



## IV362 - December 2004

### The centrality of the Palestinian question

9 December 2004, by **Michel Warschawski**

It is of the highest importance that the world anti-war movement roots itself in the Arab world which is the front line of the imperialist offensive which is currently waging two battles, in Iraq and in Palestine.



Israeli as well as Syrian-Lebanese law makes participation in the Beirut conference impossible for my Israeli colleagues of the "Alternative Information Center" (AIC). It is nonetheless important to establish a clear distinction. The Arab decision concerning the Israelis stems from their legitimate battle against the normalization of relations with Israel, while the Israeli law which forbids its citizens from traveling in Arab countries is based on a deliberate policy seeking to prevent any cooperation among activists; more precisely any type of cooperation whose objective is not "normalization" (i.e. the creation of a false impression of peace and normality) but rather cooperation with the aim of coordinating our struggles against imperialist war, colonialist Zionism and the occupations in our region.

In this letter, I want to stress this global war as well as the anti-war movement and the centrality of the Palestinian question. Why Palestine is so important in the eyes of millions of

activists in civil and political society. Why, in every demonstration against neoliberalism or against the war, is the Palestinian flag omnipresent, much more than the Iraqi or any other flag? Is it because the Israeli occupation is the most barbarous or murderous? No, unhappily, there are situations which are worse, like that in Chechnya where the Russian army is carrying out a veritable genocide.

Is it because the Palestinian national movement is a source of inspiration for the peoples of the world? No, there are movements of national liberation which are more efficacious and closer to victory than the Palestinian movement.

Some "friends of Israel" will claim that the centrality of the question of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the confirmation of the anti-Semitism of the anti-war and anti-globalization militants. I cannot subscribe to this quite defamatory accusation, knowing how our movements in Europe, Africa, America or Asia have always been in the vanguard of the struggles against racism including of course anti-Semitism, which is not the case with the "friends of Israel"

In my view, the centrality of the Palestinian question is explained by the fact that more than any other conflict on our planet, it concentrates the stakes of the global war launched by the Bush administration and its

allies.

In reality, the Palestinian question was the laboratory of this war. All the methods, arguments and justifications, all the images and techniques were tried in Palestine before being put into practice elsewhere in the world. If we look at the "check points" in Iraq, we have to note that they are carbon copies of the "control points" in Palestine. If we also look at the terrible images of torture in Iraqi prisons, most of these are old Israeli methods. The concept of unilateralism, the declaration that the Geneva conventions and more generally the post world War 2 political order are no longer pertinent. The framework of Bush's new strategy was at the heart of the Israeli policy of the last ten years. Again, since 2000, Israel has waged a preventive, global and permanent war against the Palestinians, who are more than enemies for they are perceived as an "existential threat".

Remind you of anything? Some try to explain the similarity between the strategies of Bush and Sharon as the result of a "Jewish conspiracy" behind the US president, manipulating him to implement policies serving Israeli interests.

However, there is a simpler explanation, that over the last 15 years, a group of US, Israeli and European politicians, experts, retired



officers and businessmen have together drawn up a new vision of the world, a new global strategy after the fall of the Soviet bloc.

Some of them had relations with the Israeli Likud party. They are known as neoconservatives, and in various research centres and think tanks they have developed the concept of the "Islamist menace", "the clash of civilizations", "the global preventive war".



Their main hypotheses are the global political order established after the victory over fascism is no longer relevant, that the new threat is no longer communism, "the end of history" but Islamist terrorism and that the US has the right to protect the world against this menace, that Israel is at the centre of this new world war and that US unilateralism should replace UN multilateralism. The Israeli neoconservatives came to power with Netanyahu and his gang in 1996, five years before coming to power in Washington: that's why one has the impression that the US administration copies Israeli methods. To some extent Israeli policy against the Palestinians is a kind of local

laboratory for the neoconservative strategy on a global scale. This strategy is based on the recolonization of the world, imposing the domination of the US and its allies through local collaborators, thus establishing a system of global apartheid.

That has foundered in Palestine as it is now foundering in Iraq, thanks to the extraordinary resistance of the peoples, even in the face of an unlimited military power.

It is by definition a unilateral strategy using preventive war in the goal of neutralizing the future challenges to their global domination. At the beginning of the 21st century, there are no longer local conflicts but rather local battles of the same neocolonial war between on the one hand US imperialism and its allies and on the other the peoples of the planet who resist global capitalism and colonial domination.

The second reason for the centrality of the Palestinian question is that the front line of this global, permanent and preventive war is situated on the frontline where Israel is building the apartheid wall. To the east of the wall, in Qualquilya and Tulkarm, begins the axis of evil, the "rogue states"; to the west of the wall, in Kfar Saba and Zur Yigal begins Bush's civilization. Israel is in the front line of civilization

combating the barbarians, Palestine is in the first line of the gigantic army of peoples of the world who fight against the civilization of MacDonald, Microsoft, Mitsubishi and Lagardère.

The wall is not only the apartheid wall between Israelis and Palestinians, it is a universal apartheid wall which separates the world into two global social forces, leading a war to life, to death on a planetary scale. The existence of a huge movement for global justice and against the war, even inside the imperialist states, is an enormous challenge to the strategy of apartheid which tries to deliver the world to a "clash of civilizations". This is also the case in Israel with the existence of an anti-colonialist movement, modest in size but crucial in its capacity to challenge in its daily activities the setting up of an apartheid system on a huge scale and a policy of permanent, preventive and colonial war against the Palestinian people.

As long as we are ready to combat colonialism and occupation, as long there are soldiers refusing to serve in an army of occupation and men and women who will fight for a true cohabitation, "ta ayush" between Jews and Arabs, the chances of avoiding a catastrophe for the peoples of the region will be increased.

## America Goddam

9 December 2004, by **David Finkel**



That's somewhat of a caricature, obviously, but let me briefly pursue the parallel. The government of the Islamic Republic brought its people to virtual ruin in the Iran-Iraq Gulf War of the 1980s, and has run the Iranian economy about as far into the ground as is possible for a country with such oil wealth; yet the regime has survived and maintained a powerful social base, even though much of the

population loathes and despises it.

The Republican right wing in the United States dragged the country into a war that was based on lies and, it's now clear, that cannot be won. Its fiscal subsidize-the-rich and military spending policies have produced budget deficits that pose the real danger of full financial meltdown in the next economic downturn.

On top of that have come the torture photos from Abu Ghraib, the Halliburton war profiteering, the

collapse of Enron, the health care crisis and the taunts of Osama ("I'm back") bin Laden.

The Democrats and, it must be admitted, much of the Left that might have known better, assumed that John Kerry had this election in the bag, requiring only a large turnout from the African American community and other sectors alienated by the Bush gang and furious over the stolen 2000 election.

The conventional pollsters, we were



assured, had it all wrong when they showed an extremely tight race with a slight edge for Bush. They were missing the youth vote, the kids with cell phones who weren't in the phone book. And this time, the Democrats were mobilizing their base and their legal apparatus to check the harassment and "suppress the vote" tactics of the right. Kerry would win and it wouldn't even be that close.

The calculation was half right. The Black vote, above all, was there. The antiwar vote, taken for granted by the Democrats with their pro-war candidate, was there. (Ralph Nader and Peter Camejo, the independent antiwar campaign, got 390,000 votes nationwide - about one-seventh of Ralph's vote in 2000, and not even what he received when he ran a barely visible frayed-shoestring campaign in 1996. As for David Cobb, the Green Party candidate, his vote of slightly over 75,000 is too sad even to laugh at.)

Labor poured tens of millions into anti-Bush ads, voter turnout and lawsuits to keep Nader/Camejo off the ballot in many states. The problem was that something else was there, too, which the pollsters saw but the left didn't - the mobilization of the rightwing religious vote. There's the America-as-Iran factor.

Kerry could have won, ironically despite losing the nationwide popular vote by a three million margin, if he had taken Ohio, which he might have

done had the gay-marriage ban not been on the state ballot. Make no mistake, however: Such an outcome would have been a fluke. The actual result reflects the reality - the mainly white religious conservative vote has made the Republicans the governing party in the United States.



### A sad day

It's important neither to disrespect the folks who vote this way on "moral values", nor to pander to them. The Democratic Party does both, while the Republicans mobilize them, and in essence there goes the election.

The bulk of this religious conservative vote is made up of white people, either working class or middle class of very modest incomes. For a complex set of reasons, they are voting for the party that is most aggressively dedicated to screwing them. Their jobs are disappearing into the global marketplace, their social security (the U.S. term for old age pensions) are at risk of being privatized, their health is increasingly uninsured, their kids are one war away from getting the draft notices, and in the new capitalist order their lives are dominated by permanent indebtedness and insecurity.

Without even knowing it, these folks are among the first victims of the ultra-reactionary U.S. political order their votes have put in place. Why do they do it? That's a desperately

complicated question: For the moment, let's just say that the right wing knows how to expertly manipulate their fears and their moral concerns, while the Democratic leadership - no matter how far to the right they move - haven't a clue how to talk to them. When Kerry runs on about "colossal errors in judgment over Iraq" without even mentioning the morality of Abu Ghraib, well, you get the idea...

Ralph Nader was entirely correct on election night when he stated that ordinary people in America will not permanently put up with what the two corporate parties offer. The big unanswered question today, however, is how long that will take, and the stakes riding on that conundrum are incredibly high.

In this writer's opinion, the Republicans are in a position to dominate all levels of U.S. politics until they seriously screw up. In the violently unstable world that U.S. imperialism has created, and the prospects for a financial meltdown from the astonishing deficits that military spending and tax giveaways to the rich, the debacle may come sooner than later.

The question then will be whether there's a democratic, populist or socialist left with anything meaningful to say. The first step is to unchain the antiwar movement from a decaying Democratic Party and begin to mobilize again.

