nuclear power or candles, growth or famine, alienating work or unemployment.

All the ingredients nonetheless exist to favour a flourishing of the forces of nature; capitalism is pregnant with a technological revolution.

The critique of productivism allows us not just to explain the crisis of the environment; but also to oppose to it a revolutionary outcome. That is why the critique of the CPP should be deepened and should constitute the point of departure of the resolution: the Fourth International "should sound the alarm" as Manuel writes.

On biodiversity

Terry (Canada)

In my opinion, the section 'Threats to Biodiversity' in the Ecology and Socialism resolution fudges one of the central issues. The document does this by resorting to a series of passive constructions in order to avoid naming humanity as the principal subject of the destruction of biodiversity.

The document states: "the existence of tens of thousands of species is menaced by the countless attacks on ecosystems".

I think the document needs to state that it is the extraordinary and unsustainable multiplication of human communities that is the central reason for this threat.

The document should acknowledge that there is an optimum level for the human population in a world that is biologically diverse. Beyond this optimum level, biodiversity is threatened - regardless of whether or not capitalist or socialist relations of production prevail on the planet. In my opinion, we are already at and probably well beyond this optimum level even now.

Similarly, the document should not continue to argue from a human-centric point of view that, "biodiversity must be defended, not for sentimental or aesthetic reasons, but on behalf of our own species".

This kind of thinking is not radical enough. We need to be making the argument that "biodiversity should be defended because biodiversity underpins the existence of all life on this planet, including the human race." We should not continue shortsighted formulas that single out the interests of the human race when we are dealing with the issue of biodiversity.

Biodiversity involves the recognition of a mutual set of interests linking the human race with the multiplicity of other life forms.