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New Labour: a government with no mandate

3 June 2001, by **Alan Thornett**

The turnout was 59%, the lowest since 1918 with a huge 41% of those on the electoral register abstaining from voting. There are many others, not on the electoral register, who do not even appear in the statistics. A disproportionate number of these are young and black and poor.

Less than one in five of the population of voting age voted for new Labour in this election.

Some 'landslide' then! By any rational view Blair does not have a mandate to do anything, not even form a government, but in terms of the British electoral system he is the most powerful Prime Minister since Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. The result was also achieved by shifting the electoral base of the Labour Party towards middle England. Blair was elected with fewer votes from the working class and more from the middle class than any previous Labour government. The biggest abstention was from the traditional Labour strongholds.

The Evening Standard of June 14 has shown graphically how this was reflected in London:

"Over the last 10 years, Labour's popularity has grown sharply among suburban middle class voters. This is the main reason why it holds seats it never did before. However, last week's vote contains a message that should

terrify Tony Blair. He has lost hundreds of thousands of Labour's traditional supporters in the capital's poorest inner-city seats".

The article goes on to list ten traditional Tory seats where the Labour support has gone up massively and ten traditional Labour seats where Labour's support has fallen dramatically. The traditional Tory seats include Harrow West where Labour's percentage support across the electorate has gone up from 17.7 % in 1992 to 31.5% today. In Enfield Southgate, won dramatically by Stephen Twigg for New Labour against Portillo in 1997, Labour's level of support was 20% in 1992 and 32% in 2001, while in Tory held Brent North it has shifted from 23% to 34% over the same period.

As far as traditional Labour seats go, the article points out that in the East London seat of Bethnal Green and Bow, Labour's support has fallen from 36.5% in 1992 to 24.5 today. In Chris Smith's seat of Islington South and Finsbury Labour's support shrank from 36.5 % of the electorate in 1992 to 24.5% today. And in Lewisham Deptford it has dropped from 40% to 30%. Changes of this kind are replicated across the country.

The result is a government of the centre, based on a huge middle class vote - which had been Blair's aim since he was elected leader - and

increasingly representing the mainstream of British capital.

It is a 'big tent' which has colonised the so-called 'centre ground' of British politics, driven the Tories from it, and sent them into near melt-down. Blair has stolen the Tory mantle of being the main party of big business.

The Tories could hardly be in a worse situation. William Hague has resigned as leader, and the leadership contest, which is already under way, is wracked by historic divisions over the EU. Blair had little real opposition in the last parliament: but he will have far less in this one.

Blair, of course, claims that the election has given him a massive mandate for change. This means the second term is going to be far more reactionary than the first. New Labour represents the radical rightist edge of European Social Democracy and is the clearest exponent of the neo-liberal global project. Blair has already made it clear that he will push the neo-liberal agenda of global capitalism forward with even greater vigour this time. And the new attack on the public sector, which is planned, is already being spelled out in some detail. The private sector is to be brought directly into the management of hospitals. The other major services - health, education, transport and housing - are to be restructured as well with, as Blair puts it, 'no ideological

constraints'.

All this will, of course, be totally ideologically driven - and the ideology is that of 'the market'. The result will be a massive new round of privatisation and deregulation. At the same time the shifting of the hard-liner David Blunket to the Home Office will ensure the victimisation and scapegoating of asylum seekers will continue and increase. So state racism - the backbone of racism in British society - is to continue in full force despite the shocking result in Oldham where the fascist BNP scored an average of 15% across two constituencies after whipping up hatred and conflict and provoking a fight-back by the Asian community.

The issue of how to win a majority in a referendum on the single currency may prove to be the most difficult issue the new government will have to face. During the election campaign Blair began to make the case for joining the Euro, but now we have had the rejection of the Nice treaty by the Irish electorate so things are not so clear. New Labour is split on the timing of entry while there is a big section of British capital which expects the new government to use its election victory to go in as soon as possible.

So what did the left achieve in the election, and what are the prospects now for building an alternative to Blairism in Britain? One thing is clear, the decision of the Socialist Alliance to make a major intervention into this election was absolutely vindicated both by the campaign and by the result.

The urgency of such an intervention was dictated not just by the march to the right of the Blairites, but by the space that this was opening to their left. This space - represented by disaffected LP members and voters - needed to be filled and it needed to be filled by a socialist alternative.

The idea - promoted by the media - that all abstention is 'apathy' is nonsense. Many people abstained because they could see little difference between what the two main parties were saying and did not want to vote on a 'lesser evil' basis. Many of

these are people who have understandably lost faith in political parties and the political system. Some of them are particularly alienated and are unable to see how the current major parties and the system of government relates to them. Even many of those who protest against global capitalism see no point in participating in elections on this sort. We have to show them that there is no contradiction between campaigning for your politics in an election and demonstrating on the streets in Seattle or Genoa. Both are important to building a national and international alternative.

The protest vote which was divided, inevitably, between abstention (the biggest number) and voting for the Liberal Democrats (who are historically the junior party of British capital and who were well to the left of Labour), the Greens, who also ran a left campaign, and the two socialist alternatives: the Socialist Alliance (SA) and the Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP).

The Liberal Democrats took the biggest part of the protest vote and increased their representation in Parliament. They also benefited from tactical voting - people voting to keep the Tories out whether that means voting Labour or Liberal Democrat in a particular constituency. This growth in Lib Dem support also shows a weakening of the idea of working class independence from the traditional bourgeois parties.

The Greens had their best ever result in a general election scoring an average of 2.25% in the 145 constituencies in which they stood. Their best constituency vote was 9.3%. This was the first time the Greens had saved a deposit in a Westminster election: they did not save any in 1997. They achieved this result despite a poor profile in the campaign and weak campaigns in most areas. Their best results were in London where they benefited from Ken Livingstone's endorsement during the Greater London Assembly election last year.

As far as the left is concerned the biggest achievement was the result won by the Scottish Socialist Party

(SSP) - which had merged with the SWP in Scotland in May and went into the election as the first united socialist organisation in Scotland for many years. The SSP won an average of 3.1% across all 72 constituencies in Scotland, with its highest scores in Glasgow including 9.98% in the best Glasgow constituency. It achieved a total vote of 72,500 and saved ten deposits. The SLP stood in a few Scottish seats but were marginalised by the SSP vote. This result puts the SSP in a strong position to win more seats in the next elections for the Scottish Parliament - which are held under proportional representation. This achievement represents a big step forward for socialist renewal, not just in Scotland but in the whole of Britain. The SSP remains the model to be followed.

The socialist vote in England and Wales was split between the Socialist Alliance, which was standing for the first time, and the SLP, which stood in the last election in 1997. The Alliance polled better than the SLP, but only just. The Alliance polled a total of 55,635 votes in the 93 constituencies in which it stood in England, with an average of 1.75%. It saved two deposits with scores of 7% and 6.8%. The SLP scored 54,880 votes in England in the 104 constituencies they stood in and saved one deposit. This means that the Alliance averaged 598 votes per constituency and the SLP 504. The SLP also stood in 10 seats in Scotland, where in most cases it scored badly against the SSP vote. Its average vote in Scotland was just 261.

In Wales the SA scored lower than in England with an average in the six seats contested of 376. Plaid Cymru did a lot worse than expected.

The Socialist Alliance's best constituency votes were 7% in Coventry followed by 6.4% in St Helens in Lancashire where Tory Shaun Woodward was parachuted into the safe seat just before the election was called. The strength of the Coventry vote reflected long term campaigning and electoral intervention by ex-Labour MP and current councillor Dave Nellist. On average London polled best for the Alliance, reflecting last year's intervention into the London Assembly

election. It scored: 4.6% in Hackney, 4.3% in Deptford, 3.7% in Tottenham, and 3.1% in Holborn and St Pancras. Apart from the two seats where deposits were saved, the best results outside London were 3.8% in Nottingham and 3.5% in Manchester Withington.

The result means that there were 180,000 votes for far left candidates (including the SSP), which is unique in a post-war British election. It is triple the left vote in the 1997 election.

But the fact that the left was seen as divided in England and Wales despite the remarkable degree of unity achieved by the SA in the run up to the election remains a problem - and the SLP continues to reject all proposals for any kind of unity. The SLP did not campaign in the election very much outside of Hartlepool where Arthur Scargill was standing against the arch-Blairite Peter Mandelson. In most places the SLP was no more than a name on the ballot paper - in some constituencies the candidate did not appear at all during the campaign! The SLP has disintegrated over the past few years as it consolidated its Stalinist politics and the dominance of the Stalin Society within it. In 1997, its heyday, it had several thousand members. By the time of this election various rounds of disputes and expulsions had reduced it to a few hundred. It largely relied on its name recognition from previous elections and Scargill's reputation and resources. It had an election broadcast, as did the SA.

The Alliance in contrast ran a remarkable, high profile campaign in almost every constituency in which it stood. Most constituencies had public meetings and rallies and millions of leaflets were delivered by hand. Most constituencies delivered at least one leaflet by hand (an average constituency is about 40,000 households) and many of them up to three. Stalls were held in the high streets and all kinds of campaigns and activities undertaken.

The average score the Alliance achieved was lower than some of the SA activists expected. But it has to be looked at objectively. It was the first time it had stood outside of London

and its results are equal to those the SSP achieved in its first electoral challenge. But it is also clear that the situation had not matured enough for workers in large number to vote for a radical class struggle party. It is clear that when the time came to vote many of those considering voting for the SA failed to do so. Also, in the first-past-the-post system, the vote is only about who will form the next government. Under that system there seems little point voting for small parties because they cannot possibly win representation. Others decided to give new Labour a second chance - which was the pitch of new Labour propaganda in the final days of the campaign. Nonetheless, it was also the best far-left result in the post-war period, better than the Communist Party scored in 1950 when it stood 100 candidates.

But the fact is we were not able to fill the space to the left of Labour in the course of one election campaign. The conditions had not yet matured enough for those breaking from Labour to vote for a radical left alternative, despite our very effective campaigning. At this stage most disaffected and politically disenfranchised people primarily expressed themselves in the election by abstention. Protest voting and tactical voting did occur, especially with the Liberal Democrats, but also with the Greens.

This may well be different next time, when the full extent of New Labour's second term has been seen and there is a deepening polarisation against the government. The SA has now established itself as an ongoing campaigning organisation which is not just there during elections.

Meanwhile the SA brought the argument for socialism in front of millions of people at a time when the left inside the LP has declined dramatically, and had no profile in the election whatsoever.

The importance of projecting a socialist alternative can be seen in the rise of the far right BNP in some places, partly generated by the situation they have whipped up in Oldham.

Our campaign put the SA on the map and built an organisation out of an election campaign - a factor which is decisive in the longer term. It established active organisations in every constituency in which it stood. The result shows that although we were unable to attract the main protest vote there is a growing minority of people who are looking for a socialist alternative and were prepared to register this in the election. This can only increase in the next period.

The SA has also had a major impact in the unions in the short time it has existed. The left in a number of unions are discussing unity as a direct response to the SA, and the fire fighters union FBU has been the first to decide to change its rules to allow it to give money to parties standing against Labour. To discuss these issues the SA has decided to hold a trade union conference in the autumn.

During the course of the SA's high profile and energetic campaign, it more than doubled the number of activists involved in the Socialist Alliance. In particular, it drew in a steady stream of former Labour party activists, exceeding 60 former Labour councillors and many hundreds of former party members by polling day. It also received strong backing at the trade union conferences which have taken place over recent months, both through debates on conference floor and through organising fringe meetings.

Obviously the SA will need to learn from the campaign and assess its strengths and weaknesses. For example, while the Socialist Alliance had policies on environmental issues these were not highlighted in much of the work done on the streets. In order to challenge the strength of the vote for the Greens, this needs to change.

Meanwhile the Alliance has already launched the fight against new Labour's second term. On the weekend after the election when the major parties went back to business as usual, Socialist Alliance activists returned to the streets. SA stalls and leafleters were out in force. The message was clear. New Labour's plans to introduce private profit into the heart of the NHS and other public

services must and can be stopped. The re-emergence of the far right and the

rise of racist violence must and can be

resisted. The Socialist Alliance intends to be a key part of those campaigns.

A new political framework

3 June 2001, by **Livio Maitan**



Berlusconi votes...

These same fears were exploited by the ruling centre-left coalition (known as the Olive Tree) to convince left electors to support them, despite the disappointing performances of the Prodi, D'Alema and Amato governments, which have succeeded each other in the course of the last five years. The results of the May 13 elections, from which Berlusconi emerged as incontestably victorious in terms of seats both in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate, can only accentuate concern and provoke a wave of disarray among large layers of electors.

Against those who spoke of a "tidal wave" or a "plebiscite" in Berlusconi's favour, we should first recall the figures. The centre-right coalition overall won a large majority of seats, but not the majority of votes. What is more, in relation to 1996 it lost more than a million votes (the number of abstentions having not changed much). The Olive Tree virtually maintained its vote and if one adds the votes of the PRC and other formations belonging to no coalition, the total is higher than that of the centre-right.



...Genoa demonstrates

Moreover, while Berlusconi's party, Forza Italia, made palpable progress, it did not exceed the 30 % already reached in the European elections of 1994. Moreover, its advance was essentially at the expense of its allies, notably the Northern League which did not even reach the quorum of 4%

necessary to participate in the proportional distribution of seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

Finally, to give an idea of the overall situation, we have to take account of what happened two weeks after the parliamentary elections. The Olive Tree recorded an undeniable success at the second round of the partial municipal elections, retaining notably the majority in cities like Rome, Turin and Naples (the centre-right won Milan in the first round). [1]

These results cannot however hide the fact that the strongest party of the Olive Tree, the Left Democrats (DS), suffered a very serious setback (16.6% against 21.1% in 1996) whereas a heterogeneous centrist formation, which had been part of the former Christian Democrats and included the leader of the coalition, Francesco Rutelli, scored to general surprise, 14.5%.

That said, we must pose three questions: what does the coalition of Berlusconi represent socially and politically? Has it changed since 1994? Will it be able to stabilise the Italian situation after nearly 10 years of crises and political upheavals?

Berlusconi II

After Berlusconi's victory in 1994 we wrote: "Forza Italia was born from the initiative of a big employer who, to achieve his goals, has shamelessly used the structures of his financial kingdom and the powerful media he owns.

His 'party' has thus been created from above and is totally identified with his person. It would not be abusive to speak of a Bonapartist undertaking, as

much because of the decisive role of the would-be charismatic leader as the hegemonic mediator role that this leader has played to unify the different components of the right. There was a vacuum to fill and Berlusconi understood it at time: there is the key to his success". [2]

This vacuum appeared after the collapse of the long-standing coalition based on the alliance between the Christian Democracy and the Socialist Party of Craxi, which had reigned for a quarter century. The new centre-left, led by the formation originating from the old PCI (subsequently the Party of the Democratic Left, PDS, and then Left Democrats, DS) wished to be candidate to the succession.

However, all those who, for diverse reasons, could not accept such a succession, sought another solution and relied on Berlusconi. His rapid defeat, following the contradictions, which emerged within his heterogeneous coalition and under the pressure of powerful mass movements in defence of pensions in autumn 1994, opened the road to the coming to power of the centre-left after the elections of 1996.

It goes without saying that it is above all the approach of the centre-left, on both the socio-economic front (acceptance, indeed idealisation, of neo-liberalism) and in the area of international policy (unconditional support for the war against Serbia and the new NATO pact) which has allowed the centre-right to regroup and finally return to power.

However, it should be added that Berlusconi had drawn the lessons of both 1994 and 1996 (when he fell from power following the rupture with the Northern League). He structured

his party much more, trying to root it in the so-called civil society so that it no longer appeared as a replica of his business undertakings.

He gave his support to successful mayoral candidates of the centre-right at the municipal elections; independent personalities like the mayor of Milan, re-elected on May 13, or the mayor of Bologna. He gave himself an image as a responsible statesman, supporting the approach of the centre left government in the EU and aligning himself with the Balkan wars.

As we have stressed previously in IV, [3] he obtained an international profile through his participating in the European Popular Party in the Strasbourg parliament. Nine months before the elections he sealed a coalition with the National Alliance, which henceforth gave up challenging him for the leadership of the coalition and he re-established links with the Northern League through a marriage of interests which achieved the double goal of making electoral success possible and cutting his ally down to size.

Is it appropriate to describe Berlusconi's approach as "populism"? Obviously any comparison with the populism of the 19th century in Russia and the populisms of the 1940s and 1950s in Latin America would be devoid of any content.

On the other hand, such a characterisation has, at least partially, a meaning if it describes a political-ideological approach with the following traits: the claim to represent the 'people' in opposition to the politicians, placing oneself alongside the citizens; a description of reality in the form of the systematic and unnuanced denigration of the misdeeds of adversaries and competitors; the definition of simple and 'non-political' remedies; a stress on the urgency of reforming the existing socio-institutional framework. [4]

Moreover, Berlusconi tried several times to appear as a partisan of a less orthodox neo-liberalism than the Olive tree coalition, advocating not a market economy alone, but a 'social market economy'.

It remains true that Berlusconi owes his victory above all to his ability to express the sensibilities, sentiments, regressive, indeed frankly reactionary impulses that are currently extant in broad layers of society. That is why he effectively enjoys a popular support, which is not limited absolutely to certain regions of the country, although he is still relatively weaker in the regions of central Italy.