## USA: an end or beginning?

**9 December 2004, by Solidarity**

At last it's over. For what it's worth, by the time this issue reaches our readers, we'll know the identity of the occupant of the White House for the next four years. As this issue of "Against the Current" was frantically completed on election night, it looked like Bush would win narrowly, but unlike 2000, without the stigma of a

blatantly stolen election - barring a reversal of fortune in Ohio that throws the outcome to contested provisional ballots. This editorial, then, reflects the assumption that Bush is the near-certain winner. This was the first election since 1968 in which war was the fundamental and defining question. Much has changed since,

but then as now, the pro-war Democrat lost to the pro-war Republican as the antiwar movement futilely chained itself to the lesser evil.

There are numerous other issues, of course, from so-called "values" to the economy to the raw memories of the stolen election of 2000; but the



debacle that Iraq has become was the factor that made the Bush gang so vulnerable. It's been astonishing to see, on the one hand, the genuine energy and voter mobilization growing out of the popular anger over Bush's disastrous war; and on the other, the Democratic Party establishment's display of cynical contempt for its core antiwar supporters in running a "better war" campaign.

The politics of John Kerry fit snugly into what used to be called, when such a thing existed, the moderate wing of the Republican Party. Perhaps this election's greatest irony was the desperate effort of the U.S. peace movement to rescue Kerry. And in return for their efforts on his behalf, the leaders of this movement got from Kerry exactly what they asked: nothing, absolutely nothing.

Might a Democratic candidate running against Bush's war, instead of a dubious plan to wage it better, have had a better showing? That's an abstraction; the Democratic Party is a party of imperialism, which doesn't oppose war when the guns are firing, regardless of what its constituents think. Could the antiwar movement have had a greater impact with an independent strategy, conceivably by backing Ralph Nader's independent campaign or the Green Party? The answer to that, sadly, we'll never know.

The Democrats had the antiwar vote, which they took for granted. The Republicans, on the other hand, had the great bulk of the evangelical vote, which is a secret of success in this respect: Some millions of working people (mostly though not exclusively white), vote on religious grounds for the party that is most firmly committed to screwing them on issues of health care, living wages and social security. As they say, only in America.

The broader striking feature of this presidential election was the gulf between the campaign and the profound crises confronting this society and the world. Consider the Middle East alone: the intractable mess of occupation and incipient civil war that imperialism has produced in Iraq; the just-under-the-radar threat of a U.S. or Israeli "pre-emptive" strike

against Iran; the destruction of Palestine; mass murder, population removal and starvation in Darfur.

Add to this the devastating impact of runaway corporate globalization and catastrophic climate change; the profound growth of inequality in Latin America as hundreds of millions become poorer while a thin elite grows affluent; China's extraordinary economic growth and equally explosive social struggles and ecological crisis; the virtual implosion of Russia; the ravages of HIV/AIDS in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, and the threat of avian flu or new global plagues.

## War and chaos

It was in mid-September that Kerry's inner circle brought to his attention startling new polling results, showing that a decisive majority of likely voters (sixty percent, plus or minus three percent with a .95 confidence level) strongly preferred a candidate who showed tangible signs of being physiologically alive.

By failing throughout August to display such evidence, Kerry had fallen so far behind that it was looking like Bush would win the election without even having to steal it. Responding in the nick of time, the Democratic nominee delivered himself of a major critical address on the subject of Bush's mishandling of Iraq and the "war on terror."



In 47 minutes, Kerry discussed the administration's diplomatic debacle in the United Nations, the weapons inspectors, the United States' international allies and the government's own intelligence estimates on prospects for post-conquest Iraq.

The astonishing feature of this speech was what Kerry never mentioned: Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo; the torture and humiliation of prisoners, including cases of fatal beatings and the rapes of children in detention. The omission wasn't accidental, as the subject was

not broached during the supposedly "pivotal presidential debate" of September 30 on foreign policy.

In a properly functioning democracy, every official up the chain of command that presided over the Abu Ghraib atrocities, up to and including the Secretary of Defense, would be finished, and the government itself would be forced out over these revelations. In the United States of America, the power that presumes to show Iraq how to build democracy, not only does the government not fall but the opposition party refuses even to make such crimes an election issue!

As much as the Democrats genuinely wanted to defeat Bush, they remain a loyal party of U.S. imperialism. They could not afford, and did not wish, to label the Bush gang's acts in Iraq what they actually are: war crimes and crimes against humanity (the bombing of civilian neighborhoods and torture of prisoners), committed in the course of an invasion openly described as illegal by the United Nations Secretary-General.

Whatever their critique of "this administration's colossal error in judgment," Kerry and the Democrats couldn't and wouldn't open a discussion before the U.S. public on the present real condition of the Iraqi adventure. The "optimistic" scenario is that Iraq might barely hold together, with a ramshackle quasi-parliamentary system and a "strong man" regime backed up by the U.S. military. The more likely outcomes are a disaster almost beyond imagining, with the country more or less dissolving or imploding in 1970s Lebanon style.

Behind the debate on "errors of judgment," the Democratic opposition actually serves as part of the filtering mechanism that keeps most of the truth from slipping through. The truth is this: To carry out the exercise of an election in Iraq scheduled for January will require a "coalition" military offensive that will claim, probably, Iraqi civilian lives in the thousands. But if that long-touted election were to be deferred, Iraq might disintegrate.

The Democrats, hoping that John Kerry would "succeed in the mission



in Iraq" by getting major military and financial support from U.S. allies, couldn't say what most of the world knows, which is that no Middle Eastern government or European military power in its right mind would sink into that mess. (As George Bush might remind us, "You forgot Poland." Our point exactly.)

## Homeland Insecurity

Inevitably, wars of imperial conquest have fed back into our own society. The culture of fear that the Bush regime has so crudely exploited since 9/11 has enabled this government to shred the Bill of Rights through the USA PATRIOT Act, indefinite detentions in Guantanamo without charges or trials, and the return of ethnic and racial profiling.

Ironically, from the standpoint of the long-term health and stability of American capitalism, this administration may be remembered as the most destructive in history. Outrageous tax giveaways to the rich and corporate America have brought on a structural budget crisis with half-trillion dollar annual federal deficits stretching into the indefinite future. It's difficult to imagine what fiscal options will be available to whatever government is in office during the next economic downturn.

## "Suppress the Vote"

Within the contests over control of the White House, Congress and the courts, struggles of equal or even greater ultimate importance were raging over the future of democratic politics in the United States. On the right, obviously, Republican operatives and government machinery were flagrantly mobilized to "suppress the Black vote" - as Michigan Republican official John Papageorge openly put it, before his party leadership had him bound, gagged and stuffed in a closet for the duration of the campaign.

On the Democratic side, this election was about not only defeating Bush but also, they hoped, wiping out permanently any independent challenge from the social justice movement. That's why the Democrats unleashed a four-year Hate Nader campaign right after the 2000 election, and in 2004 expended as many resources to keeping Nader off state ballots as in trying to stop Republicans from stealing the election.

The Democrats' strategy of running as moderate conservatives depends critically on the absence of alternatives challenging corporate power. The vacuum on the left enables the Democrats to take labor and especially Black votes for granted as they chase the ever-rightward-moving "center."

The importance of such an alternative - and of giving it an expression through a solid and well-rooted new political party - is above all why Ralph Nader, Peter Camejo and their supporters deserve credit for their

courage and perseverance in seeing the campaign through to the end. We repeat now what we said in 2000: If you agreed with Ralph Nader's message (or that of the Green Party) but voted Democratic to defeat Bush, you have wasted your vote. Now comes the even harder part. First, in a difficult post-election climate, there's the urgent need to remobilize the antiwar movement on many levels - from mass protests as Iraqi population centers like Falluja are pounded to dust, to giving moral and legal support to military resisters, to building upon the deep-seated popular fears of the return of the draft.

Second, the gulf that opened up in the Green Party between supporters of Nader/Camejo and David Cobb/Pat LaMarche must be bridged. At its best, the Green Party has the potential to become an authentic third party with a substantial African American and Latino leadership. To accomplish this will require both a spirit of reconciliation and willingness to grapple with structural problems that left many Green activists feeling disenfranchised this year. Finally, the left in the United States needs to confront a difficult political period realistically, but without panic. A government headed by right-wing extremists has been returned to power, to preside over a divided country and a potential for real catastrophe in Iraq. Our first priority as always must be building the movements, from the ground up. How the movements respond will determine whether the end of this election marks the end of the hopes inspired in 1999 by Seattle, or a new beginning.

## Third European Social Forum

### 9 December 2004



FI rally at the ESF

More than 25,000 people from 70 countries, hundreds of interesting discussion forums, a demonstration of tens of thousands, an Assembly of Social Movements which called for a

central demonstration on 19th March 2005, against war, racism and the neoliberal Europe, against privatization, against the Bolkenstein proposals and attacks on work time,



for a Europe of human rights and for solidarity between the people - these are some of the successes of the London Forum.

There were weaknesses as well. No real women's assembly, which had been a big success in Paris-St Denis last year, marginalization of the unemployed and casualized workers, under-estimation of the importance of the fight against the neoliberal European Constitution. But for an ESF held in the heart of the neoliberal laboratory it was an encouraging

success.

Among the various plenaries, seminars and working groups which took place at the third European Social Forum in London in October 2004, that on "strategies for social transformation" attracted the interest of many delegates. Organized by the British reviews Socialist Resistance and Red Pepper, the Transnational Institute of Amsterdam and the two networks of reviews, Project K and Transform, this session benefited from the presence of

John Holloway (known particularly for his book *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*), Hilary Wainwright (author of *Reclaim the State, Adventures in Popular Democracy*), Phil Hearse (an editor of *Socialist Resistance* and regular collaborator of *International Viewpoint*) and Fausto Bertinotti (leader of the Party of Communist Refoundation of Italy). We reproduce here [a report of the discussion from Jaime Pastor](#) and [a transcript of the speech given by Phil Hearse](#).

