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A new phase of the climate poker game

16 January 2005, by **Daniel Tanuro**

This is a victory for the European Union (EU) in its struggle in competition with the US, and a very small - and very unsatisfactory - step forward in the struggle against climate change. [1] A new phase of climate negotiations is opening, during which neoliberal pressure will redouble in intensity.



Drawn up in the wake of the United Nations Framework Convention On Climate Change (UNFCCC, Rio 1992), Kyoto committed the industrialized countries (including the eastern European countries "in transition") to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions [2] by 5.2% in the course of a first "commitment period", 2008-2012.

The year of reference chosen is in general 1990. The global commitment is modulated according to country (the EU, for example, is supposed to reduce its emissions by 8%). The drawing up of the Protocol as well as the negotiations on its modalities and follow up - which continue through the Conferences of the Parties to the Framework Convention - are subject to intense pressures from capitalist lobbies.

Thus the objective of 5.2% has been softened by three mechanisms of so-

called "flexibility": the clean development mechanism, joint implementation and emission trading. To understand the issues around Russian ratification, it is necessary to understand in particular the system of emission trading.

Money, money, money

The principle is simple. Given that CO2 emitted anywhere on the globe circulates very rapidly and thus contributes to global warming, the negotiators at Kyoto estimated that the place of reduction of emissions had little importance, the essential thing being that the "more" and the "less" of the countries in relation to their quota compensate each other, so that the objective is reached globally. [3]

In application of this principle, a country which surpasses its emission reduction target (that is which falls below its quota) disposes of an equivalent amount in "emission rights". These rights can be capitalized to lighten subsequent reduction targets (because the effort of Kyoto will be pursued through a second commitment period from 2012-2016). They can also be sold to other signatory countries, which do not succeed in meeting their objective by national measures. Kyoto implies

thus the creation of a world market in carbon. [4]

As we have already said, the year of reference for calculating the reduction of emissions is 1990. After 1990, the economies of the former Soviet bloc collapsed - the GNP falling by as much as 50% in some cases. Thanks to the signature of the treaty, these countries suddenly found themselves owners of huge quantities of potential emission rights.

Obviously, these rights can only be sold if the Protocol enters into force. From this viewpoint, Russians and Ukrainians had a keen interest in ratification. But on the other hand, the oppositions were very real. They are not all explicit and are situated at very different levels of problematic. Some argue that Kyoto, by limiting emissions, would mortgage economic development. [5]

Others are enthusiastic, like GAZPROM, because the acceleration of the conversion of coal or of fuel into natural gas as the energy source of electricity production will improve its market shares. [6] Some cynics argue that global warming will have positive implications for Russia, notably from the viewpoint of agricultural production. Others point to the fact that in order to sell its rights Moscow will have to invest significant sums in systems of measurement and control.

Finally, it is obvious that geostrategic considerations have played a major role. In the context of the EU-USA polarization on the climate question, to ratify the Protocol means privileging one camp rather than the other. All these elements have weighed in different ways on the Kremlin, to the extent that it would require the personal intervention of Putin to settle it. The manner in which he has done it seems coherent with the general course of Russian diplomacy since September 11.

But the Russian hesitations are also explained by another, more down to earth reason. It is not enough to offer an abundant commodity like emission rights, it is also necessary that the price of this commodity is supported by demand. And here is the rub. The big potential buyer of carbon is the USA. In 2000, their emissions were nearly 20% above the Kyoto objective.

According to viable projections, the US surplus in 2010 will be from 300 to 500 million tonnes per year, virtually the amount of emission rights that the Russians could put on sale at that time. With the US, the market in CO2 would be in relative equilibrium (see graphic); without it, supply will greatly exceed demand. In the first case, Kyoto could yield up to 170 billion dollars in five years to Moscow; in the second, the Russians would have to content themselves with 20 billion dollars, indeed less. [7] This is not really the goose that laid the golden eggs.

Nonetheless, Putin will have estimated that he had nothing better to hope for, and that he risked missing an opportunity. It can't be said that he was wrong: John Kerry, like Bush, was opposed to Kyoto, so there was nothing to expect from his side; on the other hand, a defeat of the Protocol would have allowed the US to regain the initiative in the climate negotiation and, undoubtedly, reduce still further the price of carbon.

Europe and America

But we see things more clearly from the viewpoint of the relations between

the great powers. Unlike the EU and Japan, the US, at the federal level, has hardly begun the turn towards renewable energy sources (RES). (...) Fifty percent of US electric power stations are fuelled by coal. Four fifths of the capacity of electrical production which the US will need in 2010 has been installed recently. Moreover, everyone knows the weight of the oil lobby in the US in general, and in the Bush administration in particular.

