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Another World is Possible!

10 February 2001

Planned to coincide with, and provide an active contrast to, the World Economic Forum (WEF), which attracted the richest and most powerful corporations to the Davos, Switzerland, during the same period, to discuss strategies to further increase their profits, the World Social Forum sought to create a place in which those involved in the struggle against globalisation could gather to initiate and/or expand dialogues about developing viable alternatives to neo-liberalism. Nearly 10,000 individuals representing social-change

organisations from all over the world converged in Porto Alegre for the Forum, and throughout the week they attended workshops and plenaries about creating viable global economic and social structures.

The World Economic Forum, which held its own annual meeting from January 25 to 30 in Davos, Switzerland, barricaded itself against hundreds of anti-globalisation protestors. Founded in 1971 by Swiss-based German entrepreneur Dr. Klaus Schwab, the WEF has grown to become one of the world's most

important conventions of "global leaders" such as corporate executive officers and heads of state. The WEF allows multinational corporations unprecedented access to the government decision-makers who influence their industries, and it grants governments an unparalleled opportunity to co-ordinate their operations with global business. Swiss police vowed not to allow protestors to disrupt the meetings, as activists in Melbourne, Australia certainly did to the September 11th, 2000, WEF meetings there.

Porto Alegre World Social Forum

10 February 2001, by [Éric Toussaint](#)



March at the WSF

The aim was to map out alternative paths and agree on a timetable of priority mobilisations at the very time when those who aim to push the world still further towards commodification and the domination of capital were meeting in Davos. In short, to oppose to the World Economic Forum (WEF) at Davos a World Social Forum (WSF) which affirms that another world is possible.

The gamble paid off from all points of view: a high participation of representatives from a very wide scale

of movements opposed to neo-liberal globalisation; manifest convergence between the different platforms; a high quality of debate; adoption of three complementary declarations from the social movements, the parliamentary representatives and the local government representatives. Finally, widespread media coverage on a planetary level to the extent that the WEF at Davos and the WSF at Porto Alegre were systematically presented as symbolising two basic choices facing humanity.

The World Social Forum is the culmination of more than a year's careful preparation by a Brazilian organising committee composed of

social movements (the MST movement of the landless, the CUT trade union federation, and so on) and non governmental organisations. This committee worked systematically in liaison with movements from other continents like ATTAC, Focus on global South, the CADTM, Jubilé Sud, as well as the French journal *Le Monde diplomatique*.

The initiative was supported by the state government of Rio Grande do Sul (10 million inhabitants) and the city council of its capital, Porto Alegre (1.3 million inhabitants), both of them led by the Workers' Party (PT).

On January 25, 2001, the Forum opened with nearly 4,000 participants.

Radical speeches (like that of the governor, former trade union leader Olivo Dutra) and high quality cultural production - presenting the indigenous and African roots of today's struggles in terms of the extraordinary struggle of Black slaves for emancipation - set the tone for a 5 day race against time.

After the opening, the participants of the FSM met in the city centre for a big demonstration of around 10,000 people on the theme "March for life, another world is possible" which ended with an open air concert.

From January 26-29, each morning was taken up by four major debates which took place simultaneously with an attendance of between 400 and 900 people according to the debate. In total then, 16 debates devoted to the big social themes and oriented towards the mapping out of alternatives.

This was followed each afternoon by workshops - nearly 360 of them in four days, organised by the movements themselves. Following this, there were "conference-testimonies" involving personalities like Lula (leader of the PT), Cuautémoc Cardénas (leader of the Mexican PRD) or José Bové (Confédération paysanne, France).

In addition, there was a world parliamentary forum (in which 350 elected representatives participated) and a world municipal forum led by the new mayor of Porto Alegre, Tarso Genro.

There was also an international youth camp with more than 1,000 participants as well as a camp of indigenous peoples and many activities involving the Movement of the Landless.

The WSF ended on January 30 with the decision to meet again in Porto Alegre on the same date as the WEF in Davos in 2002.

Convergence between movements

After the defeat of the MAI (Multilateral Accord on Investment) in

October 1998, the defeat of the WTO in Seattle in December 1999, the fiasco of the annual meeting of the World Bank and the IMF in Prague in September 2000, the WSF in Porto Alegre constituted another step towards an accentuation of convergence between the very numerous movements seeking to satisfy the basic demands of humanity. This meeting was preceded by a dozen very significant initiatives of mobilisation in the year 2000 in the course of which these movements have systematically acted together: Bangkok in February 2000 (the 10th UN Conference on Trade and Development); Washington in April 2000 (Spring meeting of the IMF and World Bank); Geneva in June 2000 (Evaluation of the UN Summit on Social development); Okinawa in July 2000 (G7); Prague in September 2000; Brussels, New York and Washington in October 2000 (World Women's March); Seoul the same month (3rd Asia-Europe Conference); Nice in December 2000 (EU summit); Dakar in December 2000 ("From resistances to alternatives").

All these actions allowed the drawing up of common positions between powerful social movements (trade unions like the CUT in Brazil, KCTU in South Korea, CTA in Argentina, COSATU in South Africa, and so on), peasant movements, citizen's movements like ATTAC; indigenous movements (CONAIE from Ecuador, the Zapatistas from Mexico); the World Women's March; international networks (Focus on global south, ATTAC, CADTM, European Marches); movements of those "without" (without papers, homes, jobs, land); ecologist and pacifist movement, the radical left; coalitions around precise themes like:

- the cancellation of the third world debt (Jubilee 2000, Jubilé Sud,...);
- opposition to the neo-liberal offensive in trade;
- support for the Tobin tax.

Points of

convergence

One can try to sum up the points of agreement between these movements as follows.

The necessity of a democratic and internationalist alternative to neo-liberal capitalist globalisation; the necessity of realising equality between women and men; the necessity of deepening the crisis of legitimacy of the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO, the Davos Forum, the G7 and the big multinationals; support for the cancellation of the Third World Debt and the abandonment of structural adjustment policies; support for an end to the deregulation of trade, opposition to certain uses of genetically modified organisms and rejection of the current definition of intellectual property rights in relation to trade; opposition to militarist policies (for example, Plan Colombia); support for the right of peoples to an endogenous development; financing on the basis of the taxation of capital through a Tobin type tax; support for the rights of indigenous peoples; the necessity of agrarian reform and a generalised reduction of working hours; the necessity of a common North/South and East/West struggle; the promotion of democratic experiences like the participatory budget practised at Porto Alegre.

These main elements are all, or almost all, to be found in the declaration that the social movements adopted at the WSF in Porto Alegre (see the websites www.forumsocialmundial.org or attac.org - available only in Spanish, Portuguese and English at the moment). They are found already in the Bangkok appeal (February 2000) and in the declaration of Geneva (June 2000). It is a very encouraging sign.

Some big questions remain the subject of debate: is it necessary to "abolish" the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO or can they be reformed? Should we fight in the countries of the periphery for the suspension of the payment of the debt or rely on negotiations without recourse to this measure?

Davos surrounded by barbed wire and protected by hundreds of police and soldiers. Porto Alegre open to all who

put humanity before profit. In Davos, luxury; in Porto Alegre, dignity. In Davos the crisis of legitimacy; in Porto Alegre, the alternatives.

The meeting at Porto Alegre attracted extraordinary media coverage: nearly

500 journalists were present (more than at Davos...). The media, including the most fervent defenders of the rule of capital (CNN for example) sensed that a turning point in public opinion had been reached: an increasingly significant number of citizens of the planet are opposing the neo-liberal

offensive. Those who mobilised at Porto Alegre were in permanent contact via the alternative media (Indymedia for example) with the anti-Davos mobilisations in Switzerland and expressed their solidarity with the Swiss demonstration.

Opposition at the Davos World Economic Forum

10 February 2001, by [François Duval](#)



Opposition at Davos

Many cars carrying demonstrators from France, Italy, and Germany were stopped at the frontiers, without respect for freedom of circulation, nor for individual liberties. The excesses of the police led to heated debate in the Swiss media. Despite all the talk about "listening to civil society", the supporters of ultra-neo-liberalism do not allow the slightest challenge, above all when it is their legitimacy that is at stake. Only Laurent Fabius could dare to claim that there was merely a "misunderstanding" between the opponents of capitalist globalisation and the financial and industrial magnates!