# European Social Forum: strategies for changing the world

9 December 2004, by **Jaime Pastor**



Phil Hearse challenged the theses of Holloway

John Holloway began his intervention by noting that there were two points on which it is easy to agree: capitalism is a catastrophe for humanity and we do not know how to bring about change. From that starting point we have to ask whether we should build a party and try to take state power or, on the contrary, turn our backs on the state and to try to achieve change outside it. Holloway is clearly in favour of the second option, given his balance sheet that the history of the left centred on the question of state power during the 20th century is one of betrayal of emancipatory ideals once it arrived in power. This, according to Holloway, is due to the fact that when we enter into a relation with the state, there is no symmetry between this institution and ourselves, so the generalized tendency is to push us in a direction opposed to the self-determination of those "below". He took as an example of what he suggests the strategy of the EZLN and the creation of the Assemblies of Good Government. He considers that by this

road, while ceasing to collaborate in the construction of capitalism, it will be possible to advance towards a new way that will make possible another world. Neither an electoral strategy, nor waiting for the "last crisis" of capitalism can be used to build an alternative.

While starting by expressing her agreement with many things said by Holloway in his assessment of the left, Hilary Wainwright expressed disagreement with his proposals. She considered that Holloway made a false polarization between the strategy of self-organization on the one hand, and power on the other: "the fact that there were defeats does not mean that everything we tried to do was bad". Work in the representative institutions cannot be abandoned, we have to be at their centre and to put them at the service of a participatory democracy. She argued that the experiments made at local level in many places, including in London before they were stopped by Margaret Thatcher, show that it is possible to advance in this direction. Obviously the goal must also be to challenge capitalist relations within the framework of the State. The real problem consists in defining what should be the subject of this radical

change to which we aspire: this is the aspect on which we are confronted with the need for reinventing the party and the type of the relations it has with the social movements, with the aim of finding new ways of making policy and building the organization.

Phil Hearse challenged the theses of Holloway, starting from an assessment of what occurred recently in Argentina: the high level of self-organization and radicalization of the movement which took place there during recent years found itself in a major political dead end, which allowed the re-composition of the "political establishment" and increasing fragmentation of the forces which had led this process. The incapacity of the left to create a regroupment capable of meeting the needs for this movement was the fundamental weakness that explains the relative retreat that we see today. He also referred to the case of Venezuela, as a different experience, because there the process of popular mobilization, against a putschist line and in support of Chavez, appears to have propelled certain sectors towards their own self-organization and, at the same time, to take up the slogan "we want to be the government". As for



the Zapatistas, the problem they confront and that they cannot solve alone, is the major causes of poverty in the Indian communities, which would require a change at the level of the whole country.

Fausto Bertinotti started by underlining the fact that there is today more capitalism than ever, than there is more exploitation of labour, both in intensity and in scope, and more destruction of nature, with China as an extreme demonstration of all that. In these conditions that we are confronted with the challenge to the "welfare state" social compromise in Europe and that we must develop resistance to "the permanent war", which we are also suffering on a social level. Casualization of work is the dominant trend and, as a result, the question of the revolutionary subject is not posed in relation to the manufacturing worker or the student as in the 1960s, but to a very plural subject from the point of view of social conditions and construction of identity. But for the need for revolution to become relevant again, there would have to be a transformation of politics; and this needs new dialogue between parties, movements and associations, as happens at the European Social Forum and as his party tries to do in Italy.

There were many speakers in the ensuing discussion. I will limit myself to mentioning some of the most significant. Alex Callinicos (of the British SWP) polemicized both with

Holloway and Wainwright. He pointed out to the former that even if we want "to turn the back on the State" this latter does not turn its back on the people, especially when they are fighting and self-organized, as we have seen in Argentina, in Mexico or currently in the European Union against antisocial policies. To the latter, he said that if he agreed with working in the representative institutions, it was not to reform them but to replace them with another type of democracy and state. Jose Iriarte "Bikila" (of the Basque organization Zutik) indicated his agreement with Holloway in regard to the self-critical assessment of the left during the twentieth century, but he recalled that in any revolutionary situation the question of power is posed openly. If one does not replace the existing official power by that founded on workers' and people's self-organization, the first is quickly revived and puts an end to the second. He used the example of June 1936 in Catalonia and the failure of the CNT to illustrate his thesis. Finally there were many contributions by Italian delegates, indicating both their agreement with Bertinotti and their doubts on the compatibility between a governmental alliance with the centre-left Olive Tree and the theses he defended on the reform of politics.

In his final intervention Bertinotti nuanced these doubts, stating that participation in a government must be seen as one means of political action but that we should always start from

the presence in the movements which should be the principal function of an oppositional left wanting to encourage forms of self-organization and dual power.

Hearse insisted that we should beware of the mythical concept of the revolution as something that explodes suddenly; that the major problem for the left is to progress towards an accumulation of forces which will make it possible to win hegemony in situations which could become revolutionary crises. Wainwright underlined that, in the context of the fight against neoliberalism, we should distinguish between the aspects where we fight against the state and those where we demand policies that are favourable to the workers, taking the example of the need to prevent privatizations. Finally Holloway reaffirmed his rejection of any strategy of taking power (according to him, what happened in Russia and October 1917 was a defeat). He said clearly that he did not deny that movements could have a certain type of relation with the state (always to be against it) and he rejected the need for a party to build a new subject of overall change.

To sum up: this was a very interesting discussion that will no doubt continue in other forums and in writing. One regret - the absence for health reasons of our comrade Daniel Bensaïd, whose contribution would no doubt have further enriched the discussion. This report is taken from the site <http://www.espacioalternativo.org>

# European Social Forum: take the power to change the world

9 December 2004, by **Phil Hearse**



## ESF audience

Subcommandante Marcos focussed

this debate in the 1990s by his declaration that the Zapatistas refused, as a matter of principle, to fight for state power. I don't want to attack Marcos too much, because in my opinion the real start of the anti-

globalization movement and the fightback against neoliberalism was the Zapatista uprising on January 1st 1994. But Marcos and those who think like him are wrong to believe that anti-capitalist social transformation is



possible without dealing with the question of state power, by simply turning your back on the state.

This can be seen by looking at some crucial contemporary social struggles. First, Argentina. In my opinion, in the last four years the social and political struggle in Argentina has been the most advanced in the world. When the Argentinean economy collapsed in December 2001, a direct result of "dollarization" and extreme neo-liberal policies, the savings and livelihood of millions of working class and middle class Argentineans was expropriated. This led to a massive social explosion.

As a consequence a massive process of self-organization developed, including the formation of neighbourhood and factory committees, the occupation of factories, which continued production under workers' self-management, the piqueteros movement, and many other forms of struggle. Self-organization on a massive scale, while all the capitalist parties and leaders were completely discredited. But where is this movement today? It has largely disappeared or even been co-opted into government work projects at poverty wages.

Naomi Klein wrote a widely published article in which she said the decline of the mass movement was because of the sectarianism of the far-left organizations. She claims they brought their ideological arguments and petty squabbles into the movement, and as a consequence the masses became bored and frustrated and went home.

I don't discount the possibility that there is an element of truth in what she says about these organizations, but it is not the fundamental problem. The basic problem is that there was no big anti-capitalist party capable of uniting the movements and struggles in an overall project for taking the power. That's my criticism of the Argentinean left groups - that, despite all the opportunities, they failed to create such a party on a united basis, when they have had more opportunities in the past 30 years than most countries.

The decline of the Argentinean movement is a massive tragedy

because for a time in that country there was a real vacuum at the top, and an anti-capitalist way out of the crisis was possible. Now we just have capitalist normalization and the return of the corrupt and right-wing Peronists. As James Petras has put it, "The original strength of the popular uprising - its spontaneous, mass, autonomous character - became its strategic weakness, the absence of a national leadership capable of unifying the diverse forces behind a coherent program aimed at taking state power." (This article is available at [www.rebellion.com](http://www.rebellion.com))

The same problem is posed in a different context in Venezuela. In 2003 the London "Observer" newspaper published a very interesting article reporting from the massively self-organized barrios in Caracas. The reporter told of how the people were taking over the schools and utilities like water and electricity, organizing literacy campaigns and so on. One militant told the reporter "We don't want a government like that of Hugo Chavez to represent us, we want to be the government." This article also told of some hostility to the Bolivarian circles among some barrio activists, accusing them of dragging politics into the struggles.

I sympathize with these antigovernment and anti-state feelings, but ultimately they are a dead-end and a trap. Why is there this tremendous Bolivarian process, this enormous level of struggle against the right wing and the bourgeoisie, in Venezuela? Because of the election of a left-wing government. Where have all the resources come from for the literacy campaign, the pension and wage increases, the free children's breakfast programme? From the government, of course.

If you say we must turn your back on the state and power, then it becomes a matter of indifference, completely irrelevant, if Hugo Chavez is defeated in the right-wing referendum, because all that is about the state and doesn't concern us.

In reality, if Hugo Chavez had been defeated in the August 23 referendum it would have been a massive defeat for the Bolivarian revolutionary

process - in fact it would have ended it in a carnival of reaction. Vast numbers of the working class any kind of all-out attack. In the future, this could easily change. and the poor understood this and did not turn their backs on Chavez and their revolution. They came down from the barrios in their millions to vote for Chavez and deal the hysterical bourgeoisie, the reactionary petty-bourgeoisie and US imperialism a fearful political blow.

Now I don't say that Chavez, a left-wing populist, is the final answer to socialist transformation in Venezuela. I do say we defend him against the right wing. But to progress towards the victory of the Bolivarian revolution, the Venezuelan masses need to create their own self-organized system of national administration. That's not turning your back on the state, that's creating a different kind of state and a different kind of power.

You can see the same thing in Mexico. The Zapatistas have created their own self-organized space in the highland villages of Chiapas, formally declaring their own independent municipalities in September 2003. All that is true. But it is the product of very particular circumstances, of geographical isolation and the fact that these communities are defended by the whole of Mexican civil society. For the moment, it is too politically dangerous for the Mexican bourgeoisie to launch

However, autonomy has not solved the problems of the Zapatista base communities. They are impoverished communities, and the people there share the same problems of health, of nutrition and of living standards of poor people in many other parts of Mexico. Because the Zapatista movement raises questions which cannot be solved simply at the level of their own communities, or even at the level of the whole of Chiapas. To bring the indigenous people of Chiapas out of poverty, you need social transformation at (at least) an all-Mexico level.