The situation is certainly different at the level of some states which make up the Union. "Renewables" account for more than 10% of electricity production in California, and nine northeastern states are coordinating their CO2 emission reduction targets among themselves and with neighbouring Canada. [8] Moreover, numerous big companies, particularly multinationals (Kodak, DuPont, Alcoa among them), are taking voluntary initiatives, either because they anticipate regulatory measures which they believe to be ultimately inevitable, or because they fear seeing markets escape them, or for a combination of these reasons. But these initiatives remain limited and frustrated by the orientation of the central power.

On the other side of the Atlantic, for a series of reasons which are above all strategic (US domination of oil resources and markets, increased dependence on imports from the Middle East), the EU has for several years adopted a markedly different energy policy, based on the diversification of sources and suppliers, as well as on the growth of energy efficiency.

This policy has enjoyed a certain success, in particular in some countries [9]. And the EU is now considerably in advance of its big ally and rival across the Atlantic in RES. The share of RES in energy consumed is only 2% in the US [10], while it is 6% in the EU and the objective of 12% has been adopted for 2010.

The obstinate and increasingly irrational refusal of a good part of the US ruling class to see the climate threat facing us is certainly linked to these strategic issues in the energy sector. This is undoubtedly a good

example of self-intoxication of consciousness by the logic of profit. In any case, it is piquant to note that this self-intoxication could work out to the detriment of US capitalism.

While the protocol becomes effective, and while a faithful ally like Tony Blair considers climate change as a major issue for the G-8, Washington is little by little seeing the realization of the warning issued some years ago by a manager for international and industry affairs at the US multinational "Economies will have to adjust to that. It would be a mistake if the U.S. economy is insulated from these pressures. When the reality comes, the U.S. will have a bigger game of catch-up - and our competitors will be ahead of us [in developing and using climate-friendly technologies]". [11]

"Good news for the companies... and for the environment?"

The climatic game of poker that has just finished presented itself then in the following fashion. Russia wanted to raise the bid. The USA wanted to torpedo the Protocol so as to recommence the negotiation on new bases, notably in including the big developing countries (China, India, Brazil) in the first commitment period and in fixing a price ceiling for a tonne of carbon. They failed.

The EU won, with one eye on public opinion and the other on the green industry, also throwing in the balance its support for Russian membership of the WTO. And with the support of big capital, attracted by the juicy perspectives on the market in clean technologies [12].

Hence the enthusiasm of Digby Jones, director-general of the Confederation of British Industry: "Russia's decision is good news for companies and for the environment". [13]

The news is certainly good for companies in general, which aspire to a stable, clear and global legislative framework, inside of which to plan their medium and long-term investments. It is good news in particular for European companies. Thanks to the US's backwardness on the issue, London has every chance of becoming the world capital of the regulation of the carbon market.

Thanks to the European system of exchange of emission rights, which enters into force at the beginning of 2005, 5,000 big EU companies and many civil servants will gain precious experience of management, control and posting of emission rights, and this set-up has every chance of serving as model for the future world system. Finally, thanks to the unblocking of the protocol, industry and services will receive a significant boost. European companies are well placed to profit from it.

Wind farms, biomass combined heat and power plants, equipment for biomethanation of waste or production of biofuels, reinforcement of coastal infrastructures, production of photovoltaic electricity in remote regions, expertise and consultation missions: orders will come pouring in. As "The Economist" concludes, in embracing Kyoto, the EU may simply have given its companies an advantage in the race towards clean energy. "The Economist", October 9, 2004.

But is it also good news for the environment? That's another question altogether. It seems that some sectors of the dominant class are becoming conscious of the gravity of the situation and above all the costs which could result from it. The evolution is spectacular in Britain. The UK fixed itself the objective of reducing its emissions by 60% between now and 2050 and a whole series of adaptations to climate change have been embarked upon, notably in order to meet the growing flood risk. Two million households and five million people in Britain are threatened by the growing risk of flooding resulting from climate change, according to a report by the Office of Science and Technology (OST, 2004, www.foresight.gov.uk/fcd.html) [14]

In this respect, we should stress the paradox that the EU's victory was won through adapting to Washington's main recipes. The carbon market, the clean development mechanism (CDM), the joint implementation (JI), the

taking into account of absorptions of carbon by "sinks": all these neoliberal adaptations have been dreamed up by the US negotiators to reduce the impact of reduction of emissions and externalize it towards the Third World or the countries in transition.

All have been initially rejected by the EU, which has then taken them up and implemented them. All of them reduce, relent and pervert the "small step forward" represented by Kyoto. To such an extent that the Protocol - if it is respected in full! - would only have the effect of reducing the increase in temperature between now and the end of the century by 0.1°C. There is no real reason to "break out the champagne" as European commissioner Margot Wallström has urged. [15].

And now?

All other things being equal, it seems that this neoliberal grip on the negotiations will increase again in the course of the new climatic poker game. [16] Isolated and beaten, the USA will probably have to rejoin the Kyoto process. Too weak and incoherent to alone provide a world leadership, the EU will favour a rapprochement.