It is more alarming, on the other hand, that the centre-right has registered an extraordinary success in Sicily, which undoubtedly indicates that the mafia believes that under Berlusconi it can continue to manage more tranquilly its affairs and its own 'society'.

As for the Catholic church, while it cannot influence elections as it did in the golden years of Christian Democracy - and while maintaining a certain prudence, it rightly considers that some of its demands in the field of 'defence of the family", private schools and abortion could now have a greater audience at the parliamentary and electoral level. [5]

Finally, Berlusconi now enjoys, much more than in 1994 and 1996, support or the favourable disposition of very broad layers of employers, who, certainly, have not had very much to complain about with the centre left governments but have never ceased to advocate still more radical neo-liberal measures and a greater governmental stability.

The most symbolic message is that of Gianni Agnelli, [6] the recognised doyen of the Italian employers, who fiercely defended Berlusconi against the criticism of the foreign press. It is true that in 1994 also Agnelli had voted for the centre right government in the Senate, but he did not support Berlusconi's choice as Prime minister.

Moreover, the employers' organisation in industry, the powerful Confindustria, is now led by a young turk, Antonio D'Amato, who makes no secret of his desire to exploit the new political framework to push further his anti-worker offensive.

The democratic framework in danger?

Both in Italy and abroad there are those who speak of the danger that the coming to power of the Berlusconi government could represent for the democratic institutions set up with the adoption of the Constitution of 1948.

The question should be approached under several angles. The centre right has long favoured a constitutional reform, which, in its words, should take place in line with the procedures envisaged by the Constitution itself. In all, it seeks to give a presidential stamp to the Italian political system and increase regional autonomy.

It would, it seems, challenge the first part of the Constitution, notably the articles concerning the social inspiration and the role of the state. However, nothing precise has been advanced until now by the coalition as such. It is necessary moreover to suppose, at least for the instant, that Berlusconi does not intend to challenge in any way the European framework.

That said, the fears inspired by the fact that the control of the executive power will belong to the richest man in the country, forcefully present in several economic sectors and controlling nearly all the national private TV channels, are completely legitimate.

The last electoral campaign has given us a foretaste of this danger.

Berlusconi used his gigantic resources, which bear no comparison to those at the disposal of the other candidates, not to mention those of the PRC. However, the centre-left in government has also shamelessly used the public television network in contempt of the most elementary democratic rules.

If we needed convincing that in a bourgeois institutional framework democratic rights are often an empty shell for common mortals, that is all those who do not have wealth or political power, the recent Italian

electoral campaign proved it beyond doubt.

More generally, we have noted several times and we note again a profound tendency at work in the countries that claim to be the most democratic. The citizens are increasingly deprived of the power of real decision-making. The macro-economic choices which determine, in the last analysis, their fate; strategic political and still more military choices do not depend in the slightest on the citizens.

The gravest critique that can be made of the centre left governments is that they have not counteracted this tendency; on the contrary they have deepened it.

The decision taken by Amato's government after May 13, to prepare a land, sea and air blockade of the city of Genoa before the G8 meeting, is the latest example of it. Thus, the task of the future government will be sensibly facilitated. If it chooses repression, it can cover itself by the decisions already taken, if it chooses to allow the demonstrations, it will appear more democratic than its predecessors.

Beyond the drifts of the centre-left and what will happen in July in Genoa, there is not the least doubt that this

structural tendency towards an erosion of the democratic framework will sharpen under the Berlusconi government. To what extent and with what outcome will depend fundamentally on the socio-economic dynamic in Italy, the EU and in the final analysis the world.

It is true that Berlusconi will have difficulties with his allies, who have emerged fairly frustrated from the election and he will also face some centrifugal regional tendencies on the institutional front that he will have exacerbated by his opposition to the centre left governments in the goal of winning the support of the Northern League.

However, since the votes of the League's deputies in the two chambers are not indispensable to a centre right governmental majority, we should not envisage a repetition of what happened in late 1994 during the conflict with Bossi.

That is why the future of the new government will be conditioned first by its capacity to keep its electoral promises, notably through big tax reductions and pension increases, which will not be easy in the current framework of economic slowdown and respect for the stability pact of European monetary union.

If Italy experiences significant growth and if, in such a context, Berlusconi could re-establish a rapport with the trade union federations, the hypothesis of a consolidation of the stability of the new political framework for a certain period cannot be ruled out. However, for the moment such a dynamic is not apparent.

Moreover, in recent months there has been an undeniable revival of struggles, even if not yet generalised.

The metalworkers, still the most important sector of the working class, have been engaged in a prolonged battle for the renewal of the collective agreement and during a recent national strike some hundreds of thousands of workers filled the streets of a number of towns, in particular Turin and Milan.

Meanwhile, waves of student struggles occurred in March and April in several university centres, notably Rome. Moreover, the movement against capitalist globalisation continues to grow, which could have positive effects on both the political and cultural level.

Thus, the mobilisation against the G-8 summit in July in Genoa is more than ever a major rendezvous.

PRC: The debate begins

3 June 2001, by **Livio Maitan**

In fact, consciously or not, all these brave people have revealed or confirmed a conception of politics, which has absolutely nothing to do with principle. Ideas, programmes, projects? All in the dustbin! The essential thing is to win votes, seats, and ministerial posts. Yet the candidate of the Olive Tree himself, Francesco Rutelli, had to admit it: a political agreement with the PRC was strictly impossible and to govern together would have been still more so.

What's more, not only had the Olive Tree prepared its defeat with five years of neo-liberal and pro-imperialist policies, but it had also maintained a fundamentally anti-democratic, indeed crazy electoral system following its defeat last year in the referendum on this question.

It did not even want to correct the system in force for the Senate and, so far as the Chamber of Deputies was concerned, it made an agreement with Berlusconi's party amounting to a veritable swindle, ignoring the

warnings of the president of the republic.

In short, all the PRC's accusers should note one elementary fact: under a proportional system, of the type the PRC had demanded, Berlusconi would not have won a majority.

Finally, nothing proves that, if there had been an electoral pact, the votes of the Olive Tree and those of the PRC would have been the same; quite probably, a part of the PRC electorate would have abstained and a part of the

Olive Tree's electorate would have shifted to the centre-right.

We should stress moreover that the PRC has suffered attacks not only from left DS [former Euro-Communist party-ed.] sectors, who remain fairly ghostly politically, but also from a part of the so-called radical left which had constantly criticised the centre left governments.

These people have been fairly magnanimous in calling for a vote for the PRC in the proportional ballot (25% of seats) to the Chamber of Deputies, but, forgetting that our decision not to contest the single member section (75 %) would allow the Olive Tree to carry about 30 seats more, they refused to call for a vote for us for the Senate.

The author of this article was the object of an attack in the daily *Il Manifesto*. This radical left newspaper, which had refused the publication of a short appeal by the PRC's senatorial candidates in Rome, ran, on the eve of the poll, that is when it was impossible to reply in any way, a whole page on the vote in Rome saying that nobody should vote for Livio Maitan or for another PRC candidate, but rather for the candidates of the Olive Tree. As it happened, my competitor was a minister of the Amato government, belonging to the DS, who had approved all the decisions taken by the coalition, both socio-economic and political (the Kosovo war included). [7]

An image of radical opposition

Despite these campaigns, the PRC held firm, with 5% of the vote in both the Chamber (11 deputies) and the Senate (4 senators), the only party outside of a coalition, which reached the 4% threshold necessary to qualify for allocation of seats. Of the other smaller parties, the Greens met a particularly lamentable result: the common list (called the Sunflower) they had run with a small socialist formation, affiliated to the Socialist International, only scored 2.9%.

The party of Cossutta [called the

Italian Communist Party-ed.], originating from the split in the PRC in October 1998, was quite simply swept away (1.7%) and only survives as a fifth wheel of the DS which gave it some deputies (in the single member section) and some senators.

That said, we must admit that the result of the PRC is only satisfying in the given context.

In 1996 the party gained 8.6% (although it only got 4.3% in the European elections of 1999). The conclusion drawn by all is that the PRC is still, fundamentally, a party which attracted votes thanks to its image of radical opposition with a mass influence, but without a real social implantation, with some partial exceptions. The electoral campaign, which was completely autonomous, was characterised above all by the radical interventions of Fausto Bertinotti, whose meetings often attracted many youth.

The initiative that undoubtedly represented the biggest success, took place in Rome with the participation of numerous intellectuals and in a very passionate atmosphere. The most combative passages of the speech, which were particularly applauded, were the following: "the novelty is that capitalism and innovation are henceforth separated from social progress and are in the process of revealing radical contradictions: but, then, politics only has a meaning on condition of showing itself capable of criticising the logic of the market and the company, of recommencing from its highest point, revolution".

Debates in the PRC

The broadest body of the party, the National Political Committee, met on May 26 and 27, to draw a balance sheet of the elections. In fact, it also opened the debate for the next Party Congress scheduled for spring 2002.

The different viewpoints which exist, including in the secretariat [central leadership body-ed.], were expressed on this occasion in camouflaged or highly nuanced forms, notably on the

party's attitude towards the DS or the so-called liberal left and on the organisational problems.

It is clear to all that we must pursue an autonomous construction of the party. However some ambiguities, indeed divergences, exist on the orientation to be followed in the current phase. One current, described as "continuist", for which the (old) Italian Communist Party still remains a point of reference, looks not so much to regeneration (although this word has been utilised in a debate on the leadership bodies), but rather reorientation of the DS, which is preparing for a congress in the very near future.

Beyond all the nuances, the dilemma for the DS remains the following: either build a sort of US Democratic Party including the Olive Tree as a whole (course associated with Walter Veltroni), or keep the Olive Tree as a coalition inside which the DS will play the role of a social democratic party, linked to European socialism.

The PRC has every interest in avoiding any sectarian reflex and undertaking a dialogue with what is called the moderate or liberal left. Bertinotti has advanced for some time the perspective of a 'plural left'. However, while he refers explicitly to the French experience, he now seems rather to propose a working hypothesis.

In his conclusion he mentioned in passing the difficulties of the French Communist Party and also the role played by the LCR and *Lutte Ouvrière* [two French Trotskyist organisations outside the governing coalition-ed.].

He speculated not without reason, that in Italy the kind of movements and viewpoints which exist under specific forms in France, will generally be found inside the PRC. [8]

In conclusion, he sketched out the themes to be debated at the Congress: a systematic analysis of the current conjuncture at the national and international level; the articulation of objectives which can generate a dynamic breaking from the logic of neo-liberal globalisation; the construction of the Seattle-Porto Alegre movement within such an

optic.

For our part, we share such an approach, which fundamentally addresses the same problems that we are discussing in the Fourth International. [9] Still, we stressed once again the enormous gap that exists between such political approaches and the reality of the party.

The last campaign revealed again some lamentable practices, electoralist and completely opportunist conceptions and behaviour including on the part of some leaders, in contradiction with

not only the Party statutes but also the norms of conduct fixed for the electoral campaign.

It is fairly disconcerting that when one puts such criticisms in leadership bodies nobody contests them, yet the problem continues to be evaded. This Congress must finally debate these problems if it is not to endorse a dangerous drift.

The party leadership accomplished its statutory task of electing presidents for the two parliamentary groups. With a large majority, Franco Giordano was confirmed for the Chamber of Deputies. However, the

novelty was the unanimous election for the Senate of Gigi Malabarba, a Milan-based Trotskyist and worker militant at Alfa Romeo, who was illegally sacked by Fiat and is one of the main leaders of the unitary trade union confederation (Cobas) which was founded last Mayday.

In the corridors of the senate, our comrade will have the chance to meet Fiat boss Gianni Agnelli. Gigi has twice won a legal case against Fiat for his dismissal. We now await the verdict of the Court d'Cassation. Will this illustrious body confirm the two verdicts favourable to Gigi or endorse the dismissal of a worker-senator?

A worker in the Senate

3 June 2001, by **Gigi Malabarba**

Gigi was among the founders of the radical trade union confederation Sin-Cobas, of which he is currently the spokesperson, and with this union he has recently organised the anti-globalisation struggles in Italy and the European Marches against unemployment.

How do you explain your election? Did you expect it or was it a surprise?

Any prediction seemed very difficult in advance. I only know we waged a good campaign at local and national level, stressing the importance of social struggles and electing participants in

the world of labour to Parliament. In my neighbourhood, the Party seems to have won a lot of votes.

In any case my election is essentially due to the good result for the Party overall, we got 5% and in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies we were the only party outside of the two centre-left and centre-right coalitions to go beyond the 4% barrier necessary to have people elected.

What will be your role in Parliament, in relation to your trade union responsibilities?

It is obvious that the election of a worker, probably the only one in the

whole parliament, must signify a strong commitment to the struggles in the workplaces, which moreover seem to be reviving recently in Italy.

I also consider it very important to give a voice to the anti-globalisation mobilisations that represent a growing part of the population, above all youth, in revolt against neo-liberal policies.

These same policies are at the heart of the programme of Berlusconi and his government and for this reason I think that the anti-globalisation movement should be the heart of our social and political opposition, starting from the demonstrations in July in Genoa.

Overcoming division

3 June 2001, by **Yorgos Mitralias**

It was then almost natural that increasingly numerous voices rose everywhere against the left's disunity and sectarianism and in favour of the

dialogue and unity of action. One thing was - and remains - very clear: so long as division reigns, the small and big components of the left can do

practically nothing against the steamroller of triumphant neo-liberalism driven by the governing social democracy.

However, indications were that the concerns of the 'people of the left' would not be enough to oblige its incorrigible leaderships to change tack. The reason was simple: the pathological and brutal sectarianism of the Communist Party (KKE) combined with the more subtle sectarianism of Synaspismos [Euro-communist split from the KKE-ed.], but also with the self-sufficiency of a far left which was cut off from the live forces of the organised workers' movement.

Just after last year's elections some militants took the first steps towards uniting all those who wanted to act concretely in favour of unity of action and the recomposition of the left.

It was the 'Initiative for the Refoundation of the Left' launched in September 2000 by the AKOA (Communist and Ecological Left Renewal), the theoretical review Theses and some militants of the Greek section (OKDE) of the Fourth International. Almost at the same time, the same forces, together with some left militants from Synaspismos, launched the monthly review Manifesto which aimed to be a forum for the unitary, internationalist and radical tendencies of the entire left, both parliamentary and extra parliamentary.

Only eight months later, we can speak of a success. The initial nucleus, joined by the three left tendencies of Synaspismos, has created 'The Space of Left Dialogue and Common Action' which brings together the following forces: Synaspismos (Coalition of the Left and Progress, 3.2% in the elections parliamentary and 5.6% in the EU elections), KEDA (Movement of the Democratic Unitary Left comprising the prestigious leaders and trade union cadres recently

expelled or resigned from the KKE), 'The Initiative for the Refoundation of the Left' and its components, the DEA (Workers Internationalist Left, recent split from the Trotskyist SEK, sister organisation of the British Socialist Workers Party), the Network for the Defence of Social and Political Rights (an autonomous social movement which enjoys great prestige), Green Politics (ecologists), the Alternative Ecologists and Left Politics.

Within the 'Space' there are independent and unorganised personalities as well as the DHKKI party (Democratic and Social Movement, former split from PASOK, 2.7% at the parliamentary elections and 7.9% in the European elections) and the SEK (Socialist Workers Party) with provisional observer status.

The KKE leadership, faithful to Stalinist traditions, has used the presence in the 'Space' of the KEDA and ex-members of its political bureau - Yannis Theonas (resigned as Euro deputy last January) and Mitsos Kostopoulos (ex-president of the parliamentary group of the KKE and ex-secretary general of the CGT union confederation) - to justify its non-participation.

The breadth and the diversity of the forces involved in the 'Space' has exceeded the hopes of the initiators of this unitary process. What appeared unthinkable only some months ago became reality in May 2001! For the first time in decades, the forces of the Greek left decided to build a unitary framework so as to begin to engage in dialogue and act in common.

Obviously no one can deny that the problems faced will be difficult, that a lot remains to be done so that this first step towards the recomposition of the Greek left acquires the dynamic which is necessary to break definitively with

the traditional sectarianisms of the big and small party bureaucracies. Yet enthusiasm and a climate of confidence have dominated the first meetings the 'Space'.

By common agreement of its components, the 'Space' remains open to any new adhesion, and it has chosen to test immediately its capacities of intervention on the following fronts:

- The frontal confrontation of the workers movement and the government over the neo-liberal reform of the pension and social security system;
- The mobilisation against the new "anti-terrorist" law that limits dangerously democratic rights and liberties;
- The preparation of a mass Greek participation at the international demonstration in Genoa against the G8 and neo-liberal globalisation.

These three initial combats also offer an insight into the political priorities of the 'Space': the intransigent defence of the social gains of the workers' movement and democratic rights and liberties as well as an active internationalism and participation in the international movement of resistance to neo-liberal globalisation. Despite their numerically small forces, the Greek comrades of the Fourth International have played a key role in the preparation of the 'Space' and the launch of the review Manifesto. Evidently, the time is right for such initiatives, even when they come from small militant groups, on condition that a correct analysis of the period is combined with an approach devoid of sectarianism, a total commitment of forces and, why not, boldness and the taking of - more or less, well - calculated risks.