I will pose John Holloway a question. The Zapatistas have created their own liberated zone, through their own uprising. But suppose the same thing happened all across Mexico - the



masses rose up and took control of their own workplaces and communities. Now, shouldn't these self-organised communities in Veracruz, in Monterrey, in Mexico City, in Guadalajara - shouldn't they talk to each other? Plan their futures together? Coordinate their economic plans in an overall plan of social development of Mexico? Elect recallable representatives to an all-Mexico assembly to decide these things? Co-ordinate their response to the massive counterrevolutionary wave which is sure to hit them from inside and outside the country?

Obviously they should. If they simply turn their back on the Mexican capitalist state without replacing it with something else - well, the capitalist state will not turn its back on them. But if they do create their own national, self-governed coordination, then they will have created what is the slogan of the whole of the militant Mexican left - "Un gobierno obrera, campesino, indigena y popular" - workers', peasant, indigenous and popular

government. Not only that: they will have created an alternative form of power, an alternative form of state. Exactly what Marx called the "Commune state".

John Holloway rejects both any alternative form of state and any form of political party. In my opinion the refusal to form political parties of the left, and a refusal to fight for any alternative form of state power, are both disastrous choices.

Today in many parts of the world there is an enormous crisis of political representation of the working class and the oppressed, as a result of the old social democratic and Stalinist parties going off to the right. This threatens the presence of the working class in the national political arena; and far from being a positive thing, this has a negative impact, not only on the national political discourse, but on the struggles and mass campaigns as well. To see this, look at the example of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP).

The SSP now has six deputies in the

Scottish parliament and a significant electoral impact (up to 10% of the vote). Is this a bad thing, a diversion? I don't think so. In fact the activity of the SSP deputies, who are always on the picket lines outside factories, who have led the campaign against racist immigrations laws and the Iraq war, and who are regularly being arrested protesting outside the Faslane nuclear submarine base, is a positive factor in the struggles, and not counterposed to it.

Equally the existence of Rifondazione Comunista in Italy or the United Left in Spain is, for the moment at least, a very positive factor for the struggle. I agree with Antonio Gramsci: the political party is the "modern prince". Social struggle always strives to find a political representation, and this we cannot turn our backs on. Today means not trying to find largely mythical autonomous spaces in which we can try to hide from the state, but building united left parties on an anti-capitalist basis to propel the struggle forward. Another world is possible, but not without a revolution.

# Change the PRC's orientation!

9 December 2004, by **Flavia d'Angeli**



## PRC - poster

The theses presented by the Secretariat have the merit of basing the preparatory discussion for the congress on an overall analysis of the economic, political and social period, on the basis of which we should develop our political line. This breaks, at least in the pages of "Liberazione", with a debate centred on the need for the "lesser evil" to defeat the right and "save the party" a debate which often seems to dominate the discussion in the circles and federations.

## 1. Divergence in the analysis

It is on the basis of these elements of analysis that we can measure the scope of our first difference, which is significant. While it is certainly true - and this should be underlined - that the social movements in the last few years have scored points in stopping the spiralling crisis of credibility and self-confidence of any alternative proposal to capitalist globalization, it is false - and therefore dangerous for the movements themselves - to overestimate their structural capacity to overturn the existing social relationship of forces that they could have developed in such a short time. These movements are the result of a

defeat, that which closed the 20th century in the rubble of the Berlin Wall: a historic defeat. It is only by demanding the "right to patience" that new movements really make possible an alternative system to neoliberal fragmentation and war.

Although we should not underestimate the historical significance of the upturn in social confrontation and involvement which we have seen over the last few years, we should also note - this is where the proposed analysis is incomplete - that this renewal of commitment has not yet acquired a strength capable of fundamentally challenging the processes against which it is fighting, whether international dynamics such as the war, or those locally which are



eliminating or barbarically "reforming" jobs.

The movement, which has been and must remain central for our initiatives, draws its resources from itself, not by imposing on itself a political leap forward which would run the risk of cutting it off from its indispensable social base and thus weakening it.

How can we otherwise explain the fact that, faced with the enormous mobilizations which have marked the political diary over the last few years, "Politics" with a capital "P" does not seem to have changed, either in its programmes or even, symbolically, in its public representatives or leading circles?

That the centre left, which barely two years ago was challenged by the "girotondi" [1] is once again solidly in the saddle and not in the least inclined to either make a self-criticism or a change in orientation, as is continually evident from the positions that they take, from the defence of the Stability Pact to the laws on small and medium-size businesses. Even as far as the war is concerned - a question on which you cannot have a balancing act (you are either for or against) the Great Democratic Alliance (GAD) has succeeded in formulating a position that is objectively a retreat in relations to the positions of the movement. Thus we are in the paradoxical situation of a movement (and ourselves) which next Saturday will demonstrate for the withdrawal of the troops and an opposition, which we say should now be receptive to the demands on the movement, which is going to take to the streets in the coming weeks with an ambiguous position and which cannot even agree on the calendar for the votes in parliament.

## 2. Another political line is necessary

In this framework, which I have simply sketched out for obvious reasons, there is the need for another political line which, by centring on the development of the social movements and our place within them, would be

able to challenge the opposition at the level of programme and efficacy, starting from the need for a frontal opposition to the Berlusconi government. The strategy followed by the party in the last few months - of which I was never convinced - turns out to have been dangerously imprecise.

To state from the start that we are ready to make a governmental agreement, which accepting to postpone a clear programmatic discussion, while a good part of the centre left forces are turning away from serious opposition to the government runs the risk of leading us into a dead end. Rather than breaking the trap of the centre left we are going to rush into it. The first steps of the Great Democratic Alliance are not leading in a good direction. We are building a framework that is not in the least innovative, without even starting a serious programmatic confrontation and we accept the idea of "primaries", which we are told will make it possible for the movement's demands to be expressed, taking place on the leadership question.

We cannot build a new critical social actor without having an idea of its programme, that is to say of an alternative society. The concern with programme should be separated from the governmental question: it should come first, that is a condition in and of itself. It should serve in particular to harass and challenge the centre left on its capacity (or more probably incapacity) to represent the demands that emerge from the movements and the still unsatisfied social needs of the majority of the population.

We were wrong to leave aside the question of programme from our discussions with the opposition forces, because it is on the programmatic questions that we would at least be able to really measure the credibility of a real alternative to the rightwing government.

We cannot accept a "static" conception of the programme, split between a minimum and maximum. The idea of a "minimal" agreement, on the basis of which it would be possible to prepare a "maximum" programme, refers to a mechanism that has

already led the workers' movement to submission and defeat. On the other hand an acceptable programme would be that which today contains even partial elements of rupture sketching out a desirable perspective: reduction in working time, sliding scale of wages, nationalization of certain sectors of production, reduction in the army and military spending, turning around the policy of privatizations, that is to say clear signals of a change of direction. The fact that we all know now that with this centre left such a programme could not be proposed shows nothing other than the impossibility of a governmental agreement and the need for a radical change in our political line.

## 3. Another refoundation is possible

This party, in order to carry out the mission it gave itself, has changed several times since it was created. These were founding or refounding moments. The last congress seemed to have really decided a correct orientation, a renewed affirmation of the communist subject that led us to a break with the first Prodi government and to involve ourselves completely in the new movements, in some way since the Genoa events.

The new political turn proposed today is likely to lead to a reversal of this orientation, of this "new departure", by putting into question the very identity of the party and what is more important its "social identity". We cannot not be concerned, whatever our position, by the signals of disorientation of the party, which could lead us into a congress of disinterest, where we measure bitterness and fear rather than enthusiasm.

I think it is the very essence of the political proposals put forward by the secretariat that is at the origin of this situation. This is a strong statement but I cannot imagine the life of a collective body like a party, its state of health and capacity to react, without linking them to the political line. Otherwise we would be adhering to a



monolithic conception of the party and its members, who move forward like robots, leaving it up to the leading group to interpret the line. I think, on the contrary, that this party has learnt a lot more than we think from the movements and that it will react to the difficulties and lack of conviction.

I think that to lead the communist refoundation to a globalization government, however moderate,

completely changes the nature of this party to the point of putting in danger its very existence and a living community able to interact with society.

And I am sufficiently convinced on the other hand that there is still a space for our collective work to think that in returning to our previous inventiveness and thoroughgoing radicalism that marked the last years

we can take another road. This conviction leads me to believe that that it is possible to have a congress discussion that would make possible collective elaboration along the lines indicated by the comrades who signed the contribution "refoundation, refoundation, refoundation". By doing this I commit myself to working for the development of a broad and pluralist grouping of the critical left in the next congress.

## Left must help rebuild the unions

9 December 2004, by **Leo de Kleijn**



300,000 march

In the past fifteen years two main political forces emerged to the left of the social democracy. In 1989 the Dutch Communist Party (CPN), the Pacifist Socialist Party (PSP) and the PPR (left wing Christians) formed Groen Links, the Dutch Greens.

The ex-Maoist Socialistische Partij (SP) first entered parliament with two MPs in 1994. Before 1994 the SP had some strongholds in a number of regions, but never managed a breakthrough on the national political level. Basically the SP, as an outspoken socialist and anti-capitalist party, filled in the gap the disappearance of the CPN and the PSP had left behind.

From 1994 to 2002 the Netherlands was governed by so called "purple" coalitions (social-democrats, liberals and conservative liberals). The "purple" governments headed by prime minister Wim Kok, managed - with the help of a period of economic expansion in the 1990s - to strengthen corporatist social relations with the trade unions, keep wages relatively low and "reform" social security gradually on a neoliberal basis. Bill Clinton and Tony Blair hailed Wim Kok and his politics as a perfect example of the so-called Third Way. But the

downside of the "success" was further impoverishment of the unemployed and urban poor, and a growing underfunding of public services.