This will not happen for the first commitment period, but it could be concretized for the second. In this framework, the neoliberal offensive will redouble in intensity to drive back the positive aspects of the treaty (reduction targets, timetables, some limitations to "sinks") in favour of an even more systematic market logic. One of the main arguments invoked will be the necessity - on which the EU and USA increasingly agree - of involving the big emergent countries in the second commitment period, but "without compromising their economic and social development".

In the name of this "politically correct" objective, we will see for example growing pressure in favour of an untrammelled expansion of the "Clean Development Mechanism"

which is above all a new cover for the domination of the Third World and the appropriation of its resources. Moreover, the nuclear lobby will also attempt to profit from the situation to reassert its grip on the market.

This growing neoliberal pressure will then sharpen and complicate the race between climate change and the means of fighting against it, or adaptation to its effects.

According to the climatologists stabilization of the atmospheric concentration in CO₂ at a level which is non-dangerous for humanity involves reducing emissions by 60% between now and 2050, so as to remain below 550 ppmv ppmv stands for "parts per million by volume". [17] of CO₂ in the atmosphere. Climate change is also increasing its pressure. The "New Scientist" warns us that "the capacity of the oceans and forests to absorb our CO₂ emissions could be reaching a point of saturation". [18]

US physicist Charles Keeling defends the thesis of saturation, arguing that the atmospheric concentration in CO₂ has sharply increased in recent years, without any proportional increase in emissions. The only possible explanation is that, starting from a certain point, the capacity of ecosystems to absorb CO₂ diminishes when the quantity of CO₂ in the air increases.

In other words, climate change has begun to feed on itself. [19] Scientists had expected such a phenomenon, but in the medium term. The revelation that this "positive feedback" [20] has already begun would be very bad news. That would mean that the level of 450 ppmv would be reached in 2030, and that of 550 ppmv in 2060. So "dangerous disturbances" to the climate could intervene more quickly than envisaged. [21] Thus, while scientists display increasing alarm, the neoliberal logic is in the process of showing that it can turn the mobilization against global warming into a very profitable business. It has not yet shown that it is capable of leading this mobilization in an efficient, coordinated and rapid manner, avoiding

Two weeks on - necessities still lacking

14 January 2005, by **The Editors**



While some of that tragic loss of life is an inevitable consequence of the movement of tectonic plates, many, many others could have been saved if the human reaction both before and after December 26 had been different. Western "civilization" prides itself on spending billions on exploring space but cannot or will not provide the essentials to poor fisherman, traders and other poor people whose lives, livelihoods and communities have been destroyed.

The unfolding of events has confirmed the basic framework of our first responses; that the poor and oppressed always pay the greatest price for ecological disasters and the stark contrast between the generosity of working people and the cynicism of politicians. A number of new features have become clear, while others have evidently increased in importance.

The effects of the tsunami were worst in those areas which are among those where capitalist globalisation has been wreaking its greatest profits - and destroying the natural environment. The Thai and Sri Lankan coasts in particular which have become increasingly developed as tourist resorts for Western holiday makers suffered greater devastation than those areas where the ancient mangrove swamps were left undisturbed.

It is not just the growth of tourism either, but the developing of factory measures in the fishing industry in particular through the development of shrimp farms - which also have had the effect of depriving thousands of traditional fishermen of their livelihood.

Mangrove swamps used to cover 75 per cent of the coastlines of tropical and sub-tropical countries, according to

the US based Mangrove Action Project, but today less than 50 per cent remains - half of which is degraded. Yet again, capitalist globalisation has blood on its hands.

While the Jakarta summit has as yet reached no conclusion on a limited moratorium on debt servicing, the countries affected by the tsunami pay \$78 billion dollars per annum - or \$214 billion per day. Indonesia alone pays out \$25 billion annually. Activists need to demand the complete cancellation of the debt for the region.

This is not at all counterposed as some have suggested to fighting poverty in Africa - a victory against the debt anywhere in the world would give an enormous boost to campaigners elsewhere.

Once he decided to emerge from his festive holiday on his Texan ranch, George Bush president of the world's only super-power tried to use the sense of shock engendered by the tragedy to recoup the image of US imperialism, which has taken such a battering as a result of the murderous intervention in Iraq.

This, together with his long-running feud with the UN, was behind his short-lived attempt to set up his regional core group to co-ordinate the response to the calamity. And if TV screens and newspaper front pages filled with pictures of the devastation wrought by nature kept the continued disruption to the US plans for the Iraqi elections at the end of the month by the Iraqi resistance out of the headlines, so much the better. Few in the region are likely to buy the notion that this proves that Bush and the US establishment have nothing against Muslims - but perhaps it helps PR at home.