If the heavy police mobilisations prevented any significant demonstrations in Davos itself, other

initiatives were held, notably in Zurich. On Friday January 26, a forum called "The other Davos" attracted nearly a thousand participants, mostly youth and trades unionists.

At the centre of the debates: the globalisation of capital, its social and ecological effects; the consequences for the labour and social situation of women; the new international law; the implications for the trade union movement; the arms race being led by the imperialist powers. Two forums drew particular attention: that on the situation in Palestine (with Michel Warschawski) and that on "Plan Colombia" (with Janette Habel). The forum ended with a meeting where speakers included François Chesnais, Charles-André Udry, Jean Ziegler, Annick Coupé and Roseline Vachetta, who stressed the role of the European Union as relay of capitalist globalization.

The second phase of the mobilisation was the attempt to demonstrate in Davos itself. However, demonstrators' cars were stopped about 30 kilometres from their destination by police supported by an assault tank and combat helicopters! An improvised meeting resulted with speakers denouncing police repression and protesting against the arrogance of the self-proclaimed planetary elite who refuse to even hear the voices of those at the bottom.

These mobilisations have fulfilled one of the objectives fixed by the international networks and the various social movements: not a single meeting of the world's powerful will be allowed without popular initiatives for debate or street demonstrations reminding them of their lack of legitimacy and highlighting the disastrous consequences of their decisions.

Odyssey 2001

10 February 2001, by [Livio Maitan](#)



Chinese stock trader

More generally, there was speculation on the socio-economic evolution of the world's most populous country and more particularly on the possible consequences of Peking's entry into

the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Without going back over the whole analysis developed in this magazine in recent years, [1] we will try to focus on the developments of the last year and grasp the tendencies which are emerging following the economic transformations underway and the effects which they are having on the social tissue.

On the eve of WTO entry

Recall first that, as might have been expected, growth rates are now in single figures: 7% in 1999 and around 8% in 2000. 2001 marks the beginning of the tenth five-year plan: as Li Peng reminds us, an average growth rate of

7% is predicted. To counteract the danger of a slowing up this year, the government envisages having recourse once again to stimulants of the "Keynesian type" (which, according to the Financial Times, could reach 18 billion dollars).

From now on a major effort is projected to ensure the development of the backward western provinces. In the more long term a doubling of the gross national product (GNP) is envisaged by 2010. Even taking into account the reservations of certain specialists according to which the official figures are usually overvalued by 2-3%, the validity of these predictions is questionable to the extent that the Chinese economy is and will be still more conditioned by the vicissitudes of the world capitalist economy, which, needless to say, does not have to respect the parameters of what remains of Peking's central planning.

It is enough to recall on this subject that the US has become the first importer of Chinese produce. The question is posed, then, of to what extent the slowing up of the US economy - or, worse still, an eventual recession - could affect the Chinese economy and notably its balance of payments. What is more, if China is admitted to the WTO, it would have to, in the five coming years, reduce significantly the different measures of protection (tariffs or taxes) currently existing. [2] What will be the fallout in the national economic sectors which are now more or less in equilibrium and what will be the consequences of the restructurings that will prove necessary?

To take some examples, according to experts in the matter, among the 126 enterprises in the car sector - whose production remains, moreover, very modest - only 40 will be in shape to survive. In the food sector, according to one of the officials in Peking, Li Shijing, only half of the 10,000 existing companies would survive. The difficulties could be still more serious for agriculture, where, remember, a clear majority of the active population still works. Bearing in mind that each person active in this sector in China earns 0.1 ha, against 0.5 ha in Europe and 1.4 in the US, and that a great

part of agriculture remains managed under the form of the familial economy, we can understand the affirmation of the Chinese researcher Hawn Xu: "China could not compete with the companies of the US, Canada and Australia: the decline of the agricultural sector is only a question of time". The lowering of agricultural productivity is moreover, at the origin of the apparently paradoxical phenomenon of the abandonment of land at a time when there is a shortage of cultivable surfaces. [3]

It is then probable that there will be some particularly heartrending transformations in the rural areas where, moreover, there has been for quite a while the phenomena of a vast "surplus" population, in part itinerant, or an active under-employed population. Finally, it is difficult to envisage what the contribution to GNP of foreign companies will be and to what extent these latter will weigh on the choices of the government itself.

Growing penetration of foreign capital

This question is all the more pertinent in that the presence of foreign capital in the country continues to deepen under a number of forms. The year 2000 had already marked an upturn in relation to a certain slowing up in the preceding period. There has been, among other things, a flow of capital from certain South East Asian countries to China which now receives more than 60% of investment destined for the underdeveloped countries of the region.

Last year, powerful oil companies like Exxon Mobil, BP Amoco and Royal Dutch Shell, which have bought shares in China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec) to the tune of \$1.8 billion, also showed an increasing interest in China. On the other hand, Sinopec floated shares worth a total of 3.8 billion dollars (3.4 according to other sources) on the international markets. Shares have also been floated on the international markets for the telecommunications company China Unicom, whereas China Mobile,

the most important mobile phones operator, who had planned a share issue of 6 billion dollars (a record figure for a company in the state sector), finally recorded a profit of three times that amount (50% coming from the USA, 30% Asia, 20% Europe). Globally, 9 billion dollars worth of shares were floated on the international markets during the first six months of 2000. Let's add, moreover, that henceforth it is hoped to involve foreign capital in arduous restructuring operations in loss making state companies. The problem of these companies remains, even if, according to the official sources, some progress has been made. [4]

Numerous foreign banks have been operating in China for a long time, although with a whole raft of limitations. This presence is now quite significant in the metropolis of Shanghai, where these banks are authorised to grant loans, receive deposits and participate in the exchange markets in the name of joint ventures of foreign companies and state sector companies. They have taken on 50% of the financing of the commercial sector. Another important sector has been opened to foreign companies, that of insurance. For example, at the end of October, after a visit from the European commissioner Pascal Lamy, Ma Yongwe, president of the Commission for the regulation of the insurance, said that, even before joining the WTO, China was disposed to admit seven companies from the European Union into this market. Some foreign groups could be involved even in the setting up of pension funds: no need to stress the quasi-symbolic value of this. Zhu Li, president of Galaxi Securities, the leading company in this sector, wants to see a foreign participation of up to 33%.

It should be added that Chinese private banks are also starting to operate. The first of these banks, Musheng, has drawn the attention of investors to the extent that it has been able to amass 495.4 million dollars, more than hundred times its initial offer - the company's shares have increased their value by 57%. Another example, in another area: the ministry of Construction has drawn up measures seeking to "encourage non

public companies to enter the sector of urban public transport" in the city of Peking. [5]

Some novelties have also been announced in the area of the stock exchanges. The two which exist, that of Shanghai and that of Shenzhen, have until now had the same areas of activity although their operations are on a very different scale. It is envisaged henceforth that the distinction between share A, aimed at Chinese investors, and share B, destined for foreigners, will be eliminated. The Shanghai stock exchange is to carry out all kinds of operations whereas that of Shenzhen is to concern itself with shares of the type listed on Nasdaq on Wall Street. According to Craig Smith of the New York Times, 50 million Chinese are interested in the share market, thus more than in any other country apart from the United States. If one also takes into account the fact that personal bank deposits amount to 800 million dollars, one can conclude, says Smith, that "the Chinese markets have the potential to finance a private sector boom". According to The Economist (December 23) the Chinese stock market was the best performing last year. [6]

It is not easy to draw up an overall tableau of the respective weight of the big economic sectors. Recent figures like those we have looked at confirm that the presence of foreign capital is not at all marginal and that China is increasingly integrated in the world capitalist market. If one believes the figures advanced by different sources - such as a report of the International Finance Corporation - in 1998 the private sector represented 33% of GNP and the state sector 37%. As to the non-state collective sector, it is far from being homogeneous, including in fact a significant percentage of private enterprises. It is completely plausible that the evolution since 1998 has strengthened more the role of the private sector. Whatever the truth, this sector is the most dynamic, with a rate of growth of around 25% a year, which allows it to absorb a part of the workforce laid off from the public sector.