### Fortuyn

The SP (and to a lesser extent GroenLinks) were the only political opposition from the left and gained support in that period, both in membership and in electoral results. But they failed to organize substantial social struggle against the politics of "purple".

In the year before the general elections of 2002 the "purple" coalition collapsed. But it was not the left that took the initiative. In less than half a year the right wing populist Pim Fortuyn shook Dutch politics dramatically, with a combination of a popular critique of the deplorable state of public services, health care and education on the one hand, and on the other a xenophobic call for blaming the victims, above all migrants from Turkey and Morocco.

Fortuyn was shot dead just before election day, his party gained nearly 20 percent of the vote and entered a right wing government coalition headed by the Christian Democrat Balkenende. This coalition formulated a sharp right wing turn on social-economic, migration and cultural issues, but exploded in less than a

year due to the instability of Fortuyn's party, left without a leader.

The following elections of 2003 brought a comeback of the social democratic PvdA (from 15.1% to 27.2%), while GroenLinks got 5.1% and the SP 6.3% of the vote. Despite the growth of the PvdA, the Christian Democrats chose a right wing coalition, this time without Fortuyn's party, which dropped to 5.7%.

### 300,000 march

Facing economic depression, the second government headed by Balkenende succeeded in binding the trade unions in the autumn of 2003 to a new social contract. In exchange for some minor concessions on social security issues, the unions agreed on moderating wage demands to zero percent. This "cheap and easy deal" convinced the right wing parties that further steps to meet the Lisbon agenda were possible. In the spring of 2004 the union leaders were provoked with a new package to cut pensions and social benefits. It gave the unions no other choice then to mobilize their members, despite their lack of confidence that they were really able to do so successfully. The response of the rank and file surprised the right, the union leaders and the left. 300,000 people took to the streets of Amsterdam on October 2, and a series



of successful strikes followed.

The now proven ability to fight back has a direct impact on the relationship of forces, both on the social and political level. For sure, the union leaders will return back to their corporatist practices in the coming months or sooner. But they can only do so after substantial - in the eyes of the union membership - gains will have been made or if the struggle wavers and the unions are defeated.

## The left and the unions

Recent electoral polls show a majority for the left (PvdA, SP and GroenLinks), which is unprecedented in Dutch politics. The SP would get some 10% of the vote according to these polls.



### Solidarity

But the perspective of the majority of trade union activists, some of them organizing strikes for the first time in their lives, remains exclusively syndicalist, despite the fact that the struggle has a political character (against the government's policies).

The direct role of the left in the mobilizations is limited. GroenLinks and especially the SP participate actively in "Keer Het Tij", a coalition of social movements and the left that supports the trade union struggle and initiated the organization of the first Dutch Social Forum on November 26, 27 and 28. Apart from that, a coalition has been built of the major trade union federations, PvdA, SP and GroenLinks to prepare a referendum initiative if parliament agrees to the government's proposals.

But neither in GroenLinks nor in the SP is there a tradition of organized political work inside the unions. In the 1970s and 1980s the SP organized its own radical "union", Arbeidersmacht ("Workers Power"). Leaving Maoism behind in the 1990s, the feeling of a large number of party activists remains that the mass unions are social democratic institutions, not

really worth their while. The SP was successfully built as a party mobilizing locally door to door, not in the workplace. The mass union struggle has helped to change this feeling. Some of the 43,000 SP members are drawn actively into this fight as rank and file union members. Attempts are being made to organize union activists inside the party and to build a network of left wing trade unionists.

## Optimism

The mass mobilizations, the polls, the comeback of the left after the dark period of the Fortuyn revolt, leads to a considerable dose of over-optimism on the left. Certainly, the dynamic of the mobilizations in the last few months shows that it really is possible to resist the neoliberal agenda. Steps forward in building a left, anti-capitalist alternative can be made, and we have to make full use of the opportunities to do so.

But it is important to see that this struggle remains defensive, that it is primarily organized by relatively small and older layers of union activists who are for this moment fully supported by their union leaders, that the real dynamic of the struggle is based on a very basic rejection of the sharpest edges of government policies by the majority of the population, not on enthusiasm for the alternatives put forward by the left.

This over-optimism leads on the one hand to illusions that a left wing government of PvdA, SP and GroenLinks, that would solve the problems, is possible in the short term.

The leadership of the SP, for the first time in the history of the party, puts forward this perspective. But the PvdA remains so closely tied up with the basis of the neoliberal agenda, that it will, if it can, make a deal with the Christian Democrats after the next elections, whenever these may be. And in any case, if a left majority emerges and if the social democrats will step into a coalition with the left, it would degrade GroenLinks and/or the SP to playing the role the German Greens are playing at this very moment.

On the other hand, radical groups and organizations, and some SP activists, are putting forward a maximalist approach. Bringing down the government should be the perspective, everything else will be proof of "betrayal" by the union leadership. The problem is that they overestimate the possibility of winning the long and enduring fight that would be needed. For a battle like that a strong and rooted organization of the unions in the workplaces is needed. The current movement can help the workers to start and rebuild the unions as organizations that can fight for their rights. But for that to happen we need a victory on substantial issues in the current struggle, even if it is partial.

Of course, the worst case would happen if the trade union leaders were able to make an agreement with the government on similar terms to those of autumn 2003. This would frustrate the activists that took the lead in the struggle. We have to look very critically at the negotiations between the unions, the government and the employers that are now taking place. The outcome of these negotiations must be discussed democratically in the unions. The left should put forward the view that a deal only on pensions is not enough. The government will have to bend also on the issue of unemployment benefits and insurance for the disabled.

## Rebuilding the unions

Instead of just putting forward semi-radical slogans, the key role for the left at this moment is to help building and broadening the movement, organize solidarity campaigns with the strikes and above all take an active part in rebuilding the unions. Stronger and active union organization in the workplaces can help, in the coming years, to build up an opposition against the corporatist politics of the union leadership.

The battle now being fought should and will be just a starting point. Whether we will be facing a right wing government or a coalition which includes the PvdA, we will be confronted with new cuts and attacks



on working conditions in the coming years.

A substantial victory in the current struggle will help to rebuild both the

unions and - in the longer run - build an anti neoliberal, anti-capitalist alternative from the left.

# Building broad anti-capitalist parties - a necessary step

9 December 2004, by **François Sabado**

**The European Radical Left Tested Electorally** - Alex Callinicos

**The European elections and the anti-capitalist left** - Murray Smith

**A reply to Alex Callinicos** - Alan Thornett

## Political situation, anti-capitalist party and revolutionary party in Europe

The articles by Alex Callinicos and Murray Smith open a necessary discussion on the problems of orientation and construction in Europe. Unlike Callinicos, we do not start from the existence of so-called models: electoral coalitions of the "Respect" type, broad parties like the Scottish Socialist Party or electoral alliances like LCR-LO. These forms of political intervention or organization are too much the specific product of the history of the class struggles and the revolutionary movement of each country. They are not generalizable. We choose rather to start from the broad features of the political situation in Europe and clarify certain important questions of orientation.

## Political effects of bourgeois attacks

1 The situation in Europe is marked by the brutality of the new offensive

around neoliberal counter-reforms: the reduction of unemployment benefit and demolition of social security in Germany; pensions and social security reform and new privatizations in France; attacks on pensions, the health system and social security in Holland. After the "Thatcherism" of the 1980s in Britain, a new wave of deconstruction of the social relationships established after 1945 is underway. This radicalism of the capitalist attacks results from a sharpening of inter-imperialist competition in the framework of the current phase of globalization, with the European bourgeoisies seeking to carve out new margins of manoeuvre in relation to the USA and the Asian powers.

2 The brutality of these attacks creates new social and political tensions. This provokes social resistance through strikes, struggles and demonstrations (demonstrations in Germany against the Hartz 4 plan, strikes and demonstrations in France against pensions reform and the privatization of EDF, demonstrations and strikes in Holland) as well as a rejection of the ultra neoliberal policy of the governments: rejection of the neoliberal right in France and Italy but also of Schröder's SPD-Green government or Blair's government.

3 The brutality of these attacks also generates elements of political crisis: a crisis of political representation with the confirmation of high abstention rates in most countries, and a weakening of all the political apparatuses on the right and the left - how can a governmental party establish a social basis while

endorsing neoliberal restructuring? This weakening is accompanied by internal divisions, here again on both right and left. In France, the majority party is riven by a confrontation between the president of the Republic, Jacques Chirac and the future president of the party, Nicolas Sarkozy. On the left, although the general evolution of the majority sectors of the trade union movement and the institutional left in Europe is to the right, in a growing integration with social liberalism, fractures and divisions are emerging. In Germany a part of the union bureaucracy and the SPD, in the image of the posture of Oscar Lafontaine, opposes Schröder. In France, against all expectations, Laurent Fabius - one of those who incarnate social-liberalism - is calling for a "no" in the referendum on the European Constitution. The steamroller is such that it leads to fractures and sharp turns.

4 These evolutions repose the question of the analysis of social democracy and the left in general. Contrary to what is often presented by the British SWP, we do not think that the Socialist Parties have become bourgeois parties [rather than bourgeois workers' parties - tr note]. That has never been our analysis. In the same way, if we have underestimated the fact that the popular electorate can use the left to beat the right - but we were not the only ones, the most surprised being the socialists themselves - we explained in the documents of our last congress that in the framework of alternation, the socialist parties could win an electoral majority. What we have explained and what we maintain



is that under the pressures of neoliberal capitalist globalization, social democracy has undergone a process of "social-liberalization", with a rightwards shift in its politics and an advanced social interpenetration of its leadership with the highest levels of administration and the capitalist summits. We have noted that this process leads - in an uneven fashion - to the delinking of significant sectors of the popular classes from the organizations of the traditional left. In practice the improved electoral standing of the PS, or the stabilization of the PCF's electoral score, are not reflected in the growth of these parties, nor by a dynamic of reconstruction of the left. The electoral gains of the PS in 2003 are not reflected in a dynamic comparable to that of the 1970s with the Union of the Left or the developments of the Italian or Spanish CPs.