The regimes in the region don't have clean hands either. Even the mainstream media have

noticed some of what has been going on in Aceh, which has been under military rule since May 2003 when the Indonesian government in Jakarta poured in more than 50,000 troops in an attempt to crush separatist rebels. The area remains under the effective control of the army, which is responsible for much of the relief effort, or lack of it.

Initially the central authorities tried to keep NGO relief workers out of the province close to the epicentre of the quake, where vast areas of the country had been completely destroyed.

On December 30 David Nabarro, head of the World Health Organisation crisis team, was quoted as saying about Aceh "Perhaps as many as five million people are not able to access what they need for living. Either they cannot get water, or their sanitation is inadequate or they cannot get food."

Hospitals were overwhelmed by patients, with one of the three hospitals operating in Banda Aceh on having to turn away victims the same. One doctor said that the hospital needed at least 200 more doctors and 600 paramedics, as well as vitamins and basic medicines to treat diarrhoea and influenza. With this amount of media attention focused on them, exclusion was no longer an option, so the military then resorted to maintaining tight control. But the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh Movement or Gam) has been complaining since January 2 of increased military activity against them while Indonesian authorities said on January 8 that there had been at least three fire fights between soldiers and Gam in recent days.

Even Sidney Blumenthal, former senior advisor to President Clinton has pitched up complaining about the activities of the Indonesian military and Bush's for them against what he refers to as a "popular separatist movement" in an article in the

Guardian on January 6. This critique comes as he says in the context of a battle by the neo-cons in Washington to lift sanctions against the Indonesian military. While having no confidence in Blumenthal's motives - and no memory of him supporting the people of Aceh when his former boss was in the White House, on this occasion we agree with him.

In Sri Lanka even the mainstream press have noticed the contrast between the well-organised relief efforts in the areas under the control of the Tamil Tigers and the pathetic efforts of the government in Colombo. On January 8 the government in Colombo prevented UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan travelling to areas under the control of the LTTE - the Tamil Tigers - during a visit to the country. UN officials protested, and so have the Tigers rather more vigorously.

At the same time, with the connivance of the government of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge US troops have been quick to arrive in Sri Lanka. As the New Left Front statement points out elsewhere on this site ([hyperlink](#)) "On the one hand, this is an opportunity for the US to gain a foothold with designs to suppress the LTTE and control the Tamil liberation struggle on behalf of local capitalist rulers. On the other, it also provides an opening for the US not only to arm-twist Sri Lanka to go along with global capitalism, but also to use Sri Lanka's strategic location to consolidate its neo-colonial agenda all the more blatantly."

The left internationally needs to join with those in Sri Lanka and Indonesia campaigning for self-determination for the Tamils and the people of Aceh, and for the withdrawal of troops whether sent by Washington, Colombo or Jakarta from these areas. Meanwhile, the military regime in Burma has denied that there have been a more than a handful of deaths in that country and is still preventing outside agencies visiting to see for themselves.

The Thai government has been accused of playing down warnings of the disaster in an attempt to protect

the country's lucrative tourist trade. Officers from the country's meteorological department said information sent to tourist resorts had deliberately underestimated the threat. One hour before disaster struck the Thai coast the authorities knew a wave was out there, but they were not sure how big it was and if it would reach Thailand. They therefore decided to take the risk of not warning the threatened coast areas because a failure in the prediction would be harmful to the tourist industry. According to the Bangkok newspaper "The Nation" the decision was taken at an emergency meeting at Cha-am led by the director-general of the Meteorological department of Thailand.

In India, where Congress were re-elected to government after the defeat of the BJP in the General Election last May returned to that country's traditional line of non-intervention and self-sufficiency, party to portray itself as an important power in the region. This also may lie behind its apparent competition with Japan for control of an early-warning system in the Pacific if one is eventually installed.

As far as the situation on the Andaman and Nicobar islands, which have been Indian territories since independence in 1947, it seems likely that the presence of an Indian Air Force base on Car Nicobar plays more of a role in this insistence than concern for the fate of the indigenous peoples. This suspicion would seem to be confirmed by the visit of Prime Minister Singh to Port Blair, capital of the territory, on January 9, as he only met with military personnel and did not bother with other communities.

Many of the indigenous tribes live on high ground away from the coast and therefore didn't suffer such loss. Hardest hit was the Nicobarese, a community that lives by the sea and may have lost as many as one fifth of its population of 28,600.

In terms of ecological destruction, some of the smaller coral islands have been completely washed away, while one island, Trinket has been cut in two by the flooding. Turtles, salt-water crocodiles and sea cows have been seriously affected, though the long-

term effect on these populations will take longer to see.

Elsewhere in India, there are reports of lower caste people being forced out of refugee camps in Andhra Pradesh without as yet any response by local or national government. Yet again the most oppressed suffer the most.