As we have stressed in other articles, the importance of the changes which

have taken place is confirmed by the fact that the Chinese economy is henceforth marked by phenomena more characteristic of a capitalist economy than of a bureaucratised transitional society (overproduction, of course in relation to effective demand, upwards and downwards evolution of prices, property crises, and so on). In the recent period one has also witnessed a delirious stock market euphoria recalling, obviously with a sense of proportion maintained, phenomena on other stock exchanges around the globe, with the usual bitter disappointments which follow. [7]

A Bank of China notable is undoubtedly exaggerating when he says: "The transformation underway is one the most complex ever attempted in human history". But nobody would question that the transformation taking place is very profound, whatever judgement one has from a revolutionary point of view. [8]

Upheavals and recompositions in society

The changes which have taken place since the end of the 1970s, which have deepened in the last decade, could not fail to have major social effects.

We will not recapitulate on what has happened and is happening in the countryside where the standard of living continues to be palpably inferior to that of the towns (at the end of 1998, the annual per capita income was 2,162 yuans in the countryside and 5,425 in the cities). [4] Even if the choices are more complex than would appear from this article, we can certainly agree with him on the necessity of going in the direction he suggests.

For in reality during the Assembly of the IU there was a triple choice: there is now a "post-communist" IU (represented by Llamazares) faced with two variants of "Communist refoundation", one (that of Frutos) which resembles that of Cossutta in Italy, and another (that of Maestro) which oscillates between the Portuguese model of Cunhal and

another of the "Castroist" type. One can then say that the winning list was defined more by what it did not wish to repeat (a return to the past under one form or another) than by a clear anti-capitalist project, for the radical eco-socialist influence inside this bloc is still very weak.

The new leadership will find itself facing several challenges. The first and most immediate is that of ending the "internal war". The defeat, for the first time in the history of the IU, of a Secretary General of the PCE by another member of his own leadership announces a new type of relationship and opens a scenario of conflicts inside this party, which moreover should begin to prepare for its Congress, set for December 2001. The new Co-ordinator will probably try to neutralise these tensions inside the IU with a policy of integration of the Frutos sector in the federal leadership, which could have contradictory effects: on the one hand, it could help to "pacify" the IU but, on the other, the price could be to give it too many powers and block the process of "renovation". It is not by chance that one of the responsibilities demanded by the Frutos sector is that of international policy, where recently there has been a return to more "campist" discourses and where relations with the Communist parties of all the regions of the world (including the Chinese and Russian CPs, present at this last Assembly) continue to be privileged. In any case it is clear that debate inside the PCE will be more tense and a rupture may be difficult to avoid in the medium term.

It is necessary to take account also of the profound division which exists in the two biggest federations, those of Andalusia and Madrid, and the danger of fractioning inside the Basque federation (where the PCE, in the minority, continues to push towards an increasingly moderate line). Faced with these conflicts the new leadership will try to strengthen the federal character of the IU and ask at the same time for respect for the criteria of plurality and cohesion in public discourse; but its political authority and its ability to resist the combined pressures of Andalusia, Madrid and the leadership of the PCE

are still to be proved. To all this should be added another sizeable obstacle: a serious financial crisis, produced not only by the electoral defeat but also bad management over the recent period; developing political initiatives and campaigns with very slender resources and a substantial reduction of the apparatus, will not be easy for a formation which has "forgotten" the necessary education on the need for a solid base of self-financing as guarantee of political survival; there is thus the risk that, through lack of means to finance full timers, the institutional representatives in the Spanish and European parliaments will also concentrate the political responsibilities in the federal leadership.

The second problem is that of demonstrating with short term gestures and initiatives the real will to begin a new phase in relations with the social movements and with the national and nationalist lefts, despite the difficulties. All this is a priority, for dialogue with the PSOE, whose new leadership continues to evolve around the "Third Way", should play a secondary role. Without however abandoning the task of making a balance sheet of the municipal pacts with this party and attempting to revise them by developing objectives which push to the left and help to prepare a counteroffensive against the central government of the PP.

The third and undoubtedly the most important problem is finding the axes and themes of a response to the political and social situation so as to rally all the forces of the IU around objectives of intervention which transcend the internal confrontation. In this framework, there are some proposals that we should develop: a reformulation of the campaign for the 35 hours, a unitary pressure on the trade unions against the "flexibilisation of the labour market" and for social rights in the EU; a firm defence of a dialogue-based solution

to the Basque conflict based on the recognition of the right to self-determination; a radical opposition to the penal reforms that the government of the PP is pushing through Parliament under the pretext of the "anti-terrorist struggle", and a reaffirmation of a plurinational federalist project against the neo-Spanish centralism of the PP and sectors of the PSOE and the IU; finally, a clear and practical support to the movements against capitalist "globalisation" and the initiatives which are also beginning to develop in co-ordination with those which exist at the scale of the EU. Around these latter and other activities it may be possible to make new links with a social and cultural left which seems to be taking on a new breath and emerging from the dominant perplexity and resignation. For it is only with the preparation of a renewed social opposition that it will be possible to do better in future electoral confrontations. In any case, it will be on this terrain that Espacio Alternativo will try to work and strengthen itself, as a political organisation working both inside and outside the IU, according to the agreements taken during our meeting in May.

On the Basque conflict there was an amendment from the Basque and Navarre federations to the official document discussed during this Assembly which reaffirmed, among other things, the right of the two communities to decide on "their relations with the rest of the Spanish state, including the possibility of independence", that is the right to self-determination.

This text was accepted inside the delegates' commission where it was debated and finally incorporated into the official document; but, a few days afterwards, the first critical voices among the leaders close to Frutos and Llamazares were heard. It is then probable that this will become the first test of the new leadership's

willingness to respect the policy of Esker Batua which, despite ETA's unjustifiable and deadly attacks, continues to defend the right of all Basque citizens to decide on their future.

Footnotes

[1] A little before Izquierda Unida's 5th federal Assembly (held in Madrid on December 5-7th, 1997) the Julio Anguita leadership expelled the New Left current (Democratic Party of the New Left), close to the PSOE, as well as other sectors. Espacio Alternativo although the political opposite of this current had then argued that divergences should be resolved with this current in the framework of the debate of the 5th Assembly and not through administrative measures which, in many cases, went beyond the rules defined by the federal statutes. The expulsion of the New Left led the majority of Iniciativa per Catalunya (IU in Catalonia) to leave the IU.

[2] See IV 320, April 2000 and 321, May 2000.

[3] This article appeared on October 26, 2000, on the eve of the IU's Federal Assembly.

[4] The author makes a very positive mention of the "important collectives of intellectuals of magazines like Mientras tanto, Viento Sur or El Viejo Topo"; it should be said that Viento Sur is the review of the collectives linked to the Alternative Left - which works inside Espacio Alternativo - and the Basque organisation Zutik; some members of Espacio Alternativo participate in the editorial boards of Mientras tanto and others collaborate with El Viejo Topo, which does not really have a proper collective.

For a leftwing revival of IU

10 February 2001, by [Diosdado Toledano](#) , [Pedro Montes](#)

More than 800 delegates participated in this congress, often selected in very debatable conditions, under pressure, or even, in the case of Madrid, in the absence of the most basic democratic transparency. The delegates supporting the "alternative document" defended a radical critique of the electoral pact with the PSOE, the necessity of a turn to the left and the urgency of practically supporting the right to self-determination to provide a solution to the national conflict, particularly in Euskadi.

The two main candidates to succeed Anguita as general co-ordinator, Francisco Frutos and Gaspar Llamazares, beyond differences of style and opportunism in speech and alliances, supported the right turn which lay at the heart of the document "For a 21st century left". Voting for this document, whatever the sensibilities and divergences displayed, meant that one could not clearly oppose this turn.