5 But all these struggles, all these confrontations, have until now ended in setbacks or social defeats. Neither the strength of the anti-war movement nor the dynamic of the movement for global justice has reversed the deep underlying tendencies of the situation. As a result, the capitalist offensive is deepening and, globally, the positions of the traditional workers' movement are pushed back. This has effects on the level of consciousness of broad sectors but it is not strong enough to outflank the trade union apparatuses, which accept the neoliberal framework. These defeats have effects on the morale of wage earners; and although, in certain historic circumstances, the experience and lessons of partial defeats have led to the development of workers' organizations, the social movements and the growth of class struggle currents, this is not the case today. The successive waves of struggles, but also setbacks, weigh on the radical currents. As Alex Callinicos puts it, "the relation of social and political struggles with the electoral process is extremely complex, combined and indirect" but it is this combination of factors that explains for example, the setback for the LCR-LO lists in France. As for the electoral results of the PRC in Italy, which have improved, we cannot consider them as those of a radical left organization "strictly speaking". In many aspects, it can be

placed on the radical left but its implantation as well as its electoral influence smack above all of a segment of the traditional communist movement.

## Anti-capitalist politics

6 In these conditions what are the key elements of an anti-capitalist political orientation? First, because revolutionaries "have no interests distinct from the working class", they must reaffirm a policy of unity and class independence. That requires a tactic of a united front of the workers and all their organizations - which we carry out through social mobilizations, of the anti-war movement or the movement for global justice, combined with the defence of an anti-capitalist programme. We would like to use this article to reject all the accusations that have been made against the LCR, claiming that we have been "external" to the movement of rejection of the right. Our stand against the government and the right - unity of action of all the social, trade union and political left - was first concretized in the struggles. This orientation was then translated into the electoral campaign, presenting our action as that of the real opposition against the government and the right. We did not, it is true, call for a vote for the left in the second round. This question is a question of electoral tactics, linked to the French particularities of the majority ballot over two rounds, so this is not the last word of a united front policy. We unceasingly, throughout the whole electoral campaign, made proposals for common action to the whole left. Our arguments differentiated between right and left. We have never had so much influence on the internal debates on the left. That is why, for any observer of French political life, the accusation of "anti-politics" does not stand. Since the presidential campaign of 2002, with Olivier Besancenot, we have never done so much "politics". But we did not call for a vote for the left, judging that, during these elections, to call for such a vote was to give a blank cheque to the SP leaders. Moreover, even if the majority of our voters did vote in the second

round for the left, few people have reproached us for our failure to call for a vote. For beyond the vote for the left, there is not the same type of relationship between the wage earners and the traditional left as existed in the 1930s or 1970s. A vote for the SP - or even for the French CP - is more a vote against the right than a vote of support for the policy of the SP. Once again, there are not, as in the 1930s or 1970s, interconnected relations between struggles, the organic growth of the reformist organizations and a political outcome to the struggles which would be a PS-PC government. The meaning of the call for a vote is not the same today as in the 1970s because the labour movement does not have the same relations with the reformist leaderships.

7 This tactic of the united front should be accompanied by the defence of an anticapitalist programme, what we have called in France an emergency social and democratic plan in the service of the workers. From this viewpoint, we would like to stipulate that our electoral campaigns, contrary to what Alex Callinicos has said, are not "openly revolutionary socialist", in the sense that our electoral programmes take up the totality of the revolutionary programme. No, we choose some key themes of the transitional programme - the struggle for a ban on collective layoffs, wage increases, the defence of public services and democratic rights - and we explain that these immediate and anti-capitalist demands can only be satisfied by social mobilization and a government which breaks with the bourgeoisie, a workers' government.

This government is defined by the tasks it must accomplish to satisfy the main popular demands and to begin to break with the capitalist institutions.

This formula remains "algebraic" - it can moreover go under a number of names: anti-capitalist government, a government as loyal to the workers as the right is to the bosses and so on. - but it allows us to make a distinction from all the governmental policies of management of the state and the capitalist economy. It is not a question of avoiding the question of power, as Holloway or others suggest we should



do. The revolutionary left must face the question of power and of government but by giving its own responses, not by entering class collaborationist governments. Of course, the topicality of a discussion on this question depends on the political situation in each country, but it is decisive to define a general orientation on this question of power. Thus, there should be some flexibility in forming electoral alliances, but there where these alliances are confronted with the governmental question, we cannot skirt the question... under the threat of paralysis or break up of the coalitions that we set up. The building of an anti-capitalist party, as a medium and long-term project, should clarify its positions on the governmental questions. This debate is a debate on the entire international radical left: should we participate in or support governments dominated by social-liberalism? The response of the PT in Brazil with Lula, that of the PRC in Italy, that of the CPs of the European left is positive. These parties lead or prepare to support or participate in this type of government. We think, as the whole of historical experience teaches us, that this is a grave error. This type of participation subordinates the workers' movement to the interests of the dominant classes. It holds back the dynamic of mass mobilization. It provokes disillusionment and demoralization. It is this that underpins our opposition to the politics of class conciliation.

## **Towards a new party - how?**

8 The united front and the anti-capitalist programme are the two fundamental pillars of the construction of a new anti-capitalist force. But this perspective is, more fundamentally, a coordinate of the new historical period. From 1992 onwards, the LCR indicated that its activity took place in the following triptych: "new epoch, new programme, new party". The crisis of neoliberal policies, the social resistance and the evolution of social democracy and the decline of Stalinism freed up a space for a new political force, for a refoundation of the workers' movement. That means

that the politics of revolutionary organizations should define, at each stage, initiatives to advance along this road. That presupposes firstly defining the content of a new party. It should include, to a good extent, the essential elements of the transitional programme, combining immediate demands, demands for an anti-capitalist transformation of society and a perspective of power linking the necessity of a workers' government and democratic socialism. It should be clear that an anti-capitalist party rejects support for or participation in governments of management of the established order. This party has, then, a "class struggle" strategic and programmatic delimitation but these latter are not completed in the sense that they do not precise a priori the modalities of revolutionary conquest of power, and leave a series of programmatic questions open. In fact many programmatic definitions will be made on the basis of experience, but the foundations of this new party should be solid. In the same way, although the choice between reform and revolution, or different conceptions of the revolution, is not a discriminant in building this party - we can work with partisans of a transformation of society by radical reforms - the basis of this party should clarify key questions: class struggle, democracy, refusal to participate in governments of capitalist management, internationalism.

How then, do we advance on the political-organizational level? As indicated by Alex Callinicos, in the current period, it is improbable that a new party will be born in similar conditions to those of the 1920s, resulting either from a fusion of the revolutionary wing and currents originating from social democracy and moving towards revolutionary positions, or from a fusion between the revolutionary Marxist nuclei and entire parts of the socialist or communist parties. New hypotheses should be retained. The axis of a new party will probably be exterior to the old traditional organizations. Its social and political base will rest on the new generations, experiences of struggle and social movements. It will take up the red thread of revolutionary history while expressing above all a revolutionary policy for the 21st

century. But this new party will not be established by decree. It should result from a whole process of political experiences marked by events or the convergence of significant forces which create the conditions for a reorganization of the workers' movement and the construction of a new party. In Scotland, it is the specific combination of the social question and the national question which has made possible the emergence of the SSP. In Portugal, it is the convergence of several currents originating in the CP, the UDP (ex-Maoist), the PSR (section of the Fourth International) and independent personalities which has given birth to the Left Bloc. It is decisive that the revolutionaries organize this process on "class struggle" bases, but they can only constitute this new party on the basis of a dynamic that largely goes beyond the current framework of the revolutionary organization. A new party cannot be a self-disguising of the revolutionary organization. The new anti-capitalist force must broadly transcend the revolutionary organization. Without this added value, the new force can only appear as a projection of the revolutionary organization or one of its fronts. In France, while the LCR has for some years taken initiatives for a new political force, it has not proclaimed a new party that would only have been an enlarged LCR, but without its history and without its programmatic bases.

9 This dialectic between revolutionary and new broad party is decisive. The importance of a new political force is indeed the building of a strategic mediation between the current revolutionary organization and the construction of a new mass revolutionary party indispensable to the revolutionary conquest of power by the workers. A mediation linked to an entire historic period where it is necessary to reorganize the workers' movement on a broader basis, and remake a series of experiences on an anti-capitalist basis. This is the practicality of a new political representation for the workers. But all this experience of a broad party should be undertaken without forgetting the objective - the socialist revolution - and thus the building of a party which capable of achieving its



goals, which presupposes the preparation and education not only of militants but also of sectors of the mass movement. That also supposes preserving, cultivating and strengthening the animation of a revolutionary current inside this broad party. And this pursuit of the construction of a revolutionary leadership through a broad party in unfinished contours can only be done

if the new party is much broader, much more extensive than the revolutionary organization. If the conditions of a real transcendence of the revolutionary organization do not exist, if the forms of a new force are less significant than those of the revolutionary organization, and we hurry the rhythms and modalities of construction of such a party, we lose in substance - programme, history, and revolutionary experience - without

gaining in political and organizational breadth. Thus, inasmuch as the conditions for a broad party do not exist, the accumulation of forces for a revolutionary leadership in the broad sense is done essentially through the construction of the revolutionary organization and by initiatives favouring the conditions for this new party, rather than by the proclamation of a new force on the cheap.

## A big success

**9 December 2004, by Thomas Eisler**

The Ruesta village used to be a peasant village, but when a dam was constructed in the 1950s they lost almost all their land. The village was abandoned until 1989 when the anarcho-sindicalist trade union CGT moved in and made a site for educational and recreational activities. Nevertheless it was not fully equipped for a camp the size of an FI Youth Camp. The forums of the camp took place in the former village church. It had only been used as a storehouse by the CGT, so it had to be cleared out and construction work done by the Spanish State comrades to make it adequate for the camp forums. The camp was also on the pilgrim path to Santiago de Compostela, and from time to time pilgrims or others following that trail would pass through. An unexpected encounter with another world!