But if we are critical of the actions, or inactions of governments in the region, we are clear that it is the project of US imperialism that will benefit most from these developments, whether in terms of increasing militarisation or through "reconstruction" projects which will line the pockets of multinational companies, and local middlemen while further impoverishing the majority of the population of the region and damaging the local environment yet more. Very few poor people in these countries have any title to land and so are under enormous threat of loosing even more if "megadevelopments" are put in place.

But we don't want the rest of the region to become like the US military base on Diego Garcia - which of course did have ample warning of the tsunami - where the indigenous people have been completely driven out.

We know that global warming and other results of human intervention under capitalism will make dramatic weather patterns and other catastrophic events more likely.

The response of governments and rulers to this cataclysmic event has confirmed, time and again, many of the most barbaric features of late capitalism. At the same time, the humanity and generosity of ordinary people has been also underlined.

The relief efforts and subsequent reconstruction needed when such events do take place need to be under the control of local people not governments and the military.

We want health, education, transport, food and shelter for everyone, not war for profits.

Our conviction that another, socialist world is urgently necessary has been strengthened over these last days.

Quagmire

13 January 2005, by **Phil Hearse**

The cause of this crisis of the US project in Iraq is obvious - the lack of loyal partners with a sufficient base of support to secure an end to the insurgency. In the face of this the new US ambassador John Negroponte and his Washington masters are attempting to secure a working alliance with the Shi'ite clergy - a dangerous and desperate manoeuvre. Even if this yields temporary results, the election is likely to be seen as illegitimate by millions - especially in the Sunni areas - who will boycott it.

Before we go into detail about the political forces involved, a brief overview of US strategy. The US doesn't want to make Iraq a direct colony, it wants a dependency like the old situation of the Philippines or Panama. In other words a 'legitimate' elected Iraqi government, but with twelve giant US military bases there forever and a substantial number of US government and business personnel who will 'help' run the country. Through this mechanism Iraq will become a pivot of US control of the Middle East and world oil supplies.

In mid-2004 the US decided that it had to strike decisive military blows at the resistance in the 'Sunni triangle', to try to 'kill' the insurgency, in order to stabilise the country for elections at the end of January. This military offensive of course was centred on the attack on Fallujah which started on November 13.

Fallujah because it is seen as the centre of the resistance, but also because of the defeat suffered there by the marines in April 2004. Then, after three weeks of fighting and around 100 marines killed, political pressure worldwide about the hundreds of civilian dead made the US authorities back off. The marines were withdrawn and on May 1 2004 security was entrusted to ex-Ba'athist

general Jasim Mohammed Saleh, and a force of 1100 former Iraqi soldiers. Whatever the intention of Jasim, the Iraqi security force either defected to, or fraternised with, the guerrillas, resulting in effective resistance control of the city.

In November the marines went back to revenge their fallen comrades, to finish off the resistance, with no concern whatever for civilians who remained. The results of this offensive can be briefly summarised:

- The leadership and probably a big majority of the resistance fighters left the city before the battle began, leaving an unknown number of fighters to stand and fight - and to die.

- The US forces used artillery, napalm and phosphorus bombs on civilian areas resulting in many hundreds of civilian deaths.

- Hundreds of men trying to leave the city were detained and are still being kept prisoner, with an unknown fate.

- Weeks after the fighting was supposed to have finished there are daily firefights with remaining resistance fighters, many of whom may have re-infiltrated the city. The resistance has been incredibly heroic, with individual or small groups of fighters holding out for days against overwhelming firepower and much larger forces, before eventually falling silent.

- As everyone knows, the city is totally wrecked and more than 200,000 refugees from the fighting have been left destitute in camps some distance away.

- At least 80 marines were killed, with hundreds being wounded or maimed.

Reporting from Fallujah relied on 'embedded' reporters who went in with US troops. Even they reported on a few well-publicised cases of

American troops killing wounded prisoners, the tip of the iceberg of the barbarism perpetrated in that city.

Whatever else it did, the assault on Fallujah did not kill the resistance. Far from abating the fighting is escalating. Robert Burns from Associated Press reported December 31:

"The U.S. military suffered at least 348 deaths in Iraq over the final four months of the year, more than in any other similar period since the invasion in March 2003.

The number of wounded surpassed 10,000, with more than a quarter injured in the last four months as direct combat, roadside bombs and suicide attacks escalated. When President Bush declared May 1, 2003, that major combat operations were over, the number wounded stood at just 542.

The number of attacks on U.S. and allied troops grew from an estimated 1,400 attacks in September to 1,600 in October and 1,950 in November. A year earlier, the attacks numbered 649 in September, 896 in October and 864 in November.

U.S. commanders insist they are making progress, in part by taking the fight more directly to the insurgents. And they remain hopeful that more U.S.-trained Iraqi security forces will join the fight soon.

Some observers are more doubtful....

Pentagon statistics show that for all of 2004, at least 838 U.S. troops died in Iraq. Of that total, more than 700 were killed in action, by far the highest number of American battlefield deaths since at least 1980, the first year the Pentagon compiled all-service casualty statistics.