A significant vote for a turn to the left

Of the 551 delegates present, 152 voted for the "alternative document", or 27.6%. This document was defended particularly by Angeles Maestro and Susana Lopez, the most left wing sector of the PCE, and by Jesus Albarracin, Pedro Montes, Diosdado Toledano, Domingo and J. - M. Mendez, supporters of the Fourth International. The key elements of this document can be summed up as follows:

- a "13 point appeal" which defines the axis of a turn to the left in terms of political and social action and demands a more democratic functioning of the IU;
- the formulation of objectives radically opposed to the neo-liberal economic and social policy being

implemented in the European Union and defended here by the PP in power, but also in essence by the PSOE;

- against wage deregulation (at the heart of the current negotiations between employers and trade unions), against the dismantling of public social services, for the defence of a public sector of the economy (against the threats of privatisation of rail transport supported by the right and the PSOE, with the connivance of the trade union leaderships of the UGT and CC.OO), for a municipal policy coherent with these priorities and which gives priority to the participation of citizens (with a merciless critique of practices contrary to the IU programme);

- defence of the positions of the previous federal assembly of the IU as regards the policy of alliances, for the unity in action of the left in struggle and social mobilisation against the neo-liberal offensive, for a programme of transformation; a unity which is not about agreements from above but which is built in an open and participatory fashion; relations with the trade unions which respect the autonomy of each and thus allow full liberty of criticism of the antisocial pacts or demobilisatory practices;

- denunciation of the internal functioning of the IU, often not very democratic as shown by the electoral agreement with the PSOE, where the rank and file but also the federal political council of the IU were short-circuited, the critique of the bureaucratic practices in several federations, notably in Madrid, and so on.

This document was enriched during the congress by integrating the contributions of the Andalusian delegation of the CUT on globalisation and more broadly on the national question and the practical defence of the right of self-determination.

The significant points of the congress

Shortly after the assembly opened, the partisans of Gaspar Llamazares proposed a modification of the mode of selection of the future co-ordinator general, so that it was no longer done by the federal council but by all the delegates, with clearly presidentialist arguments which claimed to "give a greater legitimacy to the future co-ordinator"... This proposal was defeated, receiving only 295 votes against 379 and 13 abstentions. A crushing blow to the camp of Llamazares which had boasted to the press that it comprised 55% of delegates.

From there on the pressures on the delegates increased, since a small number of them could turn around the relation of forces. The credentials commission only finally questioned the legitimacy of three or four delegates. The partisans of the "alternative document" who supported the candidature of Angeles Maestro were accused of various undisclosed intentions. The ballot itself did not take place in the best conditions: the ballot forms of the different candidates, for example, were not of the same format.

The results were as follows: of the 75 members of the federal political council, 32 supported the candidature of Llamazares, 30 that of Frutos and 13 that of Maestro. The minorities had then the real possibility, in full or in part, of arbitrating between the two leading candidates. The meeting of the federal political council ended speculation. The partisans of the "left turn" showed their seriousness and cohesion. Angeles Maestro received his 13 votes and it was thus by maximising his own votes that Gaspar Llamazares was elected general co-ordinator.

And now?

Some questions remain as to the future of the IU and the outcome of the political and leadership crisis it is experiencing. The political orientation approved by the majority will strengthen this crisis.

The drift of the new PSOE leadership towards neo-liberal centrist positions, the declarations of its new secretary general Zapatero who qualifies as "leftwing" the lowering of taxes, who presents the PSOE as liberal and "libertarian", who defends the extension of privatisations, who is at one with the PP in Euskadi, all weighs on the IU's policy of alliances. Programmatic rapprochement is only conceivable if the IU takes new liberties with its own programme (as it has already done on the Basque question), but with the risk of reinforcing its left opposition and

aggravating internal conflicts.

The will to re-establish "relations" with the trade union federations, at a time when the leaderships of the UGT and CC.OO are accentuating their policy of pacts and demobilisation and are daily abandoning still more the language of the class struggle (the new secretary general, Fidalgo, has just praised wage moderation), will facilitate neither social remobilization nor trade union recomposition on more combative left bases.

All this generates tensions inside the IU and does not augur a more democratic functioning, nor a new more open and participative style.

The diversity of support for the two majority candidatures and the agreement concluded for governing the IU are heavy with instability. In the camp of Llamazares one finds both the right, the barons allied to the PSOE in the government of the

Balearic Islands, the partisans of Espacio Alternativo and Anguita himself, in other words the risks of fissure are legion.

This underlines the importance that the "alternative document" and the elected representatives of its platform can have. This position brings together diverse sectors of the left of the PCE, the CUT of Andalusia, militants of the Fourth International in Quadernos Internacionales, other Trotskyist groups like the PRT, left independents... all committed to fighting to turn the IU to the left and take active initiatives that serve this objective.

18 November 2000

Diosdado Toledano and Pedro Montes were elected to the federal political council on the positions of the "Alternative Document". They are also members of the Fourth International.

PSOE: A new generation in command?

10 February 2001, by [Antonio Garcia Santesmases](#)

The first thing that comes to mind after the congress is that the worst was avoided. However, it is also useful to highlight the appearance of certain ideological themes in the speeches and proposals of the new leadership.

For many delegates, if Bono had won the race to become general secretary of the party, it would have meant the reproduction of the worst sectarianism which had been amply displayed by the movement of so-called renovators in the guise of half-digested populism. On the eve of the congress, his defeat seemed unlikely. Yet he was beaten because of the votes of different sectors of the left who preferred to opt for "the lesser evil".

After José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was elected general secretary, the other candidates disappeared from the scene and the media's fire was concentrated on the personality of this young man (aged 40) who appeared as the representative of a new generation, the "leader of the new

times" in the words of a headline in the newspaper El Socialista. This victory of the unknown was hailed by the media which stressed a renewal of the leadership, with the disappearance of the members of the generation of the Suresnes congress (the PSOE congress held in 1974 in France, at which Felipe González was elected general secretary). There has even been reference to a "new Suresnes", which should be nuanced in order to properly understand the situation.

Some have died (Rubial, Carmen García Bloise), others have left the leadership of the party, like Enrique Mugica in 1994 or Felipe González, Alfonso Guerra and Txiqui Benegas in 1997. It is true that on the eve of the congress, speculation flew as to the election of González to the presidency of the party. Zapatero, curiously, was the warmest partisan of this proposal. González finally renounced it, which contributed to giving the image of the beginning of a new era.

The real problem concerns the intermediary generation, the group of leaders who were not present at Suresnes but who since the 1980s have occupied positions of power in the government and autonomous communities. Natural heirs of González, they appeared all set to succeed him. The opportunity presented itself in June 1997. Certainly, they had the qualities required, a great deal of political experience. But as a result of the internal quarrels of the leading group, erratic decision-making and, finally, the result of the elections, they had to renounce their goal. The resignation of Joaquín Almunia as general secretary of the PSOE following the general election defeat of March 2000 marked the retreat of that generation of leaders who had tried to survive by supporting the candidature of Bono.

The big winners from this congress are the likes of Laguina, Ciscar or Rubalcaba who supported Bono or again those, like Eguigaray and other

who supported Rosa Diez. It is a generation which is still very young to abandon political life, but this congress has forced them to quit the front stage.

They are palpably of the same generation as those who take the leadership today. If there is a significant difference of age between Zapatero and Gonzalez, this is not the case between Rubalcaba and Alvaro Cuesta.

The difference is rather that the victors have only ever occupied political posts of the second rank. Deputies, provincial cadres, cabinet chiefs in different ministries, they had little to lose and knew how to seize their opportunity. If Bono won, he would call on some of them to organise the parliamentary group. If he lost, it would only be a stage in their path towards power. For Bono, on the contrary, it was a defeat with heavy consequences. Still, the losers are not going to disappear definitively. In Germany Schroeder was beaten by Sharping and one is today chancellor, the other minister of defence. A generation with such a long political experience will not disappear simply because it has experienced a defeat in a congress.

The new leadership fits into the project of Felipe Gonzalez and identifies with the ideological references which run through the documents of the so-called renovator sector. This sector had initially supported a veritable democratisation of the party and greater transparency in its management. At this time Joaquin Leguina, paraphrasing Flores de Arcais, spoke of taking democracy seriously and building a habitable party.

That came into conflict with a very rigid apparatus culture, but many militants and sectors of public opinion certainly welcomed it. Among the renovators there is also a project close to the theses of Carlos Solchaga, defender of a basic welfare state, critical of the demands of the trade unions and partisan of an opening towards the postulates of economic neo-liberalism.

Solchaga was the first significant

leader who came out for the new leadership and one of the new leading cadres is Jordi Sevilla, who has defended a number of his theses in his books and articles.

Rereading the resolution approved at the congress and certain documents of the "New Road" one is struck by the importance accorded to the urban middle class layers. For the editors of these documents, the PSOE has distanced itself from these latter, which is fatal at the electoral level - particularly since they are considered to constitute the majority of society. The document is not very clear on this subject: do these classes form the majority of society or are they decisive in gaining an electoral majority? Whatever, much time is devoted to analysing the discontent, malaise and frustrations of these social sectors.

On several occasions, the accent is put on the change which has taken place in the developed societies. From subjects, we have become citizens, and from citizens we have become taxpayers and consumers. The text is marked by a concern to respond to the fiscal lassitude of the middle classes and by the necessity of preserving the quality of public services in health and education to keep the universality of the welfare state.

From the point of view of sociological analysis, there is something here which is undeniable. The right to education and the right to health are guaranteed, but citizens are demanding greater attention in the health centres and a higher quality in the public educational system, in the absence of which they turn towards the private sector. If the quality of public services does not improve while the tax burden remains high, the urban middle classes opt out. This is the nature of popular capitalism and the two thirds society with its difficulties in financing universalist programmes and solidarity based policies. The nightmare of the political leaders who seek to win a majority in the elections is having to increase taxes. That is why in one of his first declarations to the press, Zapatero stressed that he did not expect to increase the tax burden and he mocked those who thought that this was necessary if the left wishes to

guarantee the coverage of public expenditure (El Pais, September 10, 2000).

The problem emerges when one wishes to increase expenditure in the area of infrastructure, guarantee the quality of teaching, assure the integration of immigrants, implement a national hydrological plan, improve health services, combat tax fraud and differentiate between the self-employed, the middle classes and big property owners. All this is necessary, but this society, where the urban middle classes are not the majority, sees a rapid growth of social exclusion and marginalisation, and faces the problem of alliances between the middle classes, the dispossessed and the working class.

The documents of the "New Road" speak little of the working class and the dispossessed, yet this is a real problem and in a world ruled by the values of popular capitalism, the middle classes find it difficult to display altruism, universalism and solidarity. Nothing is simple but it is necessary in order to guarantee a welfare state. The "New Road" maintains an optimistic, positive, creative, discourse, hails the new technologies and the positive effects of globalisation, while remaining silent on the destruction of jobs or the development of social exclusion.

The left of the PSOE chose to block the greater evil incarnated by the other candidature, marked by sectarianism and an authoritarian populism. It can no longer accept the recourse to a traditionalist Catholicism or a rancid Spanish centralism. Federalism, secularism, feminism and youth were on the side of Zapatero. The left knew perfectly well that Zapatero's project was deeply marked by social neo-liberalism, closer to that of Blair than of Jospin. It was amply shown before the congress and nothing has emerged to dent this appreciation.

The results of the last elections played in favour of the theses of the "Third Way" and weakened the partisans of a plural left. The right recorded a crushing victory, the left was hit by the defection of its electorate, a part of the electorate of the PSOE fleeing

to the PP. The more moderate sectors saw this as confirming the danger of any alliance with the United Left. Almunia had never really believed in this perspective in any case. Everything was done hastily and there was no time to mobilise the social base of the left. Most of the new leaders think that this radicalisation brought nothing good, neither in the discontented sectors of the IU nor in the moderate electorate of the PSOE. Both the left and the centre have been lost. It is necessary to regain the centrist voter and this explains the accent put on the hegemonic character of the middle classes.

The new leadership wants to end the quarrels and internal debates and begin to speak with a single voice.

That responds to the expectations of many citizens who are tired of divisions which are often incomprehensible and seem reduced to personal squabbles. This was often enough the reality, but not always. Beyond labels, clans, tribes and families, Spanish socialism is not outside of the debates which traverse European socialism. This debate opposes those who try to defend what they can of the welfare state without burdening the middle classes and those who are committed to the exacerbation of the contradictions between the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the demands of the economic markets, between the promises of democracy and the autonomy of the financial markets. Lafontaine exposed it perfectly in his recent book and it is very much the

current situation.

However, to develop this debate, so that the neo-liberal centrist drift does not have the last word, it is necessary that the perspective of a plural left remains the project of the IU beyond its congress and that the trade unions emerge from their apathy. If the unions do not recover their capacity of mobilisation and political initiative, the left in the PSOE has no perspective. PSOE members are tired of the years of corruption and top level squabbling. They want to win or at least recover their self esteem. For pluralism to progress, it is not just the left minority in the ranks of the PSOE that needs strengthening, but also the trade union and political forces outside the party.

Victory for PT in municipal elections

10 February 2001, by [Beto Bastos](#), [Heloisa Helena](#)

Victory in six capitals, re-election in Porto Alegre and Belem, re-conquest of the mayorships of São Paulo and Goiânia, victories in two capitals in the North east, Recife and Aracaju, the latter achieved the first round. Victory in important towns like Pelotas (Rio Grande do Sul), Vitória da Conquista (Bahia), Imperatriz (Maranhão), Governador Valadares (Minas Gerais) and Criciúma (Santa Catarina). Reelection in Caxias do Sul (Rio Grande do Sul) and Santo Andre (Sao Paulo).

The PT had won 105 municipalities in 1996; in these elections it won 187, an increase of 78%. Of the 5,500 municipalities in Brazil, the PT now administers 3% of the total. However, the mayorships won represent nearly 25 million inhabitants, which means we will govern for 15% of the Brazilian population. Of the 62 biggest cities in Brazil, the PT won 27%. In 1996 it won the mayorship in only five of these cities, which means an increase of 240%. These 62 municipalities, which include the 26 Brazilian state capitals, represent approximately 40% of the Brazilian electorate. In these cities the vote for the PT went up from 3,593,540 in 1996 to 7,838,465 votes

in 2000, an increase of 118%.

In these cities, the PSDB won 4,469,463 votes, the PFL 3,846,226, the PMDB 2,492,293. [1]

In terms of the number of town halls won by the PT, pride of place goes to the state of São Paulo with 38, Rio Grande do Sul with 35 and Minas Gerais with 34. In Santa Catarina the PT won in 13 towns, 5 of them significant ones in the interior, Concordia, Criciúma, Rio do Sul, Chapeco and Blumenau. In the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, where we are in the state government, the PT went from controlling one municipality to controlling 11, its biggest percentage growth. With seven municipalities won in the state of Acre, where we are also in the state government, the PT now heads 32% of the state municipalities.

The PT's electoral expansion was also expressed in towns where we did not win. We came second with a significant number of votes in Salvador (Bahia), Teresina (Piaui), Natal (Rio Grande do Norte) and Osasco (São Paulo). Despite divisions within the PT and the controversial candidature of Benedita da Silva, we

missed the second round in Rio de Janeiro by only 15,000 votes.

Of the 16 towns where the PT reached the second round as biggest party, we won 13, losing only in Curitiba (Paraná), Santos (São Paulo) and Canoas (Rio Grande do Sul). With the PCdoB [2] we won Olinda (Pernambuco) and we lost Fortaleza (Ceará), nonetheless in this town we stopped the candidature of Ciro Gomes from reaching the second round. We elected the deputy mayor in Belo Horizonte in alliance with the PSB, [3] beating the PSDB in the only capital where FHC's party contested the second round. Also, with the PDT [4] we won the municipality of Niteroi (Rio de Janeiro), defeating Governor Garotinho who had supported the candidature of da rede Globo against the PDT candidate.

Overall, we increased the number of PT municipal councillors in Brazil by 38%, going from around 1,800 elected in 1996 to 2,485 at these elections. The PT elected no mayor in the states of Amapa, Alagoas, Amazonas, Roraima and Espírito Santo.

A negative aspect must also be

mentioned, the defeat of the PT in 49 cities that we governed, in the main small municipalities of less than 50,000 electors. This can be explained by poor communication on the work done by these municipalities and above all by the unity of the local right against our candidates. However it amounts to a serious concern for the PT. In Rio Grande do Sul political polarisation continues, the PT gained the most votes, and won important towns like Bege, Santa Maria and Pelotas, but we lost 15 towns that we had governed.

In the state of Minas we also lost 15 towns that we controlled and party divisions surely contributed to this result, combined with zigzags in relation to the Itamar government. [5] In Rio de Janeiro the division of the party and the coming and going in the leadership of the PDT and the Garotinho government led to a crushing defeat. We lost Angra do Reis and Barra Mansa. The subordination of the PT to ill-defined or ambiguous projects probably contributed.

Rightwing analysts had said that these elections would be dominated by municipal questions, that the choice of the electors would be decided exclusively in terms of the candidate who would present the best proposals to govern the town. This simplistic analysis masked the fear of the national character of the campaign, the fear of identification of those candidates who supported the federal government with president Fernando Henrique Cardoso; the president of recession, unemployment and despair.

This type of analysis was often adopted by PT leaders who concluded precipitately that the theme of the elections would be narrowly municipal.

The immediate consequence of this type of analysis was the "forgetting" of the red flag, the PT star, an emptiness of discourse, critique and confrontation. A style of campaign which did not chime in with the PT's militant traditions, and worse, was not what the majority of the Brazilian people expected.

In reality, the PT's success stems from

a number of factors. The PT's proposals represented an overall package of concrete measures which had already been successfully applied in some places. The PT presented itself as capable of governing and experimenting, which weakened the criticism of our opponents against those of our candidates who had never led a municipality.

The question of ethics and corruption was another basic factor. Among the qualities of the future mayor, being honest was a basic demand. The fact that corruption means fewer resources for social investment was understood by the people to an unexpected extent. The numerous scandals involving mayors and municipal councillors, with a special mention for the Pitta administration in São Paulo, have given a national dimension to this type of problem.

To these factors, outside more or less favourable local conjunctures, was added a subjective element of revolt against the federal government and it is this element which can explain the PT victory. Without that, it would be impossible to understand the national result, except to analyse case-by-case, town-by-town, at the local level, which would be an error.

The PT's was a national victory. The vote for the PT was a vote for its ability to govern, for honesty, but also a vote for the opposition, a conscious vote for change. As a general rule where the PT ran enthusiastically, proud of its red flags and its star, it won. Where it camouflaged itself, or adopted a more lukewarm discourse, it lost.

One can say that the PT victory was the fruit of the competence and the opposition built by the PT over the last few years. There was need for a radical change, and it was the PT, which symbolised this desire for the majority of the population. Generally speaking, where we won, it was in alliance with the parties of the left.

Those municipal PT leaderships who insisted on making alliances subordinated to the PSDB and PMDB (with the PT as adjunct, and in many cases not in electable positions), did not register impressive results. At

Governador Valadares (Minas Gerais), with the support of the state leadership, an alliance with the PFL was proposed and it was argued that without this alliance the PT would lose. The National Executive Commission vetoed this alliance, the PT ran its own list and won. Unhappily in some places alliances of this type were set up without the PT nationally being informed.

The PT faces a big task, that of organising a social and political bloc capable of winning the next presidential elections. A national victory demands advance preparation, defined objectives, a programme of government and a political leadership with the will to win.

Against those who pursue the recipes of the IMF, the WTO and World Bank, the democratic and popular opposition of those who believe another world is possible. The social and political strength that we organise consists principally in the struggles and mobilisations of our people. However, it can only constitute itself as a hegemonic force through political confrontation and for this confrontation the PT is the principal and most valuable instrument.

During the municipal elections the abuse of economic power, the use of public goods for individual profit, the monopoly of means of communication and the manipulation of polls created an atmosphere of debate which was very unfavourable to the PT and the other parties of the democratic and popular camp. To complete this imperfect tableau of democracy, there was also the presence of innumerable parties which were the expression of no political platform other than minuscule private interests.

It is an urgent task for the PT and allied parties to begin a national debate with legislative initiatives for a political reform which put an end to re-election, create public financing of campaigns, and institute party fidelity. It is necessary also to control the unscrupulous use of opinion polls and means of communication. However, these measures to improve the electoral process are insufficient for the enormous task of helping to consolidate a democratic

consciousness in the huge social sectors the PT claims to represent. It can only be done through the active political participation of millions to conquer citizenship and break the chains of exclusion and poverty which link them to the perverse systems of domination. Through the municipal institutions the PT has stimulated popular participation. The participatory budget and other initiatives are schools of political consciousness raising and the affirmation of democracy.

Footnotes

[1] The PSDB (Party of Brazilian Social Democracy), social-liberal in

origin, is the party of the current president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (known as "FHC"). The PFL (Party of the Liberal Front), which originated from the old party of military dictatorship, is the principal support of FHC besides the PSDB. The PMDB (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement) has its origins in the legal opposition during the military dictatorship. It supports FHC and is part of his government.

[2] PC do B (Communist Party of Brazil), ex-Maoist, ex-pro Albanian, is slowly questioning its attachment to Stalinism. It supported the candidature of "Lula" at the presidential elections

of 1989, 1994 and 1998.

[3] PSB (Brazilian Socialist Party), a small party with a left social-democratic profile. It supported the candidature of "Lula" at the presidential elections of 1989, 1994 and 1998.

[4] PDT (Democratic Labour Party), a populist centre left party led by Leonel Brizola, affiliated to the Socialist International.

[5] Itamar Franco, vice-president elected with Fernando Collor de Mello in 1990, then interim president (1992-1995) after the fall of his mentor. Elected governor of the state of Minas Gerais in 1998.

The perspectives of the Frente Social y Politico

10 February 2001, by [Fermin Gonzales](#)

Projects such as the Frente Amplio (FA) of Uruguay, the Workers Party (PT) of Brazil and the FMLN of El Salvador represented, on the political terrain of the masses, the action, resistance and insurgence of the people, faced with the exhaustion of the Keynesian model and the forced passage towards neo-liberal transnational capitalism.

The workers' and popular movement sought to create adequate strategies and political organisations to meet the challenge of the epoch

The Frente Social y Politico (FSP, Political and Social Front), which is beginning this process of construction in Colombia, wishes to present a historic alternative for the construction of a unitary politics of the excluded, but it was born surrounded by enemies and great dangers. Through these circumstances it grew and became, in the words of Orlando Fals Borda, a new force which can resolve "the tasks hanging over us", of the popular struggle and the Colombian Revolution, an attempt to gather all the previous experiences of

construction of the popular political projects of the masses, that began with the United Front of Camilo Torres's passing through the Patriotic Union, A Luchar's Frente Popular and the AD-M19's to name only the most significant.

We find that there are very few documents that deal seriously with the Latin American and national experiences of political construction, with these and other similar experiences. But that is not to say they do not exist. They are confined to internal debates with little systematisation and are therefore difficult to access. To motivate reflection in all the sectors of the FSP we will refer to the some of the most important experiences.

While the FA of Uruguay was born out of the unity of components of a "broad" left, going from radical to Social Democratic positions, the FMLN emerged from a guerrilla demobilisation articulated with a social movement and the PT was the political initiative of the unions, our FSP has to an extent a little of each

one of these ingredients. There are left parties inside it, but not only such parties. It was born in a country at war but with an autonomy in relation to the insurgents. The decision to build it came from the fourth congress of the CUT (a trade union federation). The CTC (a peasant confederation) then joined the project. Nonetheless, this does not mean there was a definite trade union hegemony or a project exclusively of the workers.

The FSP was born out of necessity from the situation in the mid 1980s, a situation that was sharpened with the crisis of the "socialist" camp. There was always the difficulty that when the socio-political context was favourable, the possibilities never coincided with a leadership team with the authority and the maturity to lead. Or things happened in reverse and teams that were capable of building were displaced through a national and global context that favoured the forces of opportunism, vanguardism and adaptation.

The closest antecedents were the last frustrated attempts like that of the

Frente Social Amplio formed in 1999 after the assassination of Eduardo Umana Mendoza. However a new initiative was only possible to the extent that the workers as a class rediscovered the necessary confidence to assume responsibility for a refoundation. For those who had buried the working class and its historical function following the productive changes in the world of work, this experience must be worth reflecting upon. Something must remain of that historical function if the trade unions, who know very well the difficulties and corporatist tendencies, have decided to take on the construction of a mass anti-neo-liberal project of the left, in the name of all the exploited, oppressed, excluded and marginalised.

Certainly, the origins of this movement should be studied more deeply. Still from the beginning this initiative originating from the workers did not exclude the popular sectors, middle layers and sectors of the national bourgeoisie linked to production. There is still a lack of programmatic clarity in the matter and this clarity is the most important task before us. However elements of consensus exist allowing us to sketch an orientation for the FSP. It is a project against neo-liberalism, opposed to "Plan Colombia" and thus an anti-imperialist project of defence of sovereignty and the self-determination of peoples. It is opposed to the speculative transnational financial system of capital. It is a national and popular project, at the service of the productive sectors, which considers sub-regional and Latin-American integration necessary on the basis of democratic, horizontal, equitable principles and tries to grasp the importance of intervening on new international terrains. It advocates a negotiated solution to the armed conflict in a framework of social transformations and dignity, denounces forcefully the context of degradation created by the war, the violation of human rights and crimes against humanity; demands respect for the autonomy of the social organisations and affirms unambiguously its programmatic independence vis-à-vis the state and the capitalist system and its organic autonomy in relation to bipartyism and

the insurrectional forces.

What can be noted in Latin America today is a substantial presence of social movements which simultaneously fight for immediate demands and provide a cement, a continuity, to political projects. Beyond the political vicissitudes they have undergone, their identity consists in representing the popular sectors.

All these movements have experienced significant growth as national political forces. Nonetheless, they are appreciated above all thanks to their management of local governments. Montevideo, Porto Alegre and San Salvador currently represent examples on the global scale of the participation of citizens in the drawing up of the budget and a more human model of urban development. This local and regional basis has allowed a rapid strengthening of political influence and a growth in membership, aiding access to the media.

Nonetheless, the forced coexistence with the enemy, the central government, and the traps of the legislation of a national state integrated in the strategies of the IMF, have led to a certain erosion and weakness which, although limited, can distance the forces in question from their initial project of radical struggle.

Tendencies in the same direction emerged following the formation of parliamentary groups, representing in the case of El Salvador and Uruguay relative majorities. The possibility, newly acquired, of debating with those who had previously excluded them, of having an impact in the important votes, the need for a policy of alliances in the framework of potentially winnable presidential campaigns, carries with it the danger of losing sight of the needs of the social sectors one represents. That is what happened, in the final analysis, with the AD-M19 parliamentary group in Colombia in the course of the last decade.

Growth on the parliamentary front has happened without the forces involved having made the necessary preparation, above all from the point of view of functioning and political

relations with their base, which constitute the irreplaceable antidote to the seductions of state power. Thus the parties tend to become exclusively parliamentary as much in their political vision as in their hierarchical structure. The parliamentary groups play the role of leadership in the big political questions, with a recurrent tendency to underestimate the structures of social movements and parties at the national and regional level. These latter are then led to only concern themselves with particular problems, immediate demands or their organisational survival.

In the case of the FSP, the test of participation in local government is already underway whereas the problem of the eventual formation of a parliamentary group will be faced following the legislative elections of 2002. In the local elections of October 2000 the FSP supported five candidates for governor and some candidates for mayor in some towns. The surprise was that three of the candidates for governor, two of them very close to the FSP project, were elected.

This was not by chance. The readjustment plans imposed by the IMF in the area of budget allocations to the regions and communes led to a rebellion from most elected mayors and governors, notably those from the region where the measures of "Plan Colombia" are being applied against the insurrectionary organisations in the name of the war on drugs. The progressive bloc of three governors elected in October has been increased by two other governors, those of Huila and Putumayo, where "Plan Colombia" is being applied, and more still will join them. Moreover, all these governors have made a declaration that they will help build an alternative presidential candidature. The candidate in question will be the FSP's public spokesperson, Luis Eduardo ("Lucho") Garzon.

The most important case is that of the government of the Cuaca region, won by the indigenous activist Floro Tumubalá. The election of the latter is the result of a broad unity resulting from important indigenous general strikes, of peasants, workers and popular layers, which finally won the

support also of the middle and bourgeois layers of the capital, Popayan.

Thus the most traditional department of the oligarchy, the zone where "Plan Colombia" is being applied, has an indigenous governor. What is at stake is of great importance: building an alternative to this plan of regional and continental domination starting from a model of democratic development and participation and more concretely from an opposition to the strategy of fumigation of crops. For their part, the indigenous peoples have taken the decision, which they are already applying, to manually extirpate coca plantations. The alternative social bloc, and thus the FSP, which leads the combat on the political level, opposes US intervention, which will lead to an escalation of the armed conflict.

The Latin American parties and fronts of the new type have the most diverse organisational structures: rank and file committees, tendencies, working groups. As for the FSP, there is a lot to do on this level: herein lies its principal weakness. It has a national presence, especially in the media, thanks to the authority that the members of the Front's national committee have won, as leaders of the workers' movement, social movements and political struggles. In this body the national political forces (Communist Party, Unidad democratica, Convergencia ciudadana and Presentes por el socialismo), the social organisations (ecologists, women, unions, municipal leaders, pensioners, truck drivers and intellectuals), personalities known in their areas and even progressive retired military figures are all represented.

Next March the FSP is to approve its political platform and the rules which fix the duties of members, the composition and functioning of the regional and national bodies and the selection of its candidates. This last point is particularly important in that there are different conceptions: some argue for a simple electoral co-ordination, others for a front in which each component keeps its autonomy, others like us seek to build a broad collective organic autonomy. The

future of the FSP and its tactical and/or strategic project will be determined by the structure adopted.

What role is there for the hundreds of thousands of citizens who want to fight for change, but do not identify with any political force and are not part of the leadership of a social organisation? And where will they find a useful space for their participation in the activities of the FSP? It is obvious that it is precisely at the territorial or sectoral level that such people can be integrated. There should also be a democratic and representative space allowing them to participate in regional and national decisions. The new feature of the FSP, compared with the Brazilian PT, the Uruguayan FA and the Salvadoran FMLN is that some social organisations as such share leadership with political organisations.

These political forces had to face the mistrust of the social organisations and intellectuals towards the conception of the "transmission belt", according to which it was up to the parties to decide the political line and the social organisations to apply it. It has, then, been essential that the parties respect the autonomy of the social organisations. That does not imply that they abandon the right to influence them, from inside and outside, in the elaboration of their independent and class-based programme. Whatever, we should not pass from one extreme to the other, as sometimes happens after the conception of the "transmission belt" has been rejected.

Everyone now accepts a functioning with internal currents and tendencies. There is no doubt that the PIT-CNT trade union federation is the spinal column supporting the Uruguayan FA, composed of left, centre-left and centre parties. In the case of the FLMN of El Salvador renewers and orthodox elements coexist, while there are different tendencies which characterise themselves as revolutionary in the Brazilian PT.

This situation is not without serious difficulties (which are more important in the case of the FSP where the internal regroupments are still taking place). However, the organisations

mentioned have progressively succeeded in groping towards centralised political structures where the majority decides by the application of a newly conceived democratic centralism. They wish to build an organic force that is capable of challenging the governments and posing, at least theoretically, the problem of the seizure of power. They function with collective leaderships: in the case of the PT and FA they combine such a functioning with the marked personal role of their presidential candidates, Lula and Tabaré Vasquez.

The leadership committees of the FSP have functioned up until now on the basis of a majority consensus, a formula which is not very clear but has been enough to stop paralysis resulting from temporary divergences. The functioning of the FSP leadership is specific to the extent that, from the beginning, it has been based on its external image and on the authority and credibility of president Lucho Garzon, who is also president of the CUT and until now the sole spokesperson of the Comando nacional unitario (CNU). It is obvious that such a personal role carries a danger of caudillismo, not necessarily because of personal factors but rather the inability of others to make collective functioning work.

In the functioning of the FSP the elements of novelty also constitute the greatest complication. The basic idea is that the social movements reach the political terrain and give themselves their own political expression. However, this idea is not completely clear and it is not easy to apply. For the centralised political organisations without a lot of members, it is relatively easy to take decisions on conjunctural problems and questions of perspective. Such an approach is less obvious in the trade unions and mass social organisations which have to take their decisions in periodic national meetings, where sectoral problems and concrete struggles make it more difficult for leaders to analyse the conjuncture and grasp political and social tasks. Within such a logic, there is the risk of a double deformation of the initial spirit of the FSP:

1. Inasmuch as the social leaders are obliged to express themselves without consulting their members;

2. Inasmuch as they decide to keep quiet and leave the political elaboration to the "specialists" of the parties.

We should concern ourselves from now on with setting rules which counterbalance this intrinsic weakness of the social organisations.

However, another problem is posed in relation to the trade union organisations. Many of them, like the CUT primarily, decided at their congresses to promote the foundation of the FSP as a political project of the workers and the people. It's one thing to contribute to such a foundation, another to transform the trade union into a political current which, moreover, will not be the only one inside the trade union itself. The historic necessity of the working class having its own political expression, a necessity that nobody can challenge, is one thing; that this political representation is held to represent all the members of a trade union organisation is another. In principle, the best solution would be building a single organisation of workers and people including and respecting the expressions and multiple tendencies that exist.

However, the reality we have inherited is more complex. A solution is needed which, on the basis of a political unification project, guarantees the political autonomy of the social organisations and their distinct non-programmatic traits, structural and functional. Thus, if the majority of an organisation sympathises with the FSP, those who composed it would act as militants of the FSP, while respecting differences on the trade union or social terrain. In cases where militants of the FSP are in the minority in their mass organisations, they should have the possibility of organising themselves

internally as a socio-political current.

In a context of war such as exists in Colombia, the construction of a political force exploiting the narrow democratic space that remains differs from all previous experiences in Latin America. In Brazil the PT emerged from the context of a dictatorship that had crushed the armed revolt; in Uruguay, there was a process of consolidation of forces after the decline of the urban guerrilla movement and the clandestine survival throughout the dictatorship; in El Salvador, the new situation was the product of a political negotiation putting an end to an armed conflict. In Colombia, there was a strong tradition of "combination of all forms of struggle", which included, on the political and military terrain, parallel constructions on the basis of the same political project. For us, such a strategy is exhausted, as is shown in practice. Following the massacres which put an end to the project of the Union Patriótica, the forces of armed rebellion no longer seek to build legal political arms and the left political forces do not consider such a strategy valid in this phase of the war, because of the existence of paramilitary forces doing what was previously the state's dirty work.

That is why the FSP affirms its organic autonomy in relation to the projects of armed rebellion, advancing critiques and noting that there are mutually recognised programmatic and methodological divergences. Such an approach is not the product of a political manoeuvre. It expresses a real differentiation between the left which leads the armed struggle and the left which exploits the social spaces and the very limited democratic conquests that remain. None of the two parties rules out possible convergences in a post-conflict framework.

The problem for the FSP is how to build itself as an intransigent defender of political democracy, social

transformations and human rights, in the midst of a war, whereas any criticism of the system, its accords with the IMF and "Plan Colombia" is considered subversive by the militarists and the right. It remains to be seen to what extent the system will accept this civic option of the left affirming itself without considering it as a military objective. On the other hand, the armed rebellion should respect the autonomy of the left represented by the FSP and approach divergences in a political debate, such as can be developed in the regions under the control of the FARC and in view of a national convention of the ELN.

The question is whether the social framework that "Plan Colombia" seeks to impose will lead to the suppression of the political spaces in the framework of neo-liberal legality; if international and national pressure obliges the government to break the links between the Army and the paramilitary forces and if attacks on political and trade union leaders, like that recently against trade union leader Wilson Borja will cease; if the criminalisation of social and political protest will stop and if the government will radically oppose the dirty war against the left; if a humanitarian accord can be reached leading to a resumption of dialogue with the FARC and if the convention of the ELN can take place in a demilitarised zone.

It will, nonetheless, be decisive that the FSP is capable of systematically defining orientations which respond to the demands and partial struggles of the people; that it can draw up a programme and platform of struggles which contributes to the reconstruction of the popular social organisations and that it is prepared to act as a political leadership at the level of the masses both in the course of the peace negotiations and in the framework that follows the conflict. Wars are won politically and the social benefits are drawn when they are over.

Old and new forms of struggle

10 February 2001, by [Eduardo Lucita](#)

For the third time in its current term - less than one year - the Argentine Government has had to face a general strike, with marches, protests and street meetings jamming the streets, roads and means of communication throughout the country in a combination of old and new forms of struggle and organisation corresponding to the transformations going on within Argentinean capitalism.

The capitalist restructuring that has taken place in the country since the mid-1970s acquired a vertiginous rhythm in the 1990s leading to profound changes in the socio-economic structure of Argentina. In opposition to this violent process of change, there has been a spreading of resistance throughout the whole country in the last decade. However, this enormous social conflict has never had a centralising focus that could guarantee its continuity. On the contrary fragmentation and dispersion were its characteristics, despite the numerous struggles and general strikes that also took place in the period.

This combination had a strong impact however on the relations of state and civil society and in the mediations of the traditional system of representation. The parties, the institutions of parliamentary democracy and the unions, had all internalised the crisis of the interventionist state [1] characteristic of populism and proved unable to channel social conflict, or at least encountered serious difficulties in doing so. In an economic and political context that differed from the previous

period, the social movement has searched for new paths through which to raise and express its resistance to the advance of the neo-liberal order that day-by-day reduces the living conditions of the workers and lower classes.

The so-called *cortes de ruta* (mass roadblocks) which first appeared at the beginning of the 1990s have extended to practically every part of the country - in large and medium sized cities, localities and towns, and rural areas. They appeared as the form of autonomous self-organisation characteristic of this period, used by part of society to express resistance to conditions of increasing day-to-day impoverishment.

According to a recent study by the liberal Centre of Studies of the New Majority, "the *cortes de ruta* are replacing strikes... as an expression of social protest". This is expressed in the following figures.

Industrial conflicts reached a peak in the period 1986/89, climbing to 3,575, falling in 1990/94 to 2,222 and in 1995/2000 to 1,228. On the other hand the evolution of the *cortes* showed the following sequence: 1997:140; 1998: 51; 1999: 252 and in the first ten months of 2000: 238.

"The average appearance of a *corte de ruta* has been one every 2.6 days in 1997, one every 7.1 in 1998, one every 1.4 last year and so far this year one every 1.2 days" [3] question what they call a "superficial vision" that assigns the motor role in the *cortes* only to the structurally unemployed demanding

work. In fact the forces driving the *cortes* include a variety of social subjects according to the objectives being pursued in each case.

These include workers (employed or not), the structurally unemployed and diverse fractions of the petty bourgeoisie - farmers or raisers of livestock, small businesses, students - who have mobilised in order to keep their jobs or subsidies for working class communities: against arrears in pay or reductions of salary: in support of demands for reductions in taxes: for easy credit: for the reconnection of public services cut off for non payment (gas and electricity): for the creation of jobs, for diverse state subsidies (food, medicine, clothing, building materials, hospitals, transport, the refurbishment of public schools, the paving of streets) that improve the quality of life of the people.

All of this has built a unity of demands which is articulated in a complex form - some demands through their immediate character cannot go beyond the level of existing political consciousness but others exceed it - those which demand changes in policy at the state, provincial or local level. In many cases this diversity of subjects and demands comes together in a single *corte* leading to a mobilisation with strong popular support.

This is particularly the case for *cortes* in medium sized cities which have developed around a hegemonic activity - mineral, oil, railways, oil - in general centralised in a state enterprise. [