### Rebuilding the FI in the Spanish State



More than 400 youth participated. It started out as the smallest camp ever with 350 participants. But numbers grew when over twenty Portuguese came on Wednesday directly from the

first youth camp of the Left Block. Even more important, the number of participants from the Spanish State more than doubled from 50 odd at the beginning to over 120 at the end.

In 1989 the Fourth International organised the sixth annual youth camp in Catalonia in the Spanish State. That was before the unification with Maoist MC (Communist Movement). The unification produced an organization that did not exist for long and supporters of the Fourth International became dispersed. This was also reflected in the participation at the youth camps. From an average delegation size of 91 in the period 1984-1991 this dropped to an all-time low of 10 in 1997. Since then the number has been growing to 40 in 2003. This reflects the rebuilding and reorganization of the Fourth International. But the ability in itself of the comrades to take on the task of organising the camp is a real proof of this positive development, although it was based on a few people doing a lot of work.

The camp was a chance for Spanish State comrades who have never or not for many years seen an FI youth camp to be part of it. It was dedicated to Eduardo Langarita who was for many years active in mobilizing for the camps and building youth work in Aragon but died at a much too young age. Organizing such a politically

successful camp in Aragon was achieving one of his goals.

### Scotland and the Philippines represented for the first time



The camp enthusiastically received the three-person delegation from the newest FI section, in the Philippines, and also the fraternal delegation from the Scottish Socialist Party, both attending for the first time. Some delegations such as the Swedish, Danish and British were noticeably bigger than in previous years - a good sign of the political work they do among young people. Others maintained the average size of the last few years without necessarily reaching their most optimistic targets.

### For the Europe of the peoples

Against the Europe of capital, patriarchy and ... for the Europe of the peoples was the camp slogan. The latter part put the emphasis on the



right to self-determination of the nations. In the Spanish State this is an important question. But it is not a simple one. During the camp there was room for an open discussion on the national question. There was a debate between the positions of Lenin and Luxemburg, Troglo, a leading member of the Basque organization Zutik, gave an educational on nations and the right to self-determination. And of course these debates are also quite relevant for the Scottish who did a workshop about the national question in Scotland.

## Using the camp to organize and educate

In the context of European Social Forums - the globalization of struggles - the youth camp is no longer the sole place for youth in Europe to debate and organize and this might make it more difficult for people to go since they have to make a priority among several international or European events. But the most important thing is that the camp has in this process become a useful instrument to reflect, plan and get educated.



The camp has given more practical results in recent years. This year's most ambitious plans came from the permanent commissions working on students and casualized workers where a workshop for the ESF to promote a common campaign was decided, and the decision from the

global justice movement commission to publish a common youth paper and organize a debate at the London ESF.

There were two educationals each day. The more theoretical issues were also related to the debates of the social forums. For instance there were debates on the ideas of Negri and Holloway.

## Tradition and renewal in our politics

More than 30 workshops - it might be one of the most ambitious programmes ever with political activities from 10 in the morning till 11 at night - were organized during the week and were judged better prepared than in previous years. The growing number of workshops that were held in a participatory way was something the participants evaluated very positively. As an example, a workshop on sexuality began with massage to make everybody more relaxed and then people were asked to reflect on their own sexuality as a starting point for a more general discussion on the heterosexist myths that are imposed on us.

During 20 years of youth camps we have built traditions on the political experiences of the camps. Particularly on feminism and LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual) issues, the camp is an inspiration for our work. In the camp there is a women's space and a LGBT space as well as one night is dedicated to the women's party and another to the LGBT party. This year the responsibility for LGBT work was

taken over by a new generation after it had been the same for some years.

The LGBT party is a party for the whole camp organised by the LGBT comrades while the women's party is organised by and for the women only as it has been since the first women's party more than 15 years ago. This is also one of the most hotly-debated issues of the year, and there were proposals that the format should change next year.

## March to Artieda

While the camp is place for discussion and relaxation it is also a gathering of activists. In 2001 the camp took place in Italy after the Genoa demonstrations and a delegation from the camp participated in the Rome demonstration against police repression.

The nearby village of Artieda is struggling against a new dam that will destroy its livelihood - not only in the 1950s was the area affected by the construction of dams. To show active solidarity the camp made a march to Artieda. The participants liked the idea of taking concrete action during the camp and about half the camp participated. But the march turned out to be not such a good idea. It took place in the hottest hours of early afternoon and it turned out that the distance was 10 km instead of the 5 to 6 km that we had been told! So the deputy mayor of Artieda and Manolo Gari from Espacio Alternativo addressed a very tired and hot group of marchers. Apologizing for their mistake, the Spanish comrades swiftly organized for everybody to be brought back to the camp by bus.

## Left debates new party

### 9 December 2004

We publish here a range of viewpoints, starting with an interview with our comrade HeloÃsa Helena, senator from the state of Alagoas and

a supporter of the Socialist Democracy tendency, who was expelled from the PT last December (see IV 357, March 2004). HeloÃsa Helena is now

president of the PSoL.

The three other articles criticize the initiative from different angles. The



first was written by a leader of the Left Articulation current in the PT, the second is the editorial from a Catholic left weekly with close links with Brazil's combative social movements, while the third was published by the Socialist Democracy tendency of the

PT (in which Brazilian supporters of the Fourth International participate).

**Dissidents form PSoL to defend socialist ideal** - Interview with HeloÁsa Helena - MaurÁcio Hashizume

**Left faces choices** - Valter Pomar

**A new socialist party** - Correio da Cidadania

**A new party: the PSoL** - Jornal Democracia Socialista

# Dissidents form PSoL to defend socialist ideal

9 December 2004, by **MaurÁcio Hashizume**

The organization, which sees itself as an alternative on the spectrum of left parties, already has a president, senator HeloÁsa Helena, elected for the PT from the state of Alagoas. In addition to her, the new parliamentary group will include the former PT deputies Babá (from the state of Pará), João Fontes (from the state of Sergipe) and Luciana Genro (from the state of Rio Grande do Sul), who is the daughter of the Education Minister, Tarso Genro. All have suffered political isolation after having voted against social security reform in Congress - a process that culminated with their expulsion for indiscipline at the meeting of the PT national leadership held on December 2003.

Most of those present at the founding meeting of the PSoL originate from the Socialist Democracy current (DS) of the PT - in the new organization they have formed a tendency called Red Liberty - or from dissident elements of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) and the Socialist Party of United Workers (PSTU), as well as public sector trades unionists (teachers in particular), the MTL peasant movement and independent groups. According to one of the 16 members of the executive of the new party, for most activists it represents the "final attempt" to build an institutional party. Among the "personalities" who have joined the new group are the sociologist Chico de Oliveira and the academic Paulo Arantes.

In order to participate fully in the elections, the PSoL still needs to succeed in its "campaign of legalization" - that is, gather the signatures needed to register. "On the day of the municipal elections in November 2004, the "brigades of the PSoL" will spread across Brazil to gather the 438,000 signatures. We will hold seminars in every state - both to satisfy the formalities and the "bureaucratic weights" to which we are subjected and to refine the provisional programme and statutes that we have adopted. Finally, in January [2005], we will hold our second national meeting during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre", said the president of the new party.

The senator, who says she devoted "the best years of her life" to helping build the PT, criticized the government in that it now contributes to "the deepening of the same neoliberal policies which were limited by the participation of the PT in opposition, whether in the social movements or Parliament". "We feel ourselves obliged to build a political refuge, to safeguard the banner of the labouring classes, and the ideological and programmatic elaborations accumulated throughout the history of the socialist left" she continued. We print here extracts from the interview that senator HeloÁsa Helena - potential PsoL candidate for the Brazilian presidency in 2006 - gave to Agence Carta Maior (ACM) shortly after the end of the first national meeting of the country's newest party.

**What is the main difference between the programme of the PSoL and those of the other parties of the left that already exist?**

Today, the other parties behave as instruments of the triumphalist propaganda of neoliberalism, because in one way or another they support the neoliberal project as implemented by the Lula government. Any sensible person, whether socialist or capitalist, who wanted to make a precise analysis of the actions of the Lula government, would see the persistent subordination to the parasites of the International Monetary Fund (FMI) and the other multilateral financial institutions, the distortion of public finances to the benefit of speculation, the reforms which have nothing to do with the reforms of the state apparatus that we have always defended.

We are partisans of reform of this Brazilian state which has been privatized in the service of a minority. On the other hand, the state reforms carried out by the Lula government, following in the footsteps of [his predecessor] Fernando Henrique Cardoso, are only neoliberal counter-reforms involving the sole mechanism of reducing social budgets to compensate for increased financial expenses, the fruit of their economic policy and their monetarist orthodoxy. Workers in the public sector are sacrificed - as was the case with pensions reform - for the benefit of the



speculators, while public resources are literally pillaged.

**Is all this irreversible? Is there no chance that social tension can change the orientation of the Lula government?**

I hope - for the good of Brazil and its millions of oppressed, excluded and marginalized - that the live forces of society will be able, in an organized fashion, to bring pressure for change. But unhappily a number of the social movements are bureaucratized, assuming responsibilities in the governmental structure, and are above all interested in paralyzing their base to stop such social tensions.

It is obvious that I want things to change, but in view of the measures already taken by the government, I don't believe in the objective possibility of a change of orientation. If I can imagine a God who is immaterial and not geographically located, you can bet that I believe in the strength of the Brazilian people and in its capacity to struggle to force the government to change course. Unhappily, the analysis that I make of members of the government is that they have changed side. So we feel obliged to create a "refuge" for the left, so that even if they have changed side, they do capture the legitimacy of

left traditions. Starting from the time where they went over to the other side, they are no longer authorized by the Brazilian people - and still less by the Brazilian left - to wipe out and trample on the historic banners which have been sanctified not by this or that political personality or party, but by heroic struggles, by the blood, sweat and tears of the toiling class and the socialist militants in Brazil, Latin America and the world.

These historic reference points and the resulting programmatic conceptions, are not the property of any party, including our new party, the PSoL, or any political personality. If a political instrument which is conceived to promote these historic objectives in the imagination of the popular classes fails, our task is to build a new party.

**Do you hope that more PT parliamentarians and cadres will join the PSoL?**

The PSoL will welcome comrades from all left parties who wish to join us with pleasure and much affection, solidarity and respect. A number of fighters for the people who have left the PT, the PCdoB, the PSTU and other parties are with us. But I will not spend a drop of sweat and energy to

try and tempt away activists in other parties, and still less parliamentarians - if only because the parliamentarians know exactly what is happening.

If these people decide to quit the government and join us, they will be met with open arms. We preserve certain bonds of affection built up in the course of our common history, but it is no longer about doing politics together. Where those bonds of affection have been broken, it is because they were not very strong, or not sincere enough to be maintained despite the ideological and programmatic disagreements of militant life.

Sincerely, I already knew that there was a socialist life, of dignity, courage and generosity, outside of the party structures which exist today - and I have become certain of this in the course of crossing the "desert" to build a new party and meeting fellow travelers. That has been a real apprenticeship for me. I will devote myself more to the conquests of these people rather than the attempt to convince activists and parliamentarians of other parties.

\* This article is translated from [Inprecor América Latina](#), electronic publication of the Fourth International for Latin America and the Caribbean.

## Left faces choices

**9 December 2004, by Valter Pomar**

On the one hand it applauds Palloci [2] and on the other it prepares the defeat of Lula. At the end of the day, the current government is not, despite everything, viable from the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie, which is why it is not very likely that Lula can both maintain his current economic policy (which erodes his own social, electoral and ideological base) and win the next elections.

If the right wins, whether electorally or "from the inside" (by bringing about a definitive break by the

government with all its commitments towards the movement from which it originated), that would impose on the socialist left a necessary reorganization, which would take decades.

Whatever the motive, a defeat for the Lula government would "objectively" mean a strengthening of the right. That is why it is risky to consider as "left" whoever works to defeat or bring down this government - an attitude which differs from political activity, including public political

activity, aimed at defeating the currently hegemonic orientation inside it.

The Party of Socialism and Liberty (PSoL) claims to build a left opposition to the Lula government. Obviously, it does not amount to a "constructive" opposition aimed at bringing pressure from the outside, in the sense of a change of orientation. If that were the case, there would be no basic difference between the position of the PSoL and that of the left of the PT; there would only be more freedom and



fewer constraints for those who, from the outside, criticize the course of the government.

The PSoL seeks to build a “destructive” opposition, acting as if it was possible to simultaneously fight the Lula government and the right, thus offering the country a left, socialist and genuinely democratic and popular government.

The reality is that there is not and there does not seem likely to be a wave of struggles which can give birth to a new socialist, democratic and popular pole, sufficiently strong to bypass the left of the PT, the Lula government and the traditional right.

That is why broad sectors of the Brazilian left have opted for a critique of the objectives of the Lula government. It is only in modifying them that we place ourselves in continuity with the political wave which started in the late 1970s. In all the other hypotheses - whether it amounts to the pursuit of the current economic policy or of the return of the traditional right - we will experience a defeat and a much deeper dispersion than what we knew after the 1964 coup.

The emergence of the PSoL is a sign that this dispersion has already begun. Paradoxically, the new party seems to have followed a PT-style model of organization. Which is natural for whoever claims to have an influence here and today in the class struggle going on in the country. It is necessary to have a mass base, a parliamentary presence and participate in the electoral battles.

Yet, unlike the PT - which was initially

small but was carried along by a vigorous wave of political struggles - the PSoL has emerged in a period of weak struggles. Also, unlike the PT, which in its first years gave little importance to the institutional struggle, the PSoL places excessive value on its parliamentarians and has already launched a candidate for the presidency of the Republic, reproducing thus in caricatural fashion the tragic dependence of the PT on Lula's candidacy.

Clearly, the political and social process which has taken more than two decades to alter profoundly the political and social project of the PT, has profoundly marked the PSoL from its foundation. That would also be the case for all the sectors that wish to break now with the experience of the PT and the government, investing energy in the long-term construction of another strategic alternative, at the price of a reduced political intervention in the current period.

The change in the positioning of the PT in recent years has been the “accelerated” version in the 1990s of the dynamic that European social-democracy followed over a century of existence - from revolution to reform, socialism to capitalism, social-democratic to neoliberal capitalism (eventually via the so-called “third way” or the centre-left).

Our problem today is not summed up in the political objectives of the PT and/or the Lula government; the concern is to rebuild, in the Brazilian working class, the democratic popular and socialist impulsion it possessed at the end of the 1970s and through the

1980s.

Today a big part of the Brazilian social movement, starting with the trades unions, is under the hegemony of moderate sectors of the PT and the CUT trade union federation. Another sector is genuinely critical of party political activity and acts as if the “social movements” were capable of resolving the problems of the conquest of power and the construction of socialism.

Is it possible to change the country without resolving the question of power, of the state? Is it possible to resolve the problem of power, without struggles and party political organization? How, in the political conditions we live in, can a left party avoid being co-opted by the bourgeois order, or being reduced to a condition of being an “eternal minority”, as is the case with most socialist and revolutionary parties?

We will not answer these questions by transforming impatience into theoretical argument, or by forgetting that our enemy is the right. We need political and social force, to incarnate an alternative strategy and a programme. Such a force will not be the product of a defeat of our government. In fact, a defeat for the Lula government, if it happens, will lead to a sharp reduction in the forces of socialism and liberty on the Brazilian political scene.

That is why, while respecting the choice of those who have preferred to follow another road, that we will continue - inasmuch as it is possible - to struggle to transform the objectives of the government and the PT.

## A new socialist party

9 December 2004, by **Correio da Cidadania**

The manifest deviation in the ideological posture of the PT and the ineffectiveness of the struggle to reverse it inside the party structures (given the monolithic majority which

has constituted itself around a veritable political-electoral machine) do not constitute sufficient reasons to create a new socialist party in Brazil.

Before launching a new party, it is necessary to determine precisely the causes of the PT's drift. That would involve a long contradictory debate, which would necessitate not only an



effort at intellectual analysis, but also the experience of new forms of political action, so as not to run the risk of reproducing the errors which have led the PT into the current situation.

We should not forget that the participation of socialists in bourgeois institutions constitutes a contradiction which will only be resolved when socialism will be substituted for capitalism as the form of organization of the economy and of society. Thus the participation of socialists in bourgeois institutional politics can only know partial and temporal

solutions, which will be a function of concrete circumstances.

Born a little after the defeat of the strategy of armed struggle, the PT proposed a strategy of institutional struggle, based on two pillars, participation in elections and direct mass pressure, often to the limits of legality. For different reasons, this strategy has not yielded results. But during this time, the conjuncture during which this strategy was formulated was completely transformed by the changes which took place in Brazil and globally.

It does not seem to us prudent, in these circumstances, to offer a new socialist proposition to the Brazilian people.

We do not mean by this critique to "fire on" the PSoL or prevent the fraternal debate that the socialists should lead if they wish to face the serious crisis threatening the country. On the contrary, we recognize the purity of the intentions of the founders of this party, their objective being to open up dialogue through the creation of a new regroupment.

It goes without saying that the columns of the "Correio" are open to contradictory opinions.

## A new party: the PSoL

**9 December 2004, by Jornal Democracia Socialista**

The essential militant forces of the PSoL come mainly from the political current Movimento de Esquerda Socialista (MES, Movement of the Socialist Left) and Corrente Socialista dos Trabalhadores (CST, Socialist Current of Workers). These two organizations are part of the tradition of Morenist Trotskyism. They remained in the PT, still united, as the CST, when the then majority of Socialist Convergence formed the Socialist Party of United Workers (PSTU).

Former militants and leaders of the PSTU, like Junia Gouvêa and Martiniano Cavalcante, who left this party at different times, are part of the leadership of the PSoL. A small group of militants, who have not respected the decisions of the National Conference of the Socialist Democracy Tendency (DS), are grouped in "Liberdade Vermelha" ("Red Liberty") and have come out in favour of the PSoL. They have not submitted this decision to any collective debate inside the DS.

Milton Temer and Carlos Nelson Coutinho - who taught us Gramsci and

the concept of process in the revolution - are also inside this new party, as well as Francisco de Oliveira.

The disenchantment provoked by the Calmar government and discontent at the evolution of the PT can lead different political traditions to come together and proclaim a new party. But in the light of the experience of the PT, we know that to build a useful political tool much more is needed. And we are not talking about the 438,000 signatures needed to get onto the electoral register [3] but of the absence of a reasonably "warm" social and political environment capable of merging different conceptions in a common programme to produce a transformative political action.

The 7th National Conference of DS in November 2003, approved the following resolution:

*"We consider the pursuit of the defence of the positive values originating in the history of the PT valuable (the programmatic contribution; rights of tendency and internal democracy; feminist conquests; the synthesis of the*

*experiences and the forces of the left). In this framework it is also necessary to renew the links between the partisan organization and the broad political-social movement around the PT.*

"We seek to intervene in the battle of orientation inside the PT, basing ourselves on the legitimacy of the defence of the historic and strategic project of a socialist and democratic party. Faced with the development of a conflict inside the party, it is more than ever necessary to put forward the construction of a broad left current which is the pole of reference of the reconstruction and functioning of the PT as a socialist and democratic party.

"The construction of this current and the struggle for the socialist reconstruction of the PT represent an alternative also faced with the sharp pressures seeking the abandonment of its programmatic character, that face those who wish to leave the PT and orient towards a project of a sectarian party, for these two orientations renounce the experience of the construction of a mass socialist and democratic party".