It almost certainly is the highest killed in action total for any year since the Vietnam War.

U.S. deaths averaged 62 per month through the first half of the year. But since June 28, when U.S. officials restored Iraqi sovereignty and dissolved the U.S. civilian occupation authority, that average has jumped to about 78.

Deaths among U.S. National Guard and Reserve troops are rising, reaching a single-month peak of 27 in November. At least 17 were killed in December. Nearly 200 Guard and Reserve troops have died since the war began, and more than one-third of those deaths happened in the past four months.

Bush administration and U.S. military officials had predicted the insurgents would intensify their efforts to create chaos before the Jan. 30 elections for an Iraqi National Assembly. Defence Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said during a visit last week in Iraq that he saw no reason to think the violence would abate after the elections.

Nearly 100 Marines have been killed over the past two months in Fallujah. Since the Marines regained control of Fallujah after fierce battles in November the focus of insurgent violence has shifted to the northern city of Mosul.

A Dec. 21 attack on a military mess hall in Mosul killed 22, including 13 U.S. soldiers and a sailor — the deadliest single attack on a U.S. installation in the war.

Even as U.S. losses mount, the brunt of insurgent violence is hitting the Iraqi security forces being trained by U.S. troops, as well as Iraqi political figures and Iraqis seen as supporting the Americans."

Against this background the US has to take major political steps to secure its position. Now that "kill the resistance and then hold elections" has failed, it means going back to simultaneously fighting the resistance and holding elections, to at least secure a minimum of legitimacy within some sections the population, notably the Shi'ite population in the south and the Kurdish population in the north. That means relying on the Shi'ite clergy to mobilise a big turnout, which means banking on the Shi'ite parties to form

the core a new government.

At the same time as the national elections the, the Kurdish region in the north will elect its own assembly, which is certain to be dominated by the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

The core of the mainly Shi'ite alliance for the elections is the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution (SICRI), led by Grand Ayatollah Ali al Sistani from Najaf, the highest ranking member of the Shi'ite clergy in Iraq and one of the five or six most senior worldwide.

Sistani has been playing a waiting game. During the invasion he instructed the Shiite community not to oppose the invasion. At the same time he has expressed his 'unease' at the US presence in the country, and indicated that it cannot be tolerated in the long term. Meanwhile he and his supporters have been doing everything possible to gain control of local government structures in the Shiite south of the country, and in the Shi'ite areas of Baghdad.

Sistani probably colluded with the United States in their attack on Muqtada al Sadr's Shi'ite based 'Mahdi army' in April and May of 2004; he conveniently left the country for medical treatment while al Sadr's militia fought it out with US troops. He then returned as the 'peacemaker', apparently brokering a ceasefire between the two sides.

Both Sistani and Muqtada al Sadr have strong links with the clerical leaders in Iran, but probably with different factions. In any case for the moment Sistani, through SICRI, is promoting a quietist line, concentrated on being the decisive force in the upcoming elections. The US knows this and is prepared for SICRI to be a prominent, if not the dominant, force in the new government formed post-elections.

Also in the January 30 polls will be the mainly Shi'ite Iraqi Communist Party, as well the coalitions led by present prime minister Ayad Allawi, and Iraqi National Congress led by the former US favourite Ahmed Chalabi. With large amounts of money on offer to

those who participate in the electoral process and the subsequent 'government', alliances are temporary and shifting. For example, it is expected that Muqtada al Sadr will participate in the Chalabi-led list.

However the legitimacy of the elections has been dealt a fearful blow by the boycott announced 28 December by the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party, the most influential Sunni Muslim group, and by the influential Association of Muslim Scholars, another Sunni group (an announcement that led to several prominent members of the Association being assassinated by 'persons unknown').

Everyone knows that elections boycotted by the Sunni population will lack any legitimacy and that consequently the insurgency will continue.

"To have an election without the Sunnis will just further erode whatever tenuous ties there are keeping the country together," said Stephen Buck, a former deputy chief of mission in the U.S. Embassy in Iraq. "We will have failed miserably if we have an election that just polarises Iraq and pushes it toward civil war."

If as seems likely a new government is formed in which SICRI is a major component, there remain two major unresolved questions for such an arrangement. First, what are the long-term objectives of Sistani and SICRI; second can SICRI actually deliver Shi'ite support for a long-term US presence in the country.

According to W. Andrew Terrill in a document produced for the US army's think tank, the Strategic Studies Institute, SICRI was discredited amongst the Shi'ite population because of its support for Iran in the Iran-Iraq war. This makes it difficult to see whether Sistani could hold the line for long against mass demands for a fatwa against the American presence.

In any case, it is obviously a dangerous strategy for Sistani to accommodate himself in the medium- or long-term sense with American control of the country. He is threatened by being eventually

outflanked by more radical clerics, even if Muqtada al Sadr is integrated into the Chalabi alliance and is in the post-election government. And he is vulnerable to mass sentiment among the Shi'ite population against the American occupation.