General strike resurrects workers movement

3 June 2001, by **Yorgos Mitralias**



Striking firemen on the march

In the space of a few days, the ravaged and discredited trade union movement reoccupied the centre stage under the pressure of its angry rank and file. The proof of this long awaited reawakening was striking: the general strike and demonstrations of April 26 surpassed in their breadth the simple resurrection of the workers' movement and constituted a veritable founding event for the whole of the Greek left.

They were by far the biggest of the past 20 years (the CGT trade union confederation claimed even that they had no precedent since the end of the Second World War!).

Some days later, the demonstrations of Mayday offered the chance for a second explosion, almost as spectacular. And finally, the enormous success of the second general strike on May 17 confirmed the certainty that we were witnessing an unparalleled groundswell coming from the depths of society and the Greek workers' movement.

The consequences of this were a veritable social and political earthquake. First, the rank and file

and trade union leaders linked to PASOK revolted against their government.

Panicking, the council of ministers withdrew all its proposals and promised the opening of a dialogue with the trade unions without preconditions. The crisis of the social democratic party was so profound that Prime Minister Kostas Simitis was even in a minority of the Executive Committee of PASOK!

Moreover, all the polls are clear: the fall in the popularity of PASOK is dizzying and this party, which for 20 years has registered electoral scores above 38%, has fallen below 27%!

Obviously, the affair is far from over to the advantage of the unions and Simitis can still regain his footing. However, nothing will be like it was before!

The personal prestige of the PM and his government has taken such a knock that it is hard to see how he can put things right in the months to come. Even more important, their neo-liberal policies will no longer be accepted as inevitable. The advance is certainly a big one and it already offers the premises for the reconstruction of both the trade union movement and the Greek left. Thus, under the pressure of rank and file employees, sectarianism has recoiled

before the unity in action of the trade union movement.

Yet this rediscovered unity will remain fragile as long as the Communist Party (KKE) will not abandon definitively its temptation to found its own 'red' unions, or unless the trade union bureaucrats of PASOK refuse to participate in the trap of dialogue organised by the government under its conditions.

Finally, a lot remains to be done so that the Greek left can participate in this reawakening of the workers' movement, to recreate its lost credibility. For the instant, it is the right that profits, while the parties of the left remain impotent and incapable of devising an alternative policy to that of PASOK. In transforming radically the social facts of the problem, the current explosion of the anger of the wage earners offers the basis for the reconstruction of the trade union movement and the recomposition of the left.

The next steps will not be easy but henceforth one can count on the combativity of a working class which seems to identify with the most popular slogan of the recent demonstrations; people go forward and don't lower your heads, there is only one road: resistance and struggle!

Quebec City 2001: 'An Ascending Movement'

3 June 2001, by Jackie Esmonde, Susan Bender



Quebec City - 30,000 protesters march

This makes QC2001 as big as, or bigger than, Seattle or Washington. But besides huge numbers of people deciding to go to Quebec City - despite the police and media barrage warning of violent protesters - what else happened in Quebec City?

We all saw it

The mobilisation for Quebec City was not only large; it was also incredibly diverse in terms of who participated and in what ways. The Peoples' Summit, an international education and activist forum, ran for the whole week.

A series of protest marches were also organised by different groups, representing very different

constituencies. These began with a candlelight vigil on Thursday 19 April. The next day activists organised the Carnival Against Capitalism-a forum for diverse direct action tactics, ranging from street theatre to tearing down the "wall of shame".

The mobilising culminated on Saturday 21 April in a massive labour- and NGO-led march away from the fence. This march was joined by another organised by Operation Quebec Printemps 2001 (OQP 2001), a

Quebec City-based coalition of student associations, union locals, NGOs, and other political activists, and the Quebec public service union, SFPQ.

A smaller, more militant breakaway rally organised by the Anti-Capitalist Convergence (CLAC) and the Summit of the Americas Welcoming Committee (CASA) attracted about 5,000 people who were committed to confronting the authorities at the wall.

Throughout the weekend there were protracted street battles occurring near the "wall of shame" - the fence erected to protect the Summit participants from viewing dissent.

Initially, police tactics (which included tear gas and rubber bullets) indicated that a decision had been made to avoid direct physical confrontation. However, in reality, their tactics were not only more violent, they also affected all the protesters, whether or not they were involved in direct action.

Leading activists, including Jaggi Singh, were subject to street abductions by undercover police. Others sustained injuries from flying tear gas canisters, rubber bullets and police beatings. Some of the injuries were very serious. And by the end of the weekend there had been up to 500 arrests.

Although the media focused primarily on those characterised as young anarchists, and as "a small but highly organized band of professional agitators ... and Marxist criminals" (Ottawa Sun, April 22,) the number of people who did direct action in Quebec City (around 8,000) was significant.

The tactics of those who "went to the fence" were definitely more militant and oppositional than at previous protests. Quebec City saw much more than blockades of streets. The hours of intense street battles over Friday and Saturday that continued late into the night demonstrated the "no retreat" stance of thousands of activists.

What Have We

Gained

The Quebec City mobilisation clearly pushed the politics of protest further to the left - particularly into an explicit opposition to neo-liberalism and the corporate agenda. This was clearly demonstrated in the labour-NGO march on Saturday.

Although this was organised under the slogan of 'The FTAA that we want' (which essentially focused on the integration of social, environmental and labour clauses into the free trade agreement), banners demonstrating this position were largely invisible. Anti-FTAA political messages prevailed. The People's Summit also closed articulating a far more explicit anti-FTAA message than it had proposed initially [see [IV No. 331, May 2001](#) - ed.].

There was a greater anti-capitalist presence in Quebec City than was evident in Seattle or Washington. The CLAC-CASA march of 5,000 was under an anti-capitalist banner. There were many anti-capitalist flags and banners in the OQP march. The OQP march, while not explicitly anti-capitalist, was nonetheless staunchly in opposition to the FTAA.

At the same time, Quebec demonstrated the need to strengthen anti-capitalist politics and organisation within the global justice movement. Anti-capitalist forces had a very limited capacity to intervene in the labour-dominated march and the socialist left even less so.

But anti-globalisation, anti-corporate and anti-neo-liberalism politics should not be equated with anti-capitalism. We also should not assume that militant tactics are necessarily accompanied by a clear and agreed upon radical politics.

It is difficult to determine the politics of the people at the fence and the diversity of tactics used in Quebec reflects a diversity of politics. But it would be a mistake to characterise their actions as apolitical acts of hooliganism. This argument is found not only in the mainstream media but also to some degree within left circles attempting to grapple with the

significance of the tactics used in Quebec.

There were thousands of people who went to the perimeter. Many probably did not go to the fence because they have a unified or comprehensive political project. But their analysis had brought them all to the point where they recognised that these meetings of international corporate and political elites are significant. Many have an in-depth analysis of the issues of the day, including the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas.

The people who went to the fence were united by the immediate goal of witnessing, supporting or participating directly in shutting the meetings down. Even actions characterised as vandalism or random acts of violence, for example, breaking windows at the Shell gas station, were in reality targeted actions politically motivated by an anti-corporate analysis.

Debating Direct Action

A lot of public and private discussion post-Quebec has focused on the pros and cons of the diversity of tactics evident throughout the protests. It is difficult to gauge the impact of the mainstream media coverage on the amount of public support for direct action of any kind, but it is important to remember that those who engage in this type of action are not doing it for the media or for the casual observer.

Much of the direct action was organised through affinity groups [small, self-defined, self-organised collectives-ed.] and in spokescouncil meetings [general assemblies with delegated representatives from affinity groups-ed.]. The direct action model, which attempts to be collective and non-hierarchical, stands in opposition to the ways our workplaces and political systems are structured. This is the first challenge direct action activists make to the status quo.

Direct action provides opportunities to, on the one hand, disrupt, and sometimes stop, meetings of the political and corporate elite. On the

other, it provides opportunities to act in solidarity with other activists in ways that build militancy, partly out of the feelings of collective power that is palpable during actions such as Quebec City.

One of the challenges for future mass protests is how to develop the affinity group model so that it can produce a more coordinated response, and is less a small group means of tactical expression.

Quebec City witnessed some small degree of bridging the gulf between direct action, and labour and community groups through the stream of people who left the labour march to go to the perimeter. On a smaller scale, it was bridged as the direct action activists became a pole of attraction for a small number of militant labour activists who came to direct action groups to learn and work together.

Pressure From Below

Leading figures such as Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians [left-nationalist citizen's movement-ed.] and Sid Ryan, head of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Ontario also took important political stances that reflect a radicalising pressure from below.

Barlow publicly supported the right of people to fight back when their livelihoods are threatened (note, not just when they are attacked by police) and Ryan sent out a press release that announced his intention to march to the fence. He did and was tear-gassed along with everyone else there.

Quebec exposed the limits of positions that make a principle of peaceful protest or that force a disjuncture between violent and peaceful protesters. First, the police made no such distinctions with their indiscriminate, massive tear-gassing. This made an impact on both the residents of Quebec City and those who consider themselves "peaceful".

Second, it is clear from Quebec that those practicing direct action are not

just youth radicals but also social justice activists, students and members of unions. The sheer creativity and diversity of expression suggests that there is lots of room for this movement against globalisation to grow. The question is who and what politics will shape and push this growth?

In the debate about tactics, one thing is clear. The nature of the protests and the aftermath would have been profoundly different had the fence not been breached. Militant self-organisation by protesters exposed the conservatism of the union and NGO leadership and in some cases forced them to the left.

What happened in Quebec has opened up possibilities for the movement to continue to radicalise and to grow. Within the labour movement, discussions generated by the widespread criticism of labour leaders could open up opportunities for talking about the politics of tactics: labour marshals attempted to block marchers from joining protesters at the fence and the labour leadership agreed with the police to march away from the fence.

Where do we go from here?

For many of the protesters, seeing, hearing and being a part of the large mobilisation in Quebec City means that they cannot look at the world in the same way.

The politics of this experience may not be clear and well defined but, for socialists committed to building an anti-capitalist current, there are more opportunities to talk to and act with more people than before Quebec City.

The growing global justice movement will be shaped and defined by those who went to the fence, those who wish they did, and those who could not get to Quebec but were politicised and uplifted by the resistance they witnessed.

The events in Quebec demonstrate that a new movement is ascending but important challenges remain. Sections

of the global justice movement remain predominantly white and inaccessible to people with little or no financial security.

This issue is particularly relevant for those mobilised around direct action, as was graphically demonstrated by the comparatively diverse labour march. Organised activists need to look at the ways issues are made a priority, how we organise, and how accessible our organising spaces are.

For anti-capitalism to become a stronger and more explicit force within the movement, it needs to become a more significant force within the labour movement. Activists inside and outside labour need to focus on the ways trade agreements and other tools of capitalism make an impact domestically.

The anti-FTAA protests in Quebec City are important because they raise opportunities to link local struggles to the capitalist system in both practical and theoretical ways. An analysis that makes these links may increase the numbers of people who participate in these demonstrations, as well as the potential gains.

Protesting at summits will not bring about the kind of radical systemic change required (although organising and participating in these kinds of protests does provoke change in individuals and activist groups).

Quebec has opened up space for activists within their locals to push for more labour engagement in struggles occurring on the ground locally, for example, through supporting and encouraging the development of flying squads which support picket lines and direct actions.

In Toronto, unions can be pushed to commit to work with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) in its provincial campaign against the neo-liberal agenda of Mike Harris' government. The protests in Quebec have strengthened the militancy, advanced the solidarity and increased the numbers of people who are prepared to engage in this kind of work.

- This article appears in the May/June

The anti-capitalist movement and the revolutionary left

3 June 2001, by **Alex Callinicos**

The birth of a new left

'Seattle was a fork in the road,' as Ralph Nader put it. Since the demonstrations that caused the collapse of the World Trade Organization ministerial meeting at the end of November 1999, there has crystallized in the advanced capitalist countries a politically active minority that sees global capitalism as the source of the world's ills. It is this sense of totality, of the system itself being at fault that distinguishes this new anti-capitalist movement from campaigns that focus on specific issues and grievances. (...)

The anti-capitalist movement manifests itself along four dimensions - protest demonstrations, a broader change in the political climate, the formation of new political milieux, and an intellectual shift:

(i) A new cycle of protest: Since N30 in Seattle there have been major mobilizations against international capitalism in Washington (16 April 2000), Millau (30 June 2000), Melbourne (11 September 2000), Prague (26 September 2000), Seoul (10 October 2000), Nice (6-7 December 2000), Washington again (20 January 2001), and Quebec City (20-21 April 2001). In addition there were protests against the World Economic Forum in Davos, which meets in January every year, in both 2000 and 2001. Among the targets for upcoming protests this year are the European Union summit in Gothenburg on 14-16 June and the G-8 meeting in Genoa on 20-22 July. The character and composition of these

demonstrations has been quite variable. Thus the participation of the organized working class was strong in Seattle and Quebec City, weak in both the Washington protests, strong in Millau, weak (though far from non-existent) in Prague, and dominant in Seoul and Nice.

Despite these variations, there can be no doubt of the scale of the movement. As Susan George puts it, 'there has not been such a resurgence of activist energy since the Vietnam War.'

(ii) An anti-capitalist mood: But in some ways more important is the change in the broader political climate. The significance of the demonstrations lies partly in what they actually achieved - thus those in Seattle did help precipitate the collapse of the WTO meeting, while the Prague protests brought the IMF annual general meeting to an abrupt halt. But they also play a symbolic role whose importance can't be underestimated.

There have been larger demonstrations in the United States, even in recent years, than Seattle. There were earlier protests against capitalist globalization - for example, over Third World debt at the G-8 summits in Birmingham in July 1998 and in Cologne a year later, and the J18 anti-capitalist riots in London in June 1999. But - perhaps because workers, students and NGOs came together there in the very heart of the beast, indeed in the capital of the 'New Economy' - Seattle crystallized a mood. (...)

To a lesser, but still remarkable degree the Prague protests have also come to play the same symbolic role,

even though they have been demonstrations elsewhere that were bigger and more working-class. (...)

Seattle and Prague represent the revival of a belief in the possibility of collective resistance to the system. It is important to understand that this does not mean that every struggle that takes place around the world is an expression of this anti-capitalist mood. The Al Aqsa Intifada, for example, is driven by the Palestinians' burning resentment of the oppression they suffer at the hands of the Zionist state and in particular of the way in which the 'peace process' has served to entrench and legitimize the Israeli seizure of large parts of the West Bank and Gaza. There is, of course, a connection between the Palestinians' oppression and global capitalism in the shape of US imperialism, but the system itself is not at the centre of their consciousness when they fight the Israeli state. Nevertheless, the anti-capitalist movement is becoming a political reference point even for struggles whose immediate driving force lies elsewhere. Thus Edward Said writes:

A turning point has been reached, however, and for this the Palestinian Intifada is a significant marker. For not only is it an anti-colonial rebellion of the kind that has been seen periodically in Setif, Sharpeville, Soweto and elsewhere. It is another example of the general discontent with the post-Cold War order (economic and political) displayed in the events of Seattle and Prague.

(iii) The formation of new political milieux. The anti-capitalist mood finds concrete expression in the emergence of more or less organized political

milieux where a new left is beginning to take shape. This process began in France after the 1995 strikes, where *Le Monde diplomatique* and ATTAC have provided a focus for opposition to neo-liberalism. These initiatives have had a Europe-wide impact: there are now English, German, and Greek editions of *Le Monde diplomatique*, while ATTAC has been set up in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Switzerland.

In the United States also a plethora of coalitions and campaigns have emerged to articulate the new anti-capitalist consciousness. Ralph Nader's presidential campaign helped to give a national focus to these movements. As one supporter put it, '[v]oting for Nader felt like a tiny step into a broader movement, an act that connected me with protestors in Seattle and Prague.' Thomas Harrison summarized the main political thrust of the campaign thus:

'Plutocracy', 'oligarchy' - these were the words Nader used. Nader is no socialist - he is not even opposed to capitalism and the market as such. His rhetoric is very much like that of old-fashioned American Populism and Progressivism. But Nader's campaign relentlessly drew attention to the problem of class rule. Not since Norman Thomas in the 1930s has a prominent candidate for the presidency made this an issue and forced people to think about.

Though the pressure to vote Democrat in what proved to be an ultra-close race cut Nader's share of the vote below the critical five percent level required to secure public funding for future challenges, his candidacy galvanized a nation-wide campaign. Howie Hawkins, an activist for the Green Party (which endorsed Nader), writes:

Four hundred and sixty three thousand signatures were collected to put Nader on the ballot in forty-three states and the District of Columbia ... 150,000 volunteers are on the databases of the national campaign and the state, local and Green Party organizations to which they were referred. 25,000 student volunteers registered tens of thousands of new voters. Exit polls indicate the

campaign brought out about one million new voters who otherwise would not have voted.

Some one hundred campaign staff were hired for two offices in DC and nineteen field offices in various states, with each state having at least one paid field co-ordinator. With the help of this field staff, over five hundred local Green groups and nine hundred campus Green groups organized and distributed eight million pieces of literature and one million buttons, bumper-stickers, and yard signs. Two unions - the California Nurses Association and the United Electrical workers - endorsed Nader outright. UAW [United Auto-Workers] and Teamsters leaders publicly flirted with Nader, if only to send Gore a message on trade issues.

Nader campaigned in all fifty states, the only presidential candidate to do so. His campaign rallies were by far the biggest for any candidate, with 15,000 in Madison Square Gardens in New York, 14,000 at the Target Center in Minneapolis, 12,000 at the Fleet Center in Boston, and 10,000 each at the Pavilion in Chicago, the Coliseum in Portland, and the MCI Center in Washington DC.

On a more modest scale, the Socialist Alliances and the Globalize Resistance conferences in Britain have brought together two overlapping constituencies - those inspired by the anti-globalization movement and Labour Party supporters disillusioned by the experience of the Blair government. This highlights the fact that in Western Europe at least the crisis of reformism intensified by the performance of the social-democratic governments elected in the second half of the 1990s has been one of the main sources of the anti-capitalist mood.

(iv) The re-emergence of critiques of capitalism. To measure the extent of the intellectual shift under way, we have to recall the scene of devastation that reigned after the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in 1989-91. It was then, of course, that Francis Fukuyama announced the End of History: liberal capitalism had triumphed over all systemic alternatives and, barring some

unforeseeable relapse into barbarism, would reign forever. In a remarkably respectful response from the intellectual left, Perry Anderson conceded that Fukuyama was probably right. Anderson, who recently resumed the editorship of *New Left Review*, re-affirmed this perspective after Seattle, declaring the hegemony of neo-liberalism was now so unchallenged that, '[f]or the first time since the Reformation, there are no longer any significant oppositions - that is, systematic rival outlooks - within the thought-world of the West; and scarcely any on a world scale either, if we discount religious doctrines as largely inoperative archaisms.' But this time he was immediately challenged.

Anderson's pessimism now contrasts with the variety of figures who have emerged to offer systematic critiques of capitalism. Chief among them are Walden Bello, Pierre Bourdieu, Susan George, Naomi Klein, and George Monbiot. It is easy enough for Marxists to identify the limitations in these critiques - their ambiguity, for example, over whether the enemy is global capitalism or merely neo-liberalism, the closely related illusions that they often display in petty capitalism as an alternative to the multinationals, and their occasional willingness to ally with the conservative right against the international capitalist institutions.

There is, moreover, a process of differentiation developing in the anti-globalization movement between those forces - for example, the so-called Congos, or Co-opted Non-governmental Organizations - that are willing to collaborate with the IMF and the World Bank in their search for a 'dialogue' and those who by contrast wish, as Bello puts it, to 'intensify the crisis of legitimacy' of these institutions. The World Social Forum (WSF), held in Porto Alegre in January 2001 as an alternative to the bosses' annual jamboree in Davos, saw powerful elements - associated notably with *Le Monde diplomatique* and the ATTAC leadership - that pushed a reformist agenda.

(...) It would, however, be a big mistake, however, to see remarks such as these as the expression of a settled

reformist position. (...)

The ambiguities of anti-capitalist theory do not in any case alter the impact that the movement has had in changing the terms of intellectual and political debate. (...)

Of course, defeating the bosses in words is not the same as tearing away control of the planet from them. Nevertheless, what we are seeing is the emergence of an increasingly influential group of intellectuals who see themselves as engaging in a political struggle against global capitalism. Bourdieu's recent writings reveal an increasingly sharp anti-capitalist focus. Thus he writes (with Loïc Wacquant):

Empirical analysis of the long-term evolution of the advanced economies suggests ... that 'globalization' is not a new phase of capitalism but a 'rhetoric' which governments invoke to justify their willing submission to financial markets. Far from being, as is ceaselessly repeated, the inevitable consequence of increasing foreign trade, deindustrialization, the growth of inequalities and the contraction of social policy result from domestic political decisions that reflect the tipping of class relations in favour of the owners of capital.

(...) What this amounts to is the birth of a new left on an international scale. After the Globalize Resistance conferences, George Monbiot wrote:

At last it's happening. Just as the neo-liberals on both sides of the Atlantic proclaim universal victory, a composite radical opposition movement is beginning to emerge. It's confused, it's contradictory and it looks like nothing we've ever seen before. But for the first time in 14 years of campaigning I feel that I've witnessed something unstoppable.

A challenge for revolutionaries

This is, as they said in 1968, only a beginning. Anti-capitalism is most widely diffused internationally as a mood. Its development into a movement is quite variable - most

advanced in the US and France, much more patchy elsewhere. Ultimate success will depend upon what happened briefly in Seattle - the coming together of organized workers and anti-globalization activists - becoming a sustained movement. And that in turn will require anti-capitalism, still as a diffuse ideology defined primarily by what it is against - neo-liberal policies and multinational corporations, developing into a much more coherent socialist consciousness. All this is ABC for revolutionary Marxists. The fact remains that this is the greatest opening for the left since the 1960s.

The anti-capitalist movement is nevertheless an enormous challenge of the revolutionary left. The two are not the same. The anti-capitalist movement is, as Monbiot puts it, 'composite ... confused ... contradictory'. It draws on all sorts of ideological sources, embraces an immense diversity of different organizations, and originated among a very heterogeneous collection of activists - Christian debt campaigners, environmentalists, dependency economists, animal righters, survivors of the 1960s, anarchist street-fighters, members of respectable NGOs, supporters of various Third World solidarity movements, and a sprinkling of trade unionists and socialists. The revolutionary left, by contrast, comprises those Marxist organizations that managed to survive the defeats of the 1980s - most importantly on an international scale supporters of the International Socialist Tendency (IST) and the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI).

There is nothing inevitable about the anti-capitalist movement and the revolutionary left coming together. For this to happen, revolutionaries will have to change themselves. They will have to shake off the habits they developed during the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, when right-wing ideas were in the ascendant and it was therefore essential to protect Marxist ideas and organization from a hostile political environment. New methods of working are now required. In particular, systematic use of the united front approach developed by the Bolsheviks and the Communist International during its early years

(1918-23) is of crucial importance in relating to the new political milieu.

The Socialist Workers Party in Britain stumbled on this more or less empirically during the Balkan War of 1999, when the anti-war movement was characterized by a much higher degree of unity and common purpose than it possessed during the Gulf War in 1991. Left unity attained a much higher level in the London Socialist Alliance, which ran a slate in the May 2000 elections to the Greater London Authority. It was able to draw on a widespread desire for unity that stretched from a wide spectrum of the far left to many traditional supporters of the Labour left. The success of the Globalize Resistance conferences in February 2001 depended critically on the diverse range of political views represented both in building for them and in the actual conferences themselves.

This shift towards systematic united-front work is merely an important part of the much wider change that revolutionaries must make in order to relate to the anti-capitalist movement. This change involves developing a sensitivity to the distinctive style and concerns of the movement, a familiarity with its literature and issues on which this focuses, and a willingness to engage in dialogue. Experience of the work for Prague and Nice and for the Globalize Resistance conferences has shown again and again that those involved in these united fronts are enormously open to Marxist arguments - provided that these put in a way that is relevant to their concerns, and provided they aren't preached at. All this underlines the importance of breaking with the tendencies towards sectarianism that the isolation revolutionary socialists have to a large extent found themselves in for the past twenty years has encouraged.

But there is absolutely no guarantee that revolutionaries will make the necessary break. The history of the socialist movement has shown again and again that every sharp change in the objective situation creates a crisis within the revolutionary organization. Even when that organization tries to adjust to the new situation it is held back by its own conservatism. A

particular method of working, if it has proved successful, tends to become entrenched in the organization. People come to see what were essentially tactics developed to address a particular set of circumstances as a matter of principle. Shifting the organization to meet different circumstances encounters resistance that reflects the inertia created by a perspective that was successful in the past.

Reflecting on the experience of the Bolsheviks, Trotsky wrote in 1924:

Generally speaking, crises arise in the party at every serious turn in the party's course, either as prelude to the turn or as a consequence of it. The explanation for this lies in the fact that every period in the development of the party has special features of its own and calls for specific habits and methods of work. A tactical turn implies a greater or lesser break in these habits and methods. Herein lies the direct and most immediate root of internal party frictions and crises. 'Too often has it happened,' wrote Lenin in July 1917, 'that, when history has taken a sharp turn, even progressive parties have some time been unable to adapt themselves the new situation and have repeated slogans which had formerly been correct but had now lost all meaning - lost it as "suddenly" as the sharp turn in history was "sudden".' Hence the danger arises that if the turn is too abrupt or too sudden, and if in the preceding period too many elements of inertia have accumulated in the leading organs of the party, then the party will prove itself unable to fulfil its leadership at that supreme and critical moment for which it has been preparing itself in the course of decades. The party is ravaged by a crisis, and the movement passes the party by - and heads toward defeat.

Lenin was confronted by this danger on a number of occasions. Most famously, in response to the Russian Revolution of 1905 he fought, as Tony Cliff puts it, 'to open the gates of the party' - that is for the mass recruitment of workers radicalized by the experience of the upturn in struggle. He did so against the bitter resistance of the 'committee-men' - the professional revolutionaries who,

with Lenin at their head, had built up a tight centralized underground organization during the years of repression before 1905. Lenin's closest ally in this struggle to open up the party was Aleksandr Bogdanov. Yet, in the period of reaction after the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, Bogdanov became the leader of an ultra-left faction within the Bolsheviks who resisted the change in tactics required to adjust to the new situation - for example, opposing standing candidates to the Tsarist Duma as a platform for legal political activity. Despite their close collaboration hitherto, Lenin did not hesitate to break with Bogdanov and ultimately to expel him from the Bolsheviks.

Lenin's practice of 'bending the stick' - of focusing on the key tasks in the current situation to the exclusion of all secondary factors and indeed to the point of exaggeration - flowed in part from the necessity of overcoming conservative resistance within the party to the changes dictated by a 'sharp turn in history'. (...)

Missing the 1960s: the American SWP

But there are more recent examples of revolutionary organizations finding it hard to turn - or failing to turn altogether. The Socialist Workers Party in the United States was the premier organization of the Trotskyist movement during its infancy in the 1930s and 1940s. James P. Cannon and other leaders of the SWP (US) had worked closely with Trotsky and they could claim with some justification to be his political heirs. Despite internal splits and state persecution the SWP was able to hold together during the 1950s, one of the most difficult periods American revolutionaries have had to face, when the Cold War, McCarthyism and the Long Boom conspired to make authentic Marxist politics seem utterly irrelevant.

Yet preserving the organization came at the price of ossification.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the situation began to change. (...) But it was opposition to the Vietnam War, particularly as a result of President

Lyndon B. Johnson's escalation of direct US military involvement in 1964-5, that generated vast mass mobilizations. Vietnam deeply divided American society in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with long-term effects that are still felt today. It also produced an enormous shift to the left among the millions in particular of young people who participated in the great anti-war demonstrations. The New Left umbrella organization on the campuses, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), mushroomed in the course of the decade. (...)

The tragedy of the SWP (US) was that it failed to seize the opportunity offered by this radicalization. To its credit, it did throw itself into the anti-war movement and played a key role in building a succession of mass demonstrations. For example, it was the driving force in the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC), which initiated one of the biggest anti-war demonstrations of all in Washington on 24 April 1971. The problem was that the SWP (US) made a fetish of the single tactic of legal mass demonstrations. (...)

The SWP (US)'s shibboleth of legal mass demonstrations meant that it was bitterly hostile to the powerful forces within the anti-war movement that supported mass civil disobedience. (...)

The absence of any serious Marxist organization that sought to relate to the radicalization helped to create a situation in which activists went through a cycle where huge mass mobilizations were followed by periods of demoralization caused by the fact that the war was continuing in spite of the demonstrations: the resulting frustration pushed opponents of the war towards forms of activity - working for the election campaigns of anti-war Democrats or terrorism - that had in common the attempt to find a substitute for mass action. (...)

An American tragedy: the

International Socialist Organization

The roots of the SWP (US)'s failure can be traced back to the mistaken path that it - along with the rest of the Fourth International - took after the Second World War when Trotsky's analysis of Russia as a degenerated workers' state was turned into a sacred dogma. The International Socialist Tendency originated in this moment of crisis, and in particular in Tony Cliff's critique of Trotsky and development of the theory of state capitalism. This allowed us to maintain the classical Marxist conception of socialism as the self-emancipation of the working class and to develop an approach to party-building that started from the realities of proletarian life rather than the fantasies of orthodox Trotskyist programme-mongers.

But sectarianism need not be the consequence only of orthodox Trotskyism. A formally correct theoretical analysis is not sufficient to confer immunity to it. The challenge posed by the new anti-capitalist mood has polarized the far left in a way that cuts across traditional lines. Orthodox Trotskyists have been divided in their response. Perhaps the most sectarian reaction came from the leading French Trotskyist organization *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO) provides an example of this response. LO did not take part in the nation-wide demonstrations held in France in solidarity with N30 in Seattle, dismissing them as a bloc of left nationalists and right-wing Gaullists, and denounced the entire anti-WTO movement:

Today the internationalization of the economy, under the aegis of the capitalist states, is a fact. To wish to oppose it, in the name of tainted protectionist ideas, of nationalism, is to risk drifting towards openly reactionary objectives. It is moreover no accident that, at Seattle, one can find united on this terrain as well Third World nationalists as the leaders of the American car workers' union UAW, who did not hesitate to organize punitive operations against the

American owners of Japanese cars in the 1980s. Because, for both, their opposition to internationalization seeks to bring about a convergence of the interests of the population with that of their national bourgeoisie.

More recently LO has attacked the French peasant leader José Bové for taking direct action against the introduction of genetically modified organisms into agriculture, accusing of him effectively being in alliance with President Chirac and the Gaullist right to block scientific research. The *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire*, the other main French Trotskyist organization and the most important surviving affiliate of the Fourth International, has taken a much more positive approach in principle. Some of its members play a prominent part in ATTAC. Activists from an orthodox Trotskyist background sought to raise the profile of a distinctively socialist analysis by arguing that the 'anti-globalization movement' must stop treating 'the question of the forms of property of the means of production, communication, and exchange as a taboo question', and put the issue of social ownership back onto the agenda. But the LCR failed to mobilize seriously for Prague or even - much more disgracefully - for Nice.

Regrettably the rise of the anti-capitalist movement has also divided the IS Tendency., as shown by the case of the International Socialist Organization (ISO), which has been the IST's American affiliate since its foundation in 1977.

(...) Despite these difficult beginnings the ISO was able to build on open socialist politics during the Reagan era, when much of the rest of the American left was collapsing into the Democratic Party. (...)

By the end of the decade the ISO claimed about a thousand members. It seemed much better prepared politically and organizationally than the SWP (US) had been in the 1960s.

Yet once again methods developed to build in the long downturn proved to be an ultimately fatal obstacle to the ISO's ability to relate to the movement that exploded at Seattle. This first began to surface during the 1999

Balkan War, when the ISO leadership initiated a debate with the SWP Central Committee by criticizing how the latter were going about opposing the war. The ISO Steering Committee argued that it was the 'duty' of revolutionaries, when building anti-war coalitions, to highlight the differences separating them from others opposing the NATO bombing campaign. In particular, they should attack illusions in the United Nations as an alternative to NATO, sympathy for Serbian nationalism, and opposition to Kosovan self-determination. 'It would,' they concluded, 'be unprincipled to ignore these questions within the anti-war movement.' This stance helped to explain why the ISO - particularly in Chicago, where the group's centre is based - was much less effective in opposing the Balkan War than it had been during the Gulf War nearly a decade earlier.

The ISO's approach contrasted dramatically with that pursued by its European sister organizations, who concentrated on building the widest possible movement in opposition to the war. This prompted the SWP Central Committee privately to communicate our disagreement. (...)

We were, however, shaken by the argument. Already at this early stage in the debate we can see the ISO displaying the attitude that by which Marx defined a sect, namely that it 'sees the justification for its existence and its point of honour not in what it has in common with the class movement but in the particular shibboleth which distinguishes itself from the movement'. Sometimes differentiation is essential if a revolutionary organization is to survive in an unfavourable political environment. This had been true during the Reagan-Thatcher era in the 1980s where the ISO and the SWP alike had taken refuge in the Marxist tradition as protection against the right-wing climate in society and the collapse of the left. But such a defensive attitude was no longer necessary, as in the second half of 1990s the long downturn in class struggle drew to an end.

The cost of such a stance became clear when the demonstrations at

Seattle exploded at the end of November 1999. Only a handful of ISO members were present. (...)

The ISO offered practical reasons - in particular the distance separating Seattle from its closest district of any size in the Bay Area - to justify its failure to mobilize for Seattle. (...)

The truth is that the ISO leadership did not regard Seattle as an important priority (even after the event they, absurdly, claimed that 'the movement against globalization ... began', not at Seattle, but at the much smaller and more obscure School of the Americas demonstration). They expected it to be dominated by protectionist trade-union leaders and preferred to concentrate their efforts what proved to be a much smaller demonstration where they felt they could have more impact. (...)

These arguments are evidence of a deep-rooted sectarian mentality that judges demonstrations by the politics of their leaders and mechanically reduces changes in consciousness to shifts in the economic class struggle. All the same, missing Seattle was a bad mistake, but not necessarily a fatal one. It often takes time for revolutionaries to adjust to a change in the objective situation. The difficulties that the Bolshevik Party had in responding to the 1905 Revolution are an example, albeit on a much grander scale. On the basis of that experience Lenin wrote:

A political party's attitude towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how fulfils in practice its obligations towards its class and the working people. Frankly acknowledging a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analysing the conditions that have lead up to it, and thrashing out the means for its rectification - that is the hallmark of a serious party; that is how it should perform its duties and how it should educate and train its class and then the masses.

Had the ISO leadership recognized their mistake and fought the sectarian mentality that had developed inside the group, events might have turned out very differently. Alas, they did not

take this course. As the tumultuous year ushered in by Seattle unfolded, they seemed pulled backwards and forwards - sometimes moving towards the anti-capitalist movement, but always correcting this initial impulse and retreating into the sectarian bunker. (...)

In the event the ISO leadership did mobilize their membership for A16 - perhaps in order to avoid the accusation that, after missing Seattle, they had also missed Washington. But they denied that the demonstrations represented the emergence of a new anti-capitalist minority, preferring instead to describe them as symptomatic of a 'reformist' or 'anti-corporate' mood. As Cliff and I put it, this kind of formulation 'underestimates the fluidity of the developing consciousness' in the movements against corporate globalization, which, while not representing a coherent revolutionary outlook, had gone beyond simply seeking the reform of particular aspects of the system.

The ISO leadership's view of what they refused to describe as the anti-capitalist movement is perhaps best expressed in the following passage;

Within these loosely connected, nascent movements, there is a strand of self-identified anti-capitalists. The radicalization of this minority, which is predominantly young students, overwhelmingly white and largely middle class, springs from the same roots as the radicalization of much wider layers of people who are becoming activated. The radicalization of all these layers arises as a response to the polarization of class relations in the US and internationally. We view the emergence of the self-identified anti-capitalist minority as an exciting development - but only one development among many. The anti-capitalists are not the leading wedge of the developing movements, and they are certainly not their cause ... When we make this distinction, we in no way 'downplay' the significance of this radicalization. On the contrary, our perspective centres on how to clearly identify the political mood and relate to various movements.

Once again this argument reveals the

ISO leadership's urge to differentiate - their implicit dismissal of anti-capitalist activists as white, middle-class students is reminiscent of some of the worst sectarian aberrations of the 1960s, for example, the refusal of the orthodox Trotskyist followers of Gerry Healy and Pierre Lambert to participate in the student and anti-war movements because of their 'petty bourgeois' character. This attitude was articulated through a mistaken assessment of the radicalization developing in the US. As we put it, "the ISO leadership sees the anti-capitalist movement as one among many, of no special importance. The comrades do not see the strategic significance of the emergence of a minority that is beginning to generalize and to target the system rather than any of its specific aspects. By relating systematically to this minority the comrades could make a qualitative breakthrough - recruiting on a large enough scale to be able to leapfrog over other organizations and establish themselves as the dominant tendency on the American far left."

In the debate that developed between the ISO and the rest of the IS Tendency in the course of the year 2000, the American leadership also took issue with the analysis implied by Cliff's remark that observing Europe in the 1990s was like watching a film of the 1930s in slow motion. This analysis, first developed in the early 1990s, was intended to highlight the presence of the same forces - economic and political instability, class polarization, the possibility of sharp shifts both to the left and to the far right - as had driven the great upheavals of the 1930s. We were, however, very careful to stress the differences between the 1930s and the 1990s - most notably, the economic crises of the 1990s were of course much less severe (in the advanced capitalist countries at least) than the Great Depression of the 1930s, and bourgeois democracy was much more securely established than it had been during the inter-war period.

The ISO leadership brushed aside these qualifications, and caricatured our analysis as a prophecy of economic catastrophe. This distortion was taken to its extreme when Joel Geier (speaking on behalf of the ISO

at an IST meeting on 8 May 2000) accused us of believing that the world faced 'decades of capitalism's biggest slump'! Such absurdities concealed the lack of any coherent alternative analysis on the part of the ISO leadership. They pointed to the American boom of the 1990s as a decisive counter-example to the '1930s in slow motion' analysis, but since their own accounts stressed its fragile roots and contradictory character it was hard to tell exactly what they were saying. They claimed that 'the CC's insistence on the parallel of the 1930s has led the SWP to orient itself as if economic crisis is always about to hit and detonate a sudden explosion in the struggle'. But the first real signs in late 2000 that the American boom was coming to an end prompted the ISO leadership to flip over into a catastrophist perspective complete with predictions of shantytowns and other forms of immiseration.

The second development that put these differences to the test was Nader's presidential campaign. After initial hesitation, the ISO leadership made a sharp turn towards building the campaign. In the most positive assessment of the anti-capitalist movement written by a leading ISO member, Geier welcomed '[t]he emergence of a new left and the sudden upsurge of an anti-corporate electoral campaign'. Perhaps the ISO's participation in the big demonstrations at the Republican and Democratic conventions in July and August 2000 gave them a sense of how Nader was offering a political focus to the movements on the ground. His campaign further brought into sharp relief the debate on the American left over whether the Democratic Party, particularly under the Clinton-Gore leadership, could be seen as a 'lesser evil' than the Republicans. The size and enthusiasm of the super-rallies Nader held across the US in the fall confirmed that the decision to build his campaign was a correct one.

Once again, however, it was a case of one step forward and two steps back by the ISO. The urge to differentiate conquered the initial decision to involve themselves in the Nader campaign. The ISO Steering Committee declared: 'We will need to

begin to offer a long term political alternative to people who are becoming radicalized in these committees and who are also critical of Nader on many issues.' Every ISO branch or district was instructed to hold a public meeting on 'The Revolutionary Ideas of Karl Marx' for 'contacts who are around us in the Nader campaign and other activities' before the election on 7 November, when campaigning activity would be at its height. Two members of the ISO in New York were quick to point out the sectarianism implicit in this attitude. 'The only people criticizing Nader were hopeless sectarians or apologists for Gore!' 'One has to question whether such people actually exist inside the committees and why we should target them and not the people who are most enthusiastic about Nader and, therefore, want to carry on his crusade against corporate power beyond the elections.'

The ISO's approach showed little sense of the dynamic of a growing and radicalizing movement whose members are bound together by their common activity. In such a movement, revolutionaries establish themselves in the first instance through their effectiveness in this activity. Political discussion, of course, is important, but it is most likely to emerge organically from the work of the movement rather than originating from abstract topics artificially introduced by the revolutionaries. The ISO by contrast saw the Nader campaign as something to raid, and to take activists from to their own activities and discussions. (...)

But giving priority to recruitment to the ISO over building the Nader campaign (particular when the campaign was at its height) reflected an essentially sectarian take on a movement that was developing its own radicalizing momentum independently of anything revolutionary Marxists might do or say. It therefore was little surprise that as soon as the presidential election was over, the ISO dropped the Nader committees like a hot potato, preferring instead to relate to the liberal Democrats protesting against George W. Bush's rigged victory. As these remarks by a member of the ISO in New York (approvingly quoted by his district

organizer) make clear, this turn was justified on the grounds that the Nader supporters were middle-class:

Are all Nader voters really closer to being working-class revolutionaries than the thousands of Redeem the Dream activists, militant shop stewards and other grass-roots organizers who voted for Gore? It's as if you view the Nader campaign as a full-fledged Social-Democratic party, where we can put all our focus. But the Nader campaign only began to sink the roots in the working class that mass reformist parties take for granted. We've been a big part of sinking these existing roots precisely because of our perspective that there are millions of black and working-class Gore supporters who are just as progressive as those already in the Nader campaign - and potentially more powerful. Thus, the perspective that Nader supporters are far closer to us not only cuts us off from most of the population, it disarms us within the Nader campaign itself, where the key question is how to broaden this movement into the working class.

This passage is a good example of the kind of sectarian logic in which ISO members have been trained: since the anti-capitalist minority aren't revolutionary socialists, they must be reformists, and therefore, since they are middle class (except for those workers attracted to the Nader campaign by the ISO), they aren't as interesting politically as the black and working-class reformists who voted for Gore. Any sense of the difference made by the emergence of a minority that, whatever its class origins, is beginning to generalize against the system as a whole is wholly absent. The ISO increasingly viewed the world through its own sectarian prism. In an extraordinary speech at the ISO's convention in December 2000, the group's National Organizer, Sharon Smith, attacked the idea that the ISO could, by systematically focusing on this minority, 'leapfrog' over the rest of the left, and insisted that methods of party-building forged in the downturn were necessary irrespective of the changing objective conditions. 'Branches are now and will always be the measure of the size of the organization,' she said. (...)

After the convention, the Steering Committee moved to discipline the minority, expelling six of its members in January 2001. This was an extraordinary move to take, particularly since the ISO leadership had always protested that 'there are no differences of principle' between them and the SWP, and that their disagreements with the rest of the Tendency were 'secondary differences'. There was, however, a certain sectarian logic behind the suppression of debate within the ISO. The leadership had decided to ignore the way in which the world outside was changing: there was only a small step to seeking to silence anyone inside the group who brought the unwelcome news that they were wrong.(...)

Conclusion

The sectarian degeneration of the ISO is undeniably a tragedy. Trotsky described the danger that 'if in the preceding period too many elements of inertia have accumulated in the leading organs of the party, then the party will prove itself unable to fulfil its leadership at that supreme and critical moment for which it has been preparing itself in the course of decades.' In the case of the ISO, sincere revolutionaries who in some cases have been active since the mid-1970s or even earlier have become so ossified that they are unable to relate to the revival of the left for which they have waited for decades.

This sad affair invites two general reflections. The first concerns how disagreements are conducted within an international revolutionary tendency. The SWP and its sister organizations have always set their faces against repeating the mistakes of Trotsky and his followers by launching an international organization, with its own leadership and discipline, before the development of the kind of mass working-class radicalization that made it possible for the Bolsheviks to make the Communist International a major pole of attraction within the world labour movement. We have conceived the IS Tendency as an international revolutionary current composed of

autonomous organizations that are united by a shared political tradition.

The ISO leadership has tried to portray the SWP's behaviour in the current debate as representing a break with this approach. Making various fanciful comparisons with the Third International under Lenin and the Fourth International under Trotsky, they claim that the SWP 'increasingly acts as a foreman unwilling to tolerate even the slightest criticism'. This is a caricature of the real situation. The Tendency has developed in large part thanks to sharp political debates among its leading organizations. In 1987-8 the leaderships of the SWP and OSE (the forerunner to SEK) disagreed fiercely over the attitude revolutionaries should take towards the US intervention on Iraq's side against Iran in the final phase of the First Gulf War. This debate played an essential role in preparing the IST to respond effectively to the much greater challenge represented by the Second Gulf War in 1991. Then again in 1993-4, the SWP and OSE disagreed vigorously over the steps necessary to help our German sister group to overcome the crisis into which it had fallen because of its failure to respond effectively to the social and political polarization that developed in Germany after reunification: the resulting reorientation led to the emergence of Linksruck as one of the strongest organizations in the Tendency.

In both cases, sharp political argument was necessary in order to arrive at the clarification on which effective action depended. Because both debates were conducted on a political basis, they did not alter in the slightest the close working relationship that continues to exist between the leaderships of SEK and the SWP. The emergence of the anti-capitalist movement represented an even bigger turn in the situation that required debate in order to clarify the tasks of revolutionaries. In complaining about the SWP leadership's decision to pursue this argument, the ISO Steering Committee seemed to conceive the relations between different organizations within the same international tendency as a kind of

mutual admiration society among leaderships that agree not to criticize one another. In rejecting this model, we are not claiming the SWP's right to impose its will on the rest of the Tendency. Each organization is autonomous and therefore must make its own political decisions. But this does not alter the centrality of political argument in the development of the revolutionary movement, internationally as well as nationally.

In any case, the argument between the ISO and the IS Tendency was more than a disagreement over political perspectives of the kind that goes on all the time. It was a symptom of the ISO's degeneration, of its ossification into a sect. To have continued co-existing with ISO would have reduced the IS Tendency to an organized hypocrisy, like the USFI in the 1970s, when, behind a façade of unity, two factions - the International Majority Tendency (based in Europe) and the Leninist Trotskyist Faction (dominated, ironically enough, by the American SWP) - waged war in every section of the Fourth International. Such a situation would have destroyed the IST, either by producing much more serious splits than have taken place, or by internalizing and factionalizing it till it ceased to be an effective political forum for international political discussion and co-operation.

Secondly, the fate of the ISO is no reason for complacency on the part of those who have avoided it this time. As I have tried to show, the temptation to retreat into sectarianism is a permanent one for revolutionary organizations, particularly when there is what Lenin called 'a sudden turn in history'. Even the vast majority of the IST that have avoided the ISO's fundamental error and recognized and sought to relate to the anti-capitalist movement face an enormous challenge in carrying this through. The ISO's metastasis into a sect is an extreme case of a tendency present in all our organizations. We will all have to fight to overcome this tendency and transform ourselves into an effective part of the movement that is burgeoning beyond us.

This process has, however, begun. The IS Tendency's concerted mobilizations

for Prague and Nice have had an impact on the left across Europe. Our Scandinavian sister organizations in Denmark, Norway, and Finland (itself a recent addition to the Tendency) have been actively involved in the establishment of new national branches of ATTAC and in building for the protests at the EU summit for Gothenburg. Genoa will see another Europe-wide mobilization by the IS Tendency.

These activities are not merely important because they allow individual IST groups to grow in size and influence. It is becoming clear that an international recomposition of the left is under way. As we have seen, reaction on the far left to the emergence of the anti-capitalist movement has cut across existing theoretical and organizational allegiances. The way in which the Socialist Alliance in Britain has brought together revolutionaries from hitherto bitterly opposed Trotskyist

tendencies alongside left reformists from a traditional Labourist background in very effective common activity is an indication of the kind of realignments under way. This is part of the larger flux characteristic of the anti-capitalist movement itself.

For those with the capacity to abandon old preconceptions, to change, and to learn there is the opportunity of winning a new generation to revolutionary Marxism.

“To speak with the people of Mexico”

3 June 2001, by Sergio Rodríguez Lascano



Marcos enters the Zocalo,
Mexico City

On the 2nd of December 2000, when the Zapatistas announced that they would travel to Mexico City to engage in dialogue both with civil society and with the National Assembly of the Union to persuade the legislators to be so kind as to approve the Law on Indigenous Culture and Right, no one, not even the most optimistic, would have imagined the tremendous success of this mobilisation.

In the period before this, those intellectuals in Mexico organically tied to the political regime (those of whom Octavio Paz had a low opinion - they have none of his extensive abilities as a poet or essayist), fabricated stories that the EZLN had lost the limited social force that had supported it, even among the indigenous peoples. According to them, the idea of surrender was the only viable scenario open to the Zapatista movement and especially to Marcos.

And among the team that surrounded the newly elected President of the Republic, a layer was favourable to the hypothesis above and therefore inclined to promote a series of actions that suggested there was no reason

for the march.

The same president Vicente Fox, from the first moment refused to take a clear position towards the march. Instead, he designed a new media policy, which would encourage people to observe his good will towards the march. Every day, from the December 3, 2001 until the end of January, his position against the march became clearer. He tried to achieve two things: on the one hand to discourage the march itself, on the grounds that the Zapatistas would meet with failure given the massive support in society for Fox, (a series of opinion polls were released - that the Fox camp sought to use as a substitute for any possibility of debate and opinion - giving Fox 80% of popular support and Marcos only 17%); on the other to convince the EZLN that before the overwhelming situation in front of them, the only possibility for success would be to sit down and negotiate with Fox.

For this gentleman, having his photo taken with Marcos became an obsession, and in a spectacular act, he signed the peace agreements, even hoping that Marcos would participate in some way in his government.

Despite all this, the Zapatistas prepared for their long march. They had asked for three signs of good faith

to be given to them by the Government to be able to renew the negotiations:

- the liberation of more than one hundred political prisoners by the Government;
- the dismantling of seven of the army's 249 military encampments in Chiapas;
- the approval of the Law of Indigenous Culture and Rights, which had been drafted on the basis of the San Andres Agreements reached in December 1996, by deputies from the Commission of Reconciliation and Pacification, in which all the political parties had participated.

Despite the spectacular actions of Fox and the overwhelming results of the polls, the Zapatistas kept their word.

Starting from the beginning of February, the Fox government had to change its position before the irremediable fact: the march was going to take place without a prior meeting between Fox and Marcos. The pressure then apparently became subtler: Fox sought to take advantage of the march, seeking to pose as its sponsor and baptising it as "the march for peace".

Thus he created so many expectations that the media began to open up and announced coverage such as they

have never ever given to any previous citizens' action.

March of Indigenous Dignity begins

"A peaceful road of stars or spring without pressure. water that with closed eyelids pours forth prophecies all the night" (Octavio Paz: Piedra de Sol)

In the days prior to the start of the march, new rumours circulated through the media: "Marcos will not march! He never thought that Fox would approve this mobilisation." On the 24th of February, with the new moon, close to twenty thousand Indians met in San Cristobal de las Casas to see off 23 commanders including Subcommandante Marcos.

At the meeting, Marcos baptised the mobilisation with the title, 'The March of Indigenous Dignity', therefore denying any possibility that Fox would talk about it and interpret it in the same way. Beginning from this moment, no one could doubt that the march would be a success. In the course of the meeting he introduced the architect, Fernando Yanez as the intermediary from the EZLN to meet with the deputies of La Copa and in general with the members of the legislative power.

This action provoked new suspicions among some in the media who began a veritable campaign of hate towards the Zapatista movement, including beginning to push the idea that Fox had made a mistake in permitting the march to be welcomed.

In a statement, one of the richest men in Mexico, Juan Sanchez Navarro, (he is known as an ideologue for big business) declared that the difference now from the time when the Zapatistas were first invited by him to speak in the Manufacturers Club, was that he personally would not now invite the Zapatista delegation to the Club because their actions were permitting the poor - among whom there was much anger - to come together and join the march, saying

finally he was locking up his wife and family during the Zapatista's stay in Mexico City. Without perhaps wishing it, and very likely without even knowing it, he repeated what the rich of Mexico had said in 1914 when the original Zapatistas entered the city.

Wherever the new Zapatistas march went, its actions became much larger and more combative. The reaction of society to the march was impressive, including in cities such as Orizaba and Puebla where the rightwing is a strong force. The immense majority of the people who live in those cities participated, going to the meetings and going to the reception in the streets.

Consistently, as the march moved forward, the various Indian peoples brought the Zapatistas their batons, their signs of authority. At each turn it became more and more clear that the government had no other Indian force to look to for an alternative discussion.

The Zapatistas had succeeded in making the National Indigenous Congress, (CNI-created initially when the EZLN invited representatives of the indigenous peoples to participate in discussions with the government), the only valid interlocutor with the government. The indigenous people not only emerged from the process as a solid and socially coherent subject, but they spoke through a body that represented them.

The Mexican right, gathered around the National Action Party, (PAN-the party of Fox), the leading members of big business and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church began to put together a new hysterical campaign.

Most conspicuous were the legislators of the PAN whom for various reasons - such as that the EZLN wore masks, that they were "criminals" and that they should have met with Fox previously - indicated they could not receive the EZLN in Congress. Some of these legislators even threatened the caravan, saying it would be better if it did not pass through their states because there was a risk to life. This aroused a general feeling of solidarity with the Zapatistas.

The 'Right' that had recently

celebrated its electoral triumph, felt it had an exceedingly large social consensus behind it and could not believe what was happening before its eyes. Those "infamous" Indians, not only were they going in the streets and city squares but they were acclaimed everywhere and were now seen by everyone as the fundamental factor to be able to determine whether Mexico had begun to travel towards the construction of a democratic country.

At the same time, inside the PAN, Fox's opponents began to hatch a plot for vengeance against him. A distinguished PAN member stated that Fox had delivered to the PAN only 75 positions in the government structure out of the more than 5,000 available. No doubt within the PAN movement innumerable disgruntled members grumbled about the shape of the cabinet. This discontent was, at the very least, late. From the design of the electoral campaign until the campaign itself, one of the key points of Fox's strategy was to keep a healthy distance from the PAN. For Fox's friends who took control of his election campaign and policies, the reason was very simple: the game that was being played was too important to be left in the hands of a party that never exceeded 26% of the popular Mexican vote.

We should not forget the anger of Ricardo Garcia Cervantes, Diego Fernandez de Cevallos and the same Felipe Calderon, (PAN legislators and the principal leaders of the conservative wing of this party) about the totally secondary role the PAN played after the start of the election campaign. It would seem then that what was taking place in these squabbles was the settling of old accounts.

Nurio: The March Of The Colour Of The Earth

"A presence like a sudden song, like the singing wind in the fire, a look that is suspended, in the world with its seas and mountains."

Nurio is a small town in Mexico on the Tarasca plateau, a town in the Purepecha nation with a population of thirty thousand people. Here about 6,000 representatives of the various Indian peoples of Mexico participated in their third Congress. The Indian communities from the whole country had agreed to meet there, including those who had never before participated in the National Indigenous Congress from the north of the country. In Nurio, the indigenous peoples of Mexico decided to accompany the Zapatistas to the national assembly, putting forward the demand for approval of the Law for Indigenous Rights and Culture. The Indians had made their appearance and with this all the strategies and tactics they had endured from the country's political regime and its political parties broke into a thousand pieces.

In a communication read to the Intercultural Meeting at which José Saramago [Portuguese Nobel literature laureate], Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Bernard Cassen [editorial director, *Le Monde Diplomatique*], Alain Touraine [French sociologist], among others, participated, Marcos set out clearly what was his vision about the way in which the Zapatista movement would operate politically at this moment.

Marcos told a story: a group of chess players were absorbed in an important game of chess being played at a high level. An Indian approached, watched and asked what they were playing. No one answered him. The Indian came near to the chess table and considered the positions of the pieces, the serious and grim faces of the players and the expectant attitude of those watching them. He repeated his question. Only one of the chess-players bothered to reply: "This is something you wouldn't understand, it is a game for important and knowledgeable people."

The Indian watched silently and continued observing the board and the movements of the contestants. After a while, he ventured a question, "And why are you playing if you already know who is going to win?" The same player, who had responded to him before, replied: "You'll never understand. This is for experts, this is

outside your intellectual reach." The Indian said nothing. He continued watching, and then left. After a short time, he returned bringing something with him. Without saying anything, he approached the chess table and planted in the middle of it an old bottle full of mud. The players were upset and looked angrily at him. The Indian smiled maliciously and said, "Checkmate!"

In Nurio, the Mexican Indians decided that the time was ripe to participate in national politics, that it was essential to act by confronting the nation, claiming their rights. They knew that this is what they must do, confronting the Mexican "political class", one of the worst in the world, if it is possible to make such a risky comparison.

One part of Mexican political life and the people who write on its behalf, rubbed their hands: the EZLN and the Indian people would now finally arrive on this class' terrain, which no one knows like they do. In their opinion, the Zapatistas and the Indian people left their communities, the open country, and even worse, they wanted to head towards the national assembly, whose rules and norms are only known to a few initiates.

Behind this assumption, not totally mistaken, was the idea that when rebel or revolutionary movements in the past headed in the direction towards a peaceful road, they are entering into contact with a political framework that will force them, in the end to change themselves into hostages of the same thing against which they were struggling.

The Zapatistas clearly announced, for those who wanted to read it, that they preferred to try a hitherto unheard of road; to remain as a rebel force, independently or not, of leaving aside their arms. Of course, to achieve the former they must inevitably break with the traditional form of understanding politics. With their usual modesty, the Zapatistas asked the Mexican political class, "Checkmate?"

As this political class is accustomed to letting the whole world see how they play among themselves, but without allowing anyone else to play, nor even

explain the rules of the game, it was not possible for them to understand that suddenly tens of thousands of Mexican Indians, representative of millions more and supported by millions of non-Indians can put a bottle full of mud on the chess-board and put the state institutions into check-mate. We will return to this a little later.

The Zocalo: 1914 - 2001

"Oh life to live and already lived, time that flies in a heavy sea and withdraws without turning its face, that which is past, was not, but is." (Octavio Paz, *Piedra de Sol*)

Following exactly the same route into the city as Emiliano Zapata and his Liberation Army Of The South in 1914, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and the National Indian Congress entered the Zocalo [central square] in Mexico City.

Hundreds of thousands of people were out in the streets to welcome them on their journey from Xochimilco to the Zocalo. Some calculated there were around 500,000 people in the streets. After a climactic entrance into the central square where more than 350,000 people were gathered together, many of who had arrived the night before (some 30,000 spent the night there), other people arrived after nine in the morning and waited until three in the afternoon until the meeting began in a temperature of 30°C.

Throughout the march, the EZLN unveiled a new method of convening massive concentrations of people, never telling the hour when they would begin and never notifying in advance the route which the caravan would take. In spite of that, thousands, and tens of thousands of citizen listened to the radio stations, simply to find out the route and to be present in the streets.

In the Zocalo, the Zapatistas achieved a first objective. To place in centre stage of national politics a unique social movement that was neither controlled by the old PRI corporatist

bonds; nor by the new, but equally corporatist supporters of the PRD; nor by the dynamic of the "useful" vote that brought Fox to power.

In the meeting at the Zocalo, the Zapatistas not only spoke of the need to approve the Law of Indigenous Rights and Culture, but also they spoke about something that in classical terms of left thought, could only be considered as a strategic vision. They explained with simple words why they are not a vanguard, why they are not so irresponsible as to make a call for a general insurrection, starting from what and how a social movement is built, how it is the product of a large experience of life. (The historian E. P. Thompson would have been a happy spectator at this meeting.)

In an unusual speech that criticised some policies of the right and the left, the EZLN, in the voice of its Subcomandante, stated the following:

"We are here and we are a mirror. Not reality, but merely its reflection. Not light, but merely a glimmer. Not path, but merely a few steps. Not guide, but merely one of the many routes which lead to tomorrow ... When we say 'we are,' we are also saying 'we are not' and 'we shall not be' ... we are not those who aspire to make themselves power and then impose the way and the word. We are not those who put a price on their own, or another's, dignity, and convert the struggle into a market, where politics is the business of sellers who are fighting, not about programs, but for clients ... We are not those who wait, naively, for justice to come from above, when it only comes from below. The liberty which can only be achieved with everyone. The democracy which is all the floors and is fought for all the time. We will not be.

We are not the passing fashion which, made ballad, is filed in the calendar of defeats which this country flaunts with such nostalgia. We are not ... we are not he who is regretful in the morning, he who is transformed into an image even more grotesque in power; he who pretends to have good sense and prudence where there is nothing but buying and selling. We are able to be without a face, armed or without

arms, but Zapatistas we are, we are and always will be.

Ninety years ago the powerful asked those from below which Zapata was called: 'With whose permission, Senores?' And those from below responded, and we respond: 'With ours.' And with our permission, for exactly 90 years, we have been shouting, and they call us 'rebels.' And today we are repeating: we are rebels. Rebels we shall be."

In my now long life as a militant (I experienced the entry of the Sandinistas into Managua, the national work stoppages in Peru, the March of Hunger of Oruro at La Paz in Bolivia, several general strikes in Ecuador, the triumph of Mitterand in France - with so much emotion for many - the preparations for the General Strike actions in Lodz, Poland, the surrender of arms at the Guazapa Volcano in El Salvador, the Sandinista defeat in Nicaragua, some civic stoppages in Colombia, various congresses of the Workers' Party of Brazil, various meetings of the Foro of Sao Paulo [Forum of the Latin American Left], I have listened to great and spirited orators like 'Lula', Hugo Blanco, Daniel Ortega, Rosario Ibarra, Alain Krivine, Fidel Castro, Douglas Bravo, Emeterio Fernandez Huidobro, Ernest Mandel and so on), I have never heard such a speech in a meeting of hundreds of thousands of people.

Marcos never tried to raise his voice, never gave an instruction and never looked for applause. It was a speech in which he conversed with 350,000 people. He chatted with us as people chat among themselves, unhurriedly, calmly, as they say the old Zapatistas used to chat when in the Ajusco mountain, on the outskirts of Mexico City, having met there to await the order to take the city whilst with patience they lit their bonfire, illuminating the night and chatted.

Almost ninety years later, the new Zapatistas chatted with us about what they have been, what they are and what they never will be. It would be good if the Mexican and international socialist left begin to believe them. This is about a rebel movement and I would say a revolutionary one (here I

believe there is a pending debate with the comrades of the EZLN) that does not exist for the taking of power: not because of a tactical problem or because they are unable, but because they don't want to because of something more profound, more Zapatista. I don't know if that is better or not (I believe yes) but here it is not important. If someone wants to make an analysis of Zapatismo, they must take seriously what the Zapatistas say about themselves.

It serves nothing to assume the attitudes of "red professors" and from on high and after years of failures, try to tell the Zapatistas what they should do. Or to tell them that their march was very good, but there was not sufficient struggle and not enough resistance because an alternative programme is necessary. Or, that they do not understand that the Indians are not able to change the country and the world, that it is indispensable they be subordinate to the working class. Or, more naively, to tell the Zapatistas they should transform themselves into a political party. This is the height of not understanding anything. Those who lament the inexistence of an independent organisation that might be a bridge between Zapatismo and socialism, between the Indian movement and the other social movements, only echo what is in the national press pointing the supposed non-existence of the Zapatista Front For National Liberation (FZLN), without noticing something that is very Zapatista, that is to work without looking for the spotlight and recognition, but simply to work. The Zapatista movement is very much another thing (as they themselves would say), neither better nor worse (as they themselves would say), simply different.

The echo that Marcos' speech and his approach has should force the Mexican and international left, which is outside the Zapatista movement, to reflect upon the significance of this new expression of emancipatory thought.

In the Zocalo in Mexico City, the Zapatista Indians spoke, without any exaggerated display of feeling in a very simple manner, crystal clear and almost inaudibly. Never before seen in

a meeting, the 350,000 people were silent. It was and it is a speech to think about and to discuss. The real Zapatista movement can be found as the mirror image of the old Zapatista movement.

Some Black Eyes On The Highest Tribune Of The Nation

"Faces of llamas, devouring face, Persecuted adolescent face ghostly years, circular days that gives the same floor, the same wall, burning the instant and they are a single face the successive faces of the llama, all the names are a single name, all the faces are a single face, all the centuries are a single instant and for all the centuries of the centuries a pair of eyes closes the passage to the future." (Octavio Paz, Piedra de Sol)

After the events of the Zocalo, the Mexican political regime began to toy with the idea that they would have to manage the stay of the EZLN in Mexico City.

When it became clear what the real position of those in power was, regarding the demands of the Indians, the EZLN expressed the view that the national assembly could not come to an agreement with them. The political authorities had proposed to the Zapatistas that they could meet only with ten deputies and ten senators to present their demands. Because the Congress had not wanted to listen to the Indians, they, the Zapatistas, returned to the forests of Chiapas to report to their communities - to put a similar question to the Indigenous National Congress - that there did not exist on the part of the Mexican political institutions any desire for peace.

As a consequence, a true crisis unravelled inside the Mexican political class. No one wanted to pay the price for the break-down of the negotiations, of course, with the exception of the party of the President, the PAN, that which - as is indicated above - is as much because

of its biological racism as the need to arrange the outstanding accounts with "their" President, they preferred to appear as intransigent.

In a very close vote, 220 for, 210 against, the Chamber of Deputies decided to invite the Zapatista commanders to the "highest tribunal of the nation". In a sui generis alliance (which always happens in Mexico), the PRD, the PRI, the PVEM-Mexican Green Ecological Party (which supported Fox and has the characteristics of being neither a party, nor green, nor ecological, nor Mexican) and other small parties, were successful in getting the Zapatistas invited. Of course there were some PRI deputies, those mostly connected to the previous regime and those of military origin who voted against - firstly - or abstained - secondly.

Six days passed between this vote and the participation of the EZLN and the Indigenous National Congress (CNI) in the Chamber of Deputies. Meanwhile, in the national media a rough hypothesis was proposed about what the attitude of the EZLN would be and especially the appearance of Marcos. A few supported the PAN thesis about the kind of speech that Marcos would give. Others said that in the middle of his speech, Marcos would leave for the mountains. There was such heightened expectations around this, quite different from what happened in the Zocalo, that three television channels, the three private ones, announced they would broadcast, live, the participation of the EZLN and the CNI in the Congress. The broadcast lasted seven hours. Three television channels and four radio stations broadcast everything that happened, live.

The next day began with great uncertainty as rebel Subcommandante Marcos had not yet arrived at the entrance to the Chamber of Deputies, leaving the television announcers in a halo of deception. Equally, some deputies were really annoyed, including a PRD senator who made a most pathetic declaration. "I'm annoyed," he said, "by the leading role of Marcos". It was the first time that an influential person has been accused of something as a result of not being

there.

Then the Zapatista movement made their final and most effective move. The decision that Marcos would not go to the Chamber of Deputies completely changed the co-relationship of forces in the country. An Indian woman, Commander Esther, made the central speech in the Congress on behalf of the EZLN. She said: "The rebel Subcommandante Marcos is that, a Subcommandante. We are all commanders, we give orders in common, we order obedience on behalf of our people ... This tribunal is a symbol. And so it has convoked so many polemics. Therefore we wanted to speak about that because some people did not want us to be here. And it is symbol also that I am, a poor woman, an Indian woman and a Zapatista woman, who speaks first and I make mine the central message of our words as Zapatistas ... My name is Esther, but that's not important now. I am a Zapatista woman, but that's also not important at this time. I am Indian and I am a woman, and that is the only thing that is important now."

It was a Mexican Indian festival and nothing or no one was able to tarnish it. Millions of Mexicans from their homes, in their work places, in the streets, in the stores and in their automobiles saw and heard an unusual historical event. The Indians were speaking in the "highest tribunal of the nation"; arguing the worthiness of autonomy; questioning themselves the Indian habits and customs that marginalised women and subjected them to violence, but reminding the PAN and PRI deputies that the marginalisation and violence against women still exists in the habits and customs of the rest of the country; defending their right to be different, to dress differently, to speak another language, to have another culture and to establish a different relationship with the rest of the nation.

Without saying it to us, they told us that Mexico has no future without their Indians and that in some way this is the last chance to close the wound in the body of the nation, in more or less peaceful terms. If society was evenly split before the arrival of the EZLN at the Congress, after the

participation of the male and female commanders and of the representatives of the Indian people on the Congress tribune, organised under the auspices of the Indigenous National Congress (CNI), these proportions became radically changed, and the majority of society responded with great feeling in favour of the Indian people. The costs for any party that is opposed to the Law for Indian Rights and Culture will be tremendous.

A Mexican Indian woman, poor, Zapatista, but above all a woman, through her speech and her presence won the battle of the symbols and it cannot be forgotten that many times that this is the central battle that frees people on their way to emancipation. The legislators of the "highest tribune of the nation" saw the black eyes of the history of Mexico, this history full of rebellions, overturns and revolutions which they spoke of, the black eyes, that the poet tells us about, the black eyes of Cajeme, Canek, Vicente Guerrero, Morelos, Emiliano Zapata, Jaramillo and the millions that in a little more than five hundred years have carried out more than 350 rebellions and three revolutions. The black eyes that close the passage to the future, but the future that does not want to include them, by accepting them as they are; poor, Indian or not, women, Zapatista, rebels.

Outside of the Congress, Marcos arrived and waited with the people until the EZLN leadership and the CNI

left. Then in a very emotional meeting, he took his leave: "Thank you, Mexico! We are going away, truly." And the people responded and almost pleaded: "No!" A young woman said: "What will we be without the Zapatistas?" Already, some days before, Commander Zebedeo had given an answer to this question when he said: "We are going away, but we are not going away." During the whole march, the Zapatista representatives did not weary of explaining that they are not a vanguard that they are not trying to lead the people towards a shining path, pre-established by the basic documents of an organisation. As was said in what has been today turned into "a folk tale", by the great story teller, Antonio Garcia de Leon: "On the first of January we discovered that the insurrection was inside ourselves." We are going away, but we are not going away, represents the idea that the rebels not only exist in Chiapas, but in the whole country.

Return with glory

"When history sleeps, it speaks while dreaming: on the brow of the sleeping people the poem is a constellation of blood. When history wakes up, the image becomes an act, the poem makes its appearance; poetry enters into action." (Octavio Paz, Towards the Poem).

The Zapatistas attained their objective: to speak with the people of Mexico. To show not only that they have not been forgotten but; that they

are present in the discussions and debates on the construction of a democratic Mexico. To show that they are the other legitimacy, the indigenous legitimacy, that of the poor of Mexico, that which was not defeated by the electoral road, that which has not bet everything on an election, that which is not sold to a corrupt system, that of those who, without openly calling themselves socialists, represent the original spirit of socialism before it was perverted by the market socialists and the state socialists (two aberrations theoretically and practically incompatible with socialism). The legitimacy of those at the bottom who dream of changing the world and deserve this change.

PS. Some ask what will follow. Patience, Zapatism "bends, advances, retreats, makes a detour, and still arrives".

This article first appeared in the Spanish review Viento Sur No. 56, May 2001 and was translated by Ernest Tate and Jess Mackenzie. It was written before the draft law on indigenous rights and culture was adopted in the national assembly by the deputies of the PAN, PRI and PVEM (at the end of April). The CNI, then the EZLN, rejected this text, which reduces indigenous autonomy to its simplest expression. The EZLN decided to break off negotiations with the government, accusing the senators and deputies of sabotage of the peace process and said it would continue the struggle.

Highways of struggle

3 June 2001, by **Ariel Ogando**



Argentine workers set up road block

This article is a contribution to the discussion of the social movements

that are driving the protests in Argentina today, movements in which the old syndicalist and political identities are being reconfigured and mixed with new actors, where new voices are making room for the complaints of social sectors, hitherto pushed into misery as a result of the

policies of neo-liberal "restraint", allowing them to be heard. Today, the highway blockades in the north-east of the country are bringing into the light a dark side of Argentina, that of the bankrupt regional economies with their armies of unemployed, the ignored demands of the Indians and

the small peasant producers who are without land, and the demands of the young people without a future.

Some Images of Tartagal, in the province of Salta, Argentina, November, 2000

Scene One

Two workers have chained themselves together and sprinkled themselves with naptha oil. They say they are prepared to set fire to themselves if they are not rehired by the electrical company, E.D.E.S.A. They have been sacked for no obvious reason.

Scene Two

Laid-off workers from the transport company Atahualpa close highway No 34, protesting the firing of several co-workers and about low wages. They are said to be the authors of the highway blockades: "we are shutting the highway, it is ours", they say.

Scene Three

A woman with her small child in her arms demands work. She is a single mother. She states she is at the highway blockade because she can find something to eat there.

Scene Four

Indian people block the highway and issue forth demands for land, social help and food: are we or are we not all Argentinesans?" they ask.

Scene Five

A man about fifty years old, said to be an ex-employee of Yacimientos Petroliferos Fiscales (YPF), is shirtless and wears a headband. He declares: "Before I had everything here, I had work, then after privatization nothing was left...everything went, the gas and petroleum were taken away from us, nothing remains here."

The highway

The images above were seen on Argentinean TV over more than ten days from the beginning of November 2000. How are these differing messages being understood, in that many demands are being made? What do the highway blockades mean for all the inhabitants of northeast Argentina?

- In "Scene One": the workers are now prepared to die if they are sacked.

What do workers for Tartagal, Abra Pampa and the Cutral Co. or Matanza do if they are faced with being sacked? What can be done - to say it better - in a country where more than one third of the population is having serious difficulty finding a job? Is it absurd to think of workers setting themselves on fire to get a job, especially if one of them is the father of a large family? Death or the highway? In recent days, the highway blockades have come to be seen as one of the few "successful" protests. The highway is like a mirror in which those excluded from the system can be seen.

- In "Scene Two": A company (in this case a regional transport company) owes more than six months of wages and dismisses its workers.

Where is the "highway" where this worker's voice will be heard? He also knows that the company is in a crisis and that his future is tied to it. This is the case for thousands of workers in small and medium sized companies being closed or shut down due to bankruptcy, or as in the majority of cases, the process of "downsizing". The "highway" becomes a bullhorn regarding the regional crises for workers and small businesses.

- In "Scene Three": A woman who reaches the highway blockade to find a popular stew that will allow her to eat, at least today. An urgent immediate demand: food.

The social situation is hard, in particular for single women, who may have several children, and whose mate may have gone to look for work because there is none where they live

or because of a crisis in the marriage. The arrival of the hand of misery and lack of work, shatters a family's plan of life. Women are adrift, without help from the state, and have hungry children. The highway is seen as a place for food.

- In "Scene Four": Various native groups demand the handing-over of land, eternally promised by various governments, and ask for social help and respect for their culture.

The various Indian groups, (the Wichi, the Toba, the Chorote, the Chulupi, the Chiriguano and the Coya) who live in the highlands, the foothills of the Andes and the land of the El Gran Chaco, have been the main influences in the socio-productive history of northeastern Argentina (Trinchero 2000). From their lands, gas and petroleum were extracted, and the multi-national companies have exploited and commercialized their labour and their sweat. This exploitation made the previous intense development of charcoal production and the growth of the impressive sugar agro-industry possible. Today they demand that which was always theirs: the land. And they aspire to be respected as a group that existed prior to the formation of the national state. The "highway " is seen as a space for intercultural confrontation.

- In "Scene Five": The company, Yacimientos Petroliferos Fiscales once provided jobs for tens of thousands of workers but today, almost a decade after its privatization, 80% of this vast workforce is unemployed. Today these workers see themselves as the "unemployed workers of YPF".

The old identities which bound workers to the job through union demands achieved by decades of struggle, became but an interlude, a space of resignation, for the classical union movement which expressed this for many "labourers" who were largely betrayed, having been transformed into a company union or into an appendix of the boss. The "highway" blockade can be seen as an expression of new forms of struggle.

How can something that is supposed to be homogenous but is not be explained or revealed? The old social

identities, such as the trade-union movement: permanent, solid and crystallized by history have been replaced by fluid identities, inter-mixed and precarious, as precarious as is the labour market and the uncertainty that threatens each Argentinean. Now there is no centre that organizes society and from where it might be possible to analyze it, at least not easily. Everything has been turned into jelly, blurred, uncertain and with no future horizons that could serve to defer the expectations of the present. More than the historically constituted actors, such as the union movement, what exists today is the ephemeral shape of rebellious actions, more characteristic of the pre-capitalist "crowd", than the classic workers' movement that emerged at an earlier juncture by natural aggregation, to disappear (in many cases) after the protest stage. (Lazarte, 2000).

We remember the shape that the protests took at the beginning of the 1990s: supermarket lootings which were characterized as "disorders" and the disturbances by the people of Santiago in December 1993, characterized as "riots", that is to say, "primitive" forms in the scale of social protest (Inigo Carrera, 1998). It is in this sense there is a need to situate the highway blockades as a unique form of struggle as they are at a higher level of protest, (not as inorganic as the "looting") and that in the case of the highway blockades in the north east of Argentina, they achieved the unification of various players with diverse demands (lack of work being one of the key demands) but they still did not achieve a defined organizational form which would allow them to overcome the urgency of immediate and short term demands (job schemes, food, medicines, etc.)

The conflicts of the past were organized around powerful poles of mobilization, which had strength, and which were clearly identifiable and one knew with certainty who were the agents in the conflict. Today it is more blurred. The unemployed workers arrive at the "highway", impelled by the pressure of their desperation, their hunger, the misery of a system that excludes them and keeps pushing their great majority "downhill". The

conflicts arise in many cases as "an explosion" and even, in certain circumstances, are converted into catalysts for other conflicts about unkept promises or as a result of the crises of the political parties, etc.

Gabriel Vommaro expressed it in an article. "The boredom of daily life," he said, "the outbreak of new and natural social conflicts (the heterogeneity of poverty, inequality, exploitation etc.) together with the effects of the use of genocide by the last dictator, were some of the most important factors in the emergence of the space created by the social movements (tied to the defence of human rights, the struggle around the act of just living, to the movements of the unemployed, of gender, of neighbourhoods, anticapitalist, etc.). So, these are at the same time an expression of the growing complexity of the social problems and of the impossibility (or incapability, or lack of will, etc.) of those who say they love the countryside to deal with such issues as political problems. The weakness, for many reasons, of the unions has also left a space for this kind of social politicization." (Vommaro, 2000).

Even though much of the leadership had been formed on the picket lines and the highway blockades of recent years, it had not been part of the old traditions of struggle in the manufacturing-industrial workers' movement where the leaders had been located; so they were, in the main, ephemeral. The organization of the earlier blockade movement was weak, and in many cases non-existent. (Many of those who participated in the blockades of these last years were ex-employees of Altos Hornos Zapla, Ingenio Ledesma and Ingenio la Esperanza and the Mendieta in Jujuy, and in Cutral Co., connected to YPF, and the industrial wire company of Rosario, La Matanza etc.) (Ogando, 1998)

The crisis...some numbers from northeast

Argentina

The decrease in production, because of the policy of "restraint", implemented by the Menem regime and deepened by the Alliance government, wreaked havoc in the economies of the peripheral provinces of north-east Argentina, such as Jujuy, Salta, Tucuman and Santiago del Estero, further deepening the crisis of these provinces, where there is a history of impoverishment for thousands of families. The provincial governments, weakened by the continual loss of autonomy and taxes, and with a strong element of internal corruption, became mere executors of these restraint policies imposed by the central authority.

The highway blockades are thus the manifestation of a social struggle and the "theatre" where the needs of a sector of workers who have been purged from the production cycle can be seen. This "new form of capitalism" is characterized by the exclusion from it of the great mass of the population. (Therborn, 1999) The unemployed, the newcomers (youth who have never worked because they cannot find work) and the older unemployed (field workers, miners, petroleum exploration workers and ex-government workers, etc) are the great protagonists of a story of a struggle that is still unfolding. But we must remember that unemployment is not merely a scourge for those who suffer it, but it is the middle ground which will be used by the different business sectors in their negotiations with their employees.

Unemployment must be seen as inherent to the system, as Nicolas Inigo Carrera, a researcher pointed out, " The growth of unemployment and the related overcrowding, fulfills the function of the reserve industrial army and constitutes one of the conditions for the reduction in the value of the work force. According to FIDE wages, in real terms, fell 33% between 1985 and 1993."

At the beginning of the 1980s, unemployment in the Argentinean Republic was around 3%. By 1990 it was at 6%, but from then on it grew rapidly immediately after the

implementation of President Menem's policies, reaching 18% by 1995, and fluctuating around this level until now. If we add other data to this, such as distribution of income, the situation is even more alarming.

With the implementation of these restraint policies, an important polarization of wealth can be seen to have taken place with an appropriation of a greater portion of the income each time by fewer and fewer people. In Argentina, 20% of the richest people have 52.9% of the income, whilst 20%, the poorest, have only 4.5%. This polarization shows us that a small portion of the population is improving its situation and earnings in an extraordinary way while millions of people are becoming more impoverished, losing their jobs or finding themselves with uncertain or badly paid work:

In the northern provinces, this polarization has reached grotesque proportions. (Ogando 2000)

	Province of Jujuy	Province of Salta	Province of Tucuman
Unemployment:	19.2%	13.8%	19.9%
Under-employment:	15.8%	15.6%	17.3%
Population (NBI):	44.2%	22.5%	29.9%
Provincial debt in millions of pesos:	741.5	649.5	1,145
Average family income:	\$123	\$150	\$141

The phenomenon of the highway blockades has to be seen as the face of this misery, expressed in the above figures. Within each of the above percentages can be seen the faces of the sacked workers, the mothers without food for their children, the exploited and poorly fed Indian people, all the protagonists we write about at the beginning of this article.

The highway blockades gives expression to a feeling of unrest which has seized the Argentinean people. It is derived from the perception they have of their country, of the policies of those who govern, of the dominant elite, an image that has been formed slowly over the years through life experience and the information that is brought to them daily through the media. There are depressing and

outrageous stories of corruption, impunity from the law and enrichment: accusations of fraud; denunciations of the police, accusations of corruption in the political class; failures of banks which had been endowed with public funds; reports of fortunes crookedly acquired; fraudulent companies and corrupt judges, immoral salaries, etc. (Lazarte, 2000; Petras, 2000).

The material conditions of existence along with the above television images have been slowly fermenting in the collective consciousness of those sectors who have been beaten down by the restraint policy, overlaid by a feeling of helplessness in front of the abuses and the impunity of the powerful; a suppressed fury after years of disillusion, a growing unrest, that was only waiting for an opportunity to explode into open conflict. The highway blockades are more than a manifestation of this "unrest", which is often expressed in the burning of business offices, municipal and political buildings, as has happened in the San Martin region, in November, 2000, in the province of Salta.

Along with the denunciations on television every day and the sight of corrupt neighbours, who with impunity, show off their money plundered from the public coffers, we see new forms of protest, the hammering of saucepans in the street by protestors, marches that are carried out in total silence by the participants, highway blockades...by social groups and collectives who drive the struggle forward, in many cases, outside traditional structures, to where it appears as if they are not doing much to direct the protest because they look so spontaneous.

There is a strong feeling of personally experienced injustice amongst the poor, by those excluded from the system, who understand that the government's economic policies have only benefited the rich. It is a population that almost does not believe in anything, a victim of so many unfulfilled promises made under the cover of glib demagoguery and

electoral marketing.

The inhabitants of northeastern Argentina sense that the social costs imposed by the government's policy of restraint have been too severe and are without any relationship to the sacrifices they have made. Even more so, the two thirds of the population who live in poverty are beginning to understand that their sacrifices nourish and will nourish the wealthy, with profits for the few, who never lose or make sacrifices. To struggle against this reality comes to be one of their tasks. "Everything went, the gas and petroleum were taken away from us, nothing remains here," said an unemployed YPF worker.

The "highway" has become a space with multiple significances, such as a source for food, as a bullhorn for the protestors, as an expression of the conflicts and ethnic demands, as a mirror of all those excluded from society.

Those involved in the highway blockades, even though only timidly asking for bread and work — leaving many questions unanswered — open the door for different protagonists to enter with a variety of other demands. Are they questioning the system? Yes, because in these struggles, many in the micro-political social movements who have very precise grievances, such as those of the unemployed, or the Indian people, express the idea that it is possible to struggle, that it is possible to resist and to win, at least partially, for now. (According to Pavlovsky)

"Emancipation cannot simply be understood as the results of the struggle: it is the process itself which is the same as struggle," stated Holloway in one of his conferences in Argentina. Within this framework all these struggles can be summed up. The protagonists of the highway blockades with their struggles and demands make visible that which is hidden: the social effects of the governments' policies of restraint which dominate us: the first step in overcoming a beaten-down subjectivity, tired of the answer, "nothing is possible".

A new model?

3 June 2001, by **Shidane D. Ali, Vagn Rasmussen**

By doing this Somalia could serve as a model for other dependent countries in Africa, but in fulfilling this the Somali people need the active support from other opponents of the globalisation process all around the world.

Strategic importance

Somalia, which is in fact a potentially rich country, makes up the very horn of Africa. It is placed where the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, leading up the Suez Canal, meet. On the other side of Somalia lie some of the most important oil wells. The power, which controls Israel in the north and Somalia in the south, can in fact control the richest area of oil fields in the whole world. This is the main reason for all the wars that have been going on in Somalia for such a long time.

Somalia was already the victim of colonisation (by Islamic countries) in the fifteenth century. In the time of modern colonialism Somalia was the victim of colonisation from the European great powers. The Somali people, who today number about 30 million, were divided by the colonialist powers into several parts. Some parts of Somalia went to Kenya, others to Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Sudan and Rwanda. The rest of Somalia was divided between Italy and France.

Britain, which also wanted its share, conquered British Somaliland in the northwestern part of Somalia (which is mainly a desert but faces directly towards Saudi Arabia on the other side of the Red Sea.)

Flag independence

Before the colonial powers left Africa they first made sure to leave behind them a copy of their own institutions. Secondly, they ensured that power remained in the hands of the very same people who had served as their former servants in suppressing the ordinary people. The imperialists never intended to stop plundering Africa. The famous slogan of the British Empire - divide and rule - didn't stop existing either.

Division in Africa means building your continued presence on the outlived system of clans and tribes. To rule means to spread the poison of ethnic and religious hatred among the people and help the warmongers with sufficient amounts of weapons and economic support to fight against each other.

Sometimes the imperialists even succeed in getting their puppets in other African countries involved. A tragic example of this is happening now in the war going on in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Hundreds of thousands of Congolese, supported from countries outside the Congo, are killing each other to no other end than to keep the very rich natural resources of Congo in the hands of big international monopolies.

Exceptions

However, there were at least some exceptions from the normal imperialist "liberation" of Africa. They are important to mention because they can serve as examples and inspirations for coming struggles. One of the exceptions was the short-lived experiment of Patrice Lumumba in the former Belgian Congo in 1960-61.

Lumumba was not a nationalist in the traditional African style. His intentions

were to form a modern and socially conscious Congo liberated also from the yoke of tribalism. The real lords of the Congo mobilised traditional tribes against him. They brought Moise Tshombe to power in Katanga - his office was in the very same building as the big Belgian mining company, Union Miniere. The Katanga province declared itself "independent" from the rest of Congo.

The imperialist countries were alarmed by the victory of Lumumba in the elections so they sent UN troops to Congo with the official excuse of defending the integrity of Congo.

Helicopters from the US Embassy helped track Lumumba down when he tried to escape from the trap set up against him in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa). He was caught and brought back to Leopoldville where the "UN defenders of Congolese integrity" were passive spectators when Lumumba, in a very brutal way, was sent to Moise Tshombe in Katanga and was finally murdered by Belgian soldiers.

Even imperialists can show some sorts of human feelings although in a passive way. When president Eisenhower made clear to members of the US National Security Council his decision to get rid of Lumumba, they were silent for 11 seconds. In order to try and get rid of Lumumba forever his dead body was totally destroyed. But have they really freed themselves from what Lumumba tried to tell the peoples in Africa? No way!

As one of the members of STS International Solidarity, Maryam Mursal Isa, sings in one of her famous songs: "They killed Patrice Lumumba but his soul lives with us for ever". Maryam is not only a very good artist known in all parts of Africa. She is also a dedicated fighter for the freedom of all human beings!

Somali experiment

On July 26, 1960 the former British colony in the northwest part of Somalia got its formal independence. Four days later the former Italian colony in the Southern part of Somalia was also made independent. The two parts of Somalia the very same day signed an Act of Union based on a constitution [drafted by Italian and US experts-ed.], which was one of the most democratic in the whole of Africa. (In the usual French style the former colony of France in the far end of the north-western Somalia was transformed into a mini-independent state, Djibouti, with only about half a million inhabitants. But the population of Djibouti have never forgotten their relationship with the rest of the Somali people.)



Siad Barre

At the beginning it looked as if Somalia would succeed in winning real independence. After first having elected a democratic president power in Somalia was conquered by Siad Barre who could not resist the temptation to play the two cards now in his hands. The first card was the strategic position of Somalia and the other was to further the narrow interests of his own clan.

First Siad Barré turned to the camp of the Stalinists. Somalia was declared a socialist republic and Barré got big supplies of weapons, military trainers, troops and economic support from the Soviet Union. When he sensed the coming breakdown of the "socialist camp" he turned to the Western side (after 1978). He gave up the idea of Somalia of being "socialistic" and declared instead that Somalia was a Muslim republic.

As a reward for this manoeuvre he got even more weapons and economic support from the Western countries - first of all from the US. Like most leading politicians in Africa he tried to keep his elected position forever - regardless of what the people who elected him might have wanted. Like most of the other politicians he did so

by building his support on the members of his own clan and some of his other corrupt friends.

Narrow interests

In order to defend the narrow interests of a sub clan of his own, the Ogadeni clan, which is divided between Ethiopia and Somalia, Barré fought two very bloody wars against Ethiopia. He fought against most of the rest of Somali clans making it necessary for themselves to arm, to fight back under the leadership of different warlords. Only a few people acted in the way our member General Noor Dhuudhi, who was the leader of the Somali Air Force, did.

He was frustrated by the prospect of having to take part in the killing of his fellow Somalis and brought the Somali Air Force to Italy asking the Italian government to take care of it and telling them that he would pick it up again, once there was something positive to fight for in Somalia! (Dhuudhi returned to Somalia and after a short period serving in his old position he is now the adviser in military affairs for the new Somali Prime Minister, Ali Khalif Galayd.)

In the end Siad Barré lost, but in such a way that it gave rise to the development of many different warlords. Officially these warlords defended the interests of their own clans or sub clans. In reality they have all followed the "logic" of all other warlords in the world.

They murder, rape, torture and destroy not only people but also exploit every economic resource in the areas they conquered from one another - in ever shifting alliances. As long as there were still some areas free to destroy they could still follow this "logic". But in the end they even destroyed the very same resources from which they live themselves - making common people more and more angry by the brutal way in which they act.

Now we can finally see and end to the intolerable regime of the warlords. But before the Somali people could do so it first had to pay the heavy price of a new UN intervention in Africa

(UNOSOM).

Results of the UN invasion

The leading force in the UN, the USA, used the anarchy in Somalia as a first excuse to invade the country in 1992. At the beginning a few other members of the UN took part in the invasion but they soon wised-up and withdrew. In the forefront of the US troops were the famous professional soldiers of the Ranger Corps used whenever the US needs to kill other people. A problem for the US, as well as for the peoples the US attacks, is the big trauma that the war in Vietnam has left in the American public.

The Rangers used their normal way of "fighting" since then. They do not care how many foreign people they kill - but they are very careful to lose as few lives as possible of their own. They used the war tactics of carpet bombardment, which resulted in the deaths of thousands upon thousands of civilians in Somalia.

The US pointed to the biggest warlord at that time, General Aideed, as their main enemy. They set a big reward on Aideed's head. But the result was the opposite of what US had expected. Both Farah Aideed and his son, Hussein Aideed (who is in fact himself a US citizen and even a former officer in the Ranger Corps) became more and more popular among the Somali population!

The concrete excuse for the intervention was to pave the road for bringing humanitarian aid to the Somali people. During an 18-month period the UN pumped no less than US\$5.1 billion into Somalia. A whole army of international NGO's arrived with their very well paid officials. The NGO's needed a virtual army of well-paid Somalis as well. The result of this was rising inflation, an increase in corruption and further sufferings for the citizens of Somalia.

Even humanitarian aid from the US is mostly used to destroy the aspirations of independence of other peoples. In 1977 Somalia bought a lot of tractors and distributed them to the farmers so

that they could produce enough corn to make Somalia able to feed its own population. But as soon as the corn was ready to be harvested a whole fleet of ships from USAID(!) [United States Agency for International Development-ed.], arrived in Somalia and the US began to distribute totally free corn to the people. (Later the US tried - in vain! - to persuade Somali farmers to use genetically manipulated seeds.) The US also delivered medicine for free and brought an end to Somalia's own pharmaceuticals industry.

Now the Somali people are used as a gigantic laboratory in testing new medical products not only from the US but also even from countries like South Africa. The coasts of Somalia are used for the dumping of industrial waste - including from the nuclear industry - by the imperialist powers.

But the worst consequence of the UN protected humanitarian aid to Somalia, and of all aid coming to Somalia until very recently, is the fact that the big donations from the outside made it possible for the humanitarian organisations to pay enormous sums of money to the warlords to "protect" their projects from attacks by the other warlords. The very same Hussein Aideed who killed his fellow Americans has received millions of dollars from NGO's to "protect" them.

This money has been used to pay for very big and heavily armed militias, which have also been used in the internal struggles of the warlords claiming thousands upon thousands more victims among the civilian Somali population.

As a result of this mistreatment from foreign countries anti-imperialist sentiment amongst the people of Somalia grew to unprecedented heights. The military invasion turned out to be a tragedy for the US. At the end of the war 18 dead US Rangers were dragged through the streets in Mogadishu. There were also huge demonstrations against the US in the streets demanding UN withdrawal from Somalia. These demonstrations were in fact the decisive factor that forced the US out of Somalia.

You can kill soldiers but it is far more difficult for a nation that "defends human rights" to kill unarmed citizens including women and children - especially when representatives of the press of the whole world are also present.

Preparing for independence

In 1993 the UN closed its last office in Mogadishu. When Somalia was totally free of any foreign interference the democratic forces finally got their chance to come out more in the open and begin to collect support from strong forces who all wanted to put a definitive end to the civil wars.

The democrats in Somalia first had to convince a sector of the Somali population without whose support it would nearly have been impossible to begin to work. As in other class societies in the world there are many poor Somalis but there are also Somalis who are very rich.

But how can you enjoy your wealth in a country where your own house is constantly in danger of being attacked by heavily armed bandits? And how can you enjoy your wealth when you are in constant danger of being kidnapped by the same bandits? It is no lasting solution to this problem if you try to protect yourselves and your life by employing your own, armed guards. The only lasting solution is to give your support to disarming all the militias and for the building of a Somali state that can guarantee not only your own right to live in peace but also the right of every other Somali.

We don't know exactly how the future world of socialism will be built or look like. After the failure of the Stalinists we are still in a phase where we must use a lot of different experiments - also in the nations in Africa. We agree that our comrades and friends in Brazil are making big contributions towards trying to find a way. We also agree that it can be necessary to use weapons to defend the people as the Zapatistas have done in Mexico and other comrades have to do in the Philippines.

Concerning Somalia there were in fact TOO many weapons and in order to get these weapons away from the warlords the democratic forces needed the support of some of the rich Somalis.

By having their support it was possible to take the first step in the direction of disarming the warlords. All available weapons in Mogadishu were bought up, raising the price of bullets and guns to sky-high levels. Many weapons were bought directly from the members of the different militias who were in fact very poor people and had only served in the militias as their only way to survive. All these weapons were stored away for eventual future use.

Reconciliation conference

The departure of the UN made it also possible for traditional organs of negotiation and reconciliation to begin to work.

At the end of April last year there was a call for a meeting of reconciliation in Arta. Around 2,000 representatives from the traditional organs of reconciliation in Somalia - civilian representatives from all the clans and the councils of the elders from all of Somalia but also representatives of the women's movement and the important Somali peace movement - were invited. But no active warlord was invited and no single clan had any chance to influence the decisions of the meeting.

After several weeks of negotiations the meeting decided upon a very clear program. It was decided that the Somali state should be built again and it had to base itself on institutions that were totally free from any influence of the clans. The meeting also decided that the Somali constitution should be based on the old democratic one (from 1960 with very few "modernisations").

The meeting confirmed the Act of Union between the former British and the former Italian areas of Somalia. These two factors alone mean that the international organisations and most countries in the world can simply not

avoid accepting the Somali Republic [former British Somaliland which independently of the UN and humanitarian organisations avoided the bloodshed in the south-ed.] although not - yet - in the diplomatic sense of recognition.

A new president was elected, Abulkassim Hasat Hassan - a veteran political figure who is known for resistance to both the civil wars and every kind of corruption. Hassan appointed a Prime Minister who elected the other ministers coming from every part of Somalia and from most of the clans.

At the conference a transitional government was also elected - again in a way that secured the influence of all parts of Somalia and of all the clans. It will hopefully be the last time that the traditional organs of negotiation and reconciliation will have such importance. The first ordinary elections, taking place in Somalia in about a year and a half, will be based on normal political parties with their different political platforms.

When the conference for reconciliation ended in August the warlords and their militias (with about 75,000 members) were still very strong. The continued existence of the warlords and their militiamen created very special problems for the parliament and the government.

As institutions of reconciliation they aimed to reconcile the civil population but recognised that the process was a long one - especially with the war criminals and warlords.

Warlords

First the warlords told the whole world that the new president and government would never be allowed to come to the Somali capital Mogadishu. But already at the time the economic support from the UN and the countries that had been stupid enough to give them money for "protection" had nearly totally disappeared.

Secondly, they began to lose the money coming in from "taxation" of trade going in or out of their different territories because the businessmen,

to an ever, higher degree, preferred to pay for their own militiamen to protect the goods.

Thirdly the parliament and the government made contact with all the foreign countries, which had supported them before with money and persuaded them to cut off the stream of money to the warlords. Every country agreed - except Ethiopia (in the beginning).

The warlords quickly began to lose the money they had paid their militiamen with! Protected by the population in Mogadishu and by the militias of the business world it was in fact not difficult for the parliament and government to come to Mogadishu. Here it began a systematic disarmament of the militias, some of whom (after re-education) were turned into serving in the police forces of the government or in its military.

In these forces the former militiamen could at least get paid to feed themselves and their families. Today the warlords can in fact only pay for a few armed bandits. Every time a militiaman chose to give up his former way of living he is asked what he exactly had done to harm the people. He is asked if he regrets his acts. He is also asked who gave the orders for the massacres and who exactly stood behind them. You cannot seriously act in another way when you know that many of the militias were only kids when the wars started and had no other possibilities to survive than to pick up a gun.

You cannot put about 75,000 young people in prison and further harm their families but you can ask them who was really responsible for the killings. Today the government in this way has collected compelling evidence to prove the crimes of the warlords.

Before letting the new police out in the streets they were taught about the democratic constitution, about human rights and how (if necessary) to arrest people in a humane way.

This important work was mainly done for free by a group of lawyers in the Somali Legal Aid Project (SLAP) which had existed for a long time, had given free legal assistance to the poor

people and made a big contribution in other ways to supporting the government of reconciliation. (SLAP even educate some of the politicians themselves in human rights, in international law, and many other things necessary to know for people who had lived for nearly 20 years in a society where laws did not exist!).

The government gradually began to take power in Mogadishu. It created police stations in most of the city and defined civil rights according to the constitution instead of the Islamic courts. Lawyers' societies elected an independent high court.

As far as the warlords were concerned, the government demanded either that they turned up on one of the 5 free television stations telling people what harm they had done to them, ask the people to send in more information and asked for forgiveness of their crimes.

Some very important warlords have already done so and have shifted to support the government. Other warlords will do the same. If they don't want this solution they are "free" to go jail and face justice either in Somalia itself or the International Criminal Court.

Ethiopia tried for a period to hinder this process. They called the rest of the warlords to Addis Ababa and tried to unite them in their own "Council of Reconciliation" which worked for "genuine" reconciliation. This was itself not very difficult. By "genuine reconciliation" the warlords expected that the Somali people closed its eyes to their war crimes. That was in fact the only thing the warlords could agree upon. Otherwise they continued their internal struggles.

Ethiopia has problems of its own. The Ethiopian people rose in large numbers against the government when it realised the risk of a new war in Somalia - coming after all the other wars Ethiopia has been engaged in. Besides it got a very clear message from the Arab countries. All support from the Arab world would end unless the Ethiopian government stopped interfering in the internal affairs of Somalia.

Although the government in Addis Ababa at this moment still tries (very carefully!) to support some of the remaining warlords we don't doubt that this will soon stop. A last attempt to unite the warlords from Kenyan president Daniel Arap Moi - who is not exactly famous for defending human rights - will also fail.

At time of writing there is still opposition in a few areas among the warlords in small parts of Puntland (in the northeast), in Somaliland and in a few areas near the border of Ethiopia. But this opposition can't last if it is left on its own!

Also in these areas the warlords have based their power on a series of crimes against the population who will simply not accept this any longer. Today all people in Somalia know that there is an alternative democratic solution to choose.

With a minimum use of guns the Somali people has in fact nearly liberated itself not only from the warlords but also from imperialism and from globalisation. When a Somali minister went to Porto Alegre, Brazil [for the World Social Forum in January-ed.] he showed other participants a letter sent in 1977, where the Somali government told the

IMF that Somalia didn't want any new loans! After the experiments with UN aggression this decision is even more popular in Somalia than before.

STS International Solidarity

STS International Solidarity is an organisation that includes people from different nationalities and of different political and religious convictions, united around three important principles: that ordinary people do not support wars; that an international organisation is needed to support the victims of war and mobilise opposition to war; that the trade union movement in all its different forms is an important (and potential) ally in the fight against ethnic and religious hatred.

STS International Solidarity has two main roots. One is the work started in 1993 by trade unionists in Europe to come to the assistance of the multi-ethnic industrial city, Tuzla, in the northern part of Bosnia.

Members of STS International Solidarity took part in the convoy sent by International Workers Aid who broke the total blockade of Tuzla in November 1993.

When STS later expanded its work to other areas of Bosnia as well as to Tetovo in Macedonia and Mitrovica in Kosova the name of the organisation changed to STS International Solidarity.

The other main root of STS International Solidarity is Somalia. This root goes back to the formation of a small group of opponents to the war in 1988.

The official spokesman of this group was Abdulkassim Hassan. Of the remaining and surviving six members of this group, three are today members of STS International Solidarity.

Through the very active help of these members STS International Solidarity has formed a special branch in Somalia with the name of STS Somalia. This affiliate today consists in fact of nearly all the civilian organisations in Somalia acting for the fulfilment of the idea of peace and reconciliation.