There is another problem for the US. Sistani is at least involved in a constant dialogue with the Iranian leadership. Centring US hopes for a new government on him necessarily means accepting a new government which is susceptible to significant Iranian pressure.

Meanwhile the occupation crisis is taking its toll in Washington. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has become a lightning rod for frustration about the apparent lack of progress in defeating the insurgency and for continuous revelations about torture of prisoners.

In December he was viciously attacked in the right-wing Weekly Standard by key neoconservative ideologue William Kristol, who called for his resignation. Kristol attacks Rumsfeld from the right, arguing that America is underspending in Iraq, does not have enough forces there, and is not prepared to commit hundreds of thousands of troops indefinitely.

Rumsfeld has also been attacked by Norman Schwarzkopf, the key US general in the first Iraq war, and by a raft of Republican senators led by John McCain.

Rumours persist that deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz continues to back Ahmad Chalabi, the former US favourite, replaced by Allawi. And behind all this is persistent bureaucratic infighting involving the CIA, who are attacked by the neoconservatives and others as being responsible (in some way not easily defined) for the whole Iraq mess. Kristol and the neocon ideologists who were the most vehement about the need to go to war with Iraq want to find any scapegoat to evade their responsibility for the mess. Disarray at the top reflects the quagmire on the ground.

From a purely military point of view the occupation is of course sustainable almost indefinitely. In Vietnam the US lost 58,000 killed in action, had hundreds of planes shot down by the North Vietnamese and nearly 2000 airmen taken prisoner. The average daily combat deaths between 1964 and 1972 was around 20 a day, and several times more than that during the height of the fighting, roughly 1966-9. Losses in Iraq are nothing like these figures. But the raw figures

conceal some uncomfortable realities.

The two Iraq wars, as well as the intervention in Yugoslavia, have accustomed the US public to virtually casualty-free wars. The 1300-plus troop deaths are at this relatively low level because of the vastly improved application of 'medivac' technology and practices; in other words, in Iraq a lot more wounded soldiers survive than did in Vietnam. But there have been over 10,000 wounded, and many of them have had terrible, maiming, injuries. Sooner or later the continuing casualties will deepen the backlash among the civilian population.

Against that, the Bush administration cannot possibly withdraw from Iraq. It must continue to seek partners in a new puppet government and it must continue to try to strike blows against the resistance. In all likelihood this means deepening disillusionment in the US, and deepening anger among the people of Iraq.

In such a situation there is every reason for the anti-war movement internationally to deepen its efforts, and especially to prepare for the international mobilisation on March 19.



On the forthcoming election in Iraq

12 January 2005, by **Gilbert Achcar**



The fact of the matter is that democracy has never been more than a subsidiary pretext for the Bush administration in its drive to seize control of the crucially strategic area stretching from the Arab-Persian Gulf

to Central Asia, a pretext ranking after others such as Al-Qaida or the WMD. Most of the vectors of US influence in this area are despotic regimes, from the oldest ally of Washington and most antidemocratic of all states, the Saudi Kingdom, to the newest allies, the police states of such post-Soviet Mafia-like republics as Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan, operating

through such great champions of democracy as generals Mubarak of Egypt and Musharraf of Pakistan.

Washington favors elections only if and when they are most likely to be won by its henchmen. When Arafat, facing Bush and Sharon's challenge to his legitimacy, suggested holding elections in the Palestinian territories,

the proposal was categorically rejected, since it was clear he would win overwhelmingly, as the Palestinian people would vote for him in defiance of Israel and the US. It is only after his death that they accepted that elections be held, not without heavily interfering in the process, intimidating another candidate into withdrawal, harassing others, and campaigning blatantly for the man of their choice - as did Blair, who paid Abu Mazen visit for this purpose.

True, elections were organized in Afghanistan, but only because there were no real stakes: the Taliban and other anti-US forces were prevented from participating, and no Afghan warlord would have risked antagonizing the US seriously for the sake of winning a position as nothing more than a representation of US authorities in Kabul. The Afghan warlords know that their control of their fiefdoms is much more effective and unfettered than Karzai's control over the capital, which is the only piece of real estate where he exerts some kind of power, by proxy. They accepted him for "president" a second time through a mockery of elections in the same way that they accepted him the first time through their horse trading with Washington before the fall of Kabul - though he was a non-entity in terms both of social basis and military force, his collaboration with the CIA being his "credentials." Karzai was accepted precisely because he was perceived as no real threat to any of the warlords.

A parallel does not exist in Iraq. There the US occupation has been faced from the start with a power-vacuum that its invasion created, aggravated by Bremer's neocon-inspired move to dismantle whatever remained of the Baathist power apparatuses. Apart from the de facto autonomous Kurdish area in the North, there were no warlords in Iraq with any real power. Thus Washington faced the "democracy paradox" (Huntington), created by the fact that the overwhelming majority of Arab Iraqis were - and are even more now - hostile to US control of their land, and hence any truly representative democratically elected government would seek to get rid of the occupation.

This "paradox" led to another: the US, the standard-bearer of democracy, which had altruistically occupied Iraq to bring the benefits of democracy to backward Muslim people, tried to postpone as far as possible the prospect of holding elections and to replace them with appointed bodies and a US-designed permanent constitution. This is what Proconsul Bremer sought to impose in June 2003, only a few weeks after the end of the invasion. He was countered by none other than one of the most traditionalist members of Iraq's Muslim Shia hierarchy, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani. The confrontation between the two men escalated until the Ayatollah called for demonstrations to impose democratic elections on the occupiers: in January 2004, huge numbers of people poured into the streets of several Iraqi cities, especially in the Shia areas, with hundreds of thousands shouting "yes to election, no to designation."

To be sure, the Ayatollah had his own motivations, which were no more a "pure," "Jeffersonian" (as they like to say in Washington) attachment to democracy than Bush and Bremer's were. His calculation was simple: the Shia constitute the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi population, almost two-thirds, and yet they have always been downtrodden by various kinds of despotic rulers. Instituting an electoral mechanism would allow the Shia to legitimately dictate the fate of the country. The electoral process is the best channel through which the Shia can exert their majority rights and sort out the balance of forces among them at one and the same time - since there is no more or less unified Shia political movement in Iraq comparable to what existed in Iran under Khomeini's leadership. Sistani - who never adhered to Khomeini's doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* ("leadership of the jurisprudent," a formula pointing to the pyramid-like rule of the Shia quasi-clergy) - would still see to it that the laws and regulations of the country conform to Islamic rules (the Shariah, his own most rigorist fatwas, etc.). On this issue, too, Sistani is intransigent.

Bremer had to backtrack, for fear of facing a massive anti-US pro-

democracy insurgency that would have ruined the last pretext for Washington's occupation of Iraq. Through a face-saving mediation by the UN, Bremer, and his bosses in Washington, agreed reluctantly to hold elections no later than the end of January 2005. (The UN envoy was none other than Lakhdar Brahimi, who as a member of the military-backed government supported the interruption of the electoral process in Algeria in 1992, when the Islamic Salvation Front was about to win a majority of seats.) The Bush administration thereby bought itself several months in order to devise a way out of its dilemma.

Had the elections been organized in the first months following the invasion, as Sistani insisted, they would have taken place in a much more orderly, all-embracing and therefore legitimate fashion. Washington would have been faced with an indisputably legitimate government asking it to withdraw its troops from Iraq. To prevent that from happening, Bremer argued hypocritically that there were no available electoral lists and that it would take a long time to prepare them. Sistani replied that the food-rationing lists and cards established under UN supervision were perfectly suitable for the purpose. The occupation forces eventually agreed, but with a delay of more than one year, during which time the situation in Iraq deteriorated to its present tragic condition.

In a sense, the US occupation produced this deterioration - whether deliberately or not, it is difficult to tell, though the most likely scenario is that, once again, the apprentice-sorcerers in Washington have gotten results they were not consciously seeking. Having accepted to hold elections, Washington went into a thorough revision of its policies in Iraq: a vicious onslaught against the most prominent rebellious forces in the country - the Fundamentalist-Nationalist-Baathist alliance in the Sunni city of Fallujah, as well as the Shia Fundamentalist movement of Moqtada al-Sadr - in order to try to strengthen its hold on the country. The neocons' buddy Chalabi was replaced with the CIA-collaborator

Allawi as the key Iraqi US stooge, and a farcical "transfer of sovereignty" was organized surreptitiously on June 28, 2003. Allawi tried to play it tough, proclaiming a state of emergency, reinstating the death penalty, etc. and, above all, endorsing with his very transparent Iraqi cover the continuing onslaught by US forces.

The attempt at crushing Moqtada al-Sadr's movement culminated in the Shia city of Najaf. Sistani, after having let the young al-Sadr reach a situation where he was on the verge of a crushing and bloody defeat, obviously in order to tame him, intervened to stop the US onslaught and thereby confirm his unchallengeable leadership of the Shia community. The second assault on Fallujah, in the immediate aftermath of the US elections, seemed to make no sense. The US occupation could not have any illusion - at this point in time - about its ability to stop the violence in the country by resorting to such violent means. Instead, there is serious reason to believe that the real purpose was precisely to aggravate the chaotic conditions in Iraq in order to diminish the legitimacy of the outcome of the January 30 elections.

Washington's duplicity could not be more blatant: on the one hand, Bush and his Iraqi official stooges state their firm commitment to hold the elections on time; on the other, Allawi's "party" joined a coalition of Saudi/Wahhabi-linked Sunni groups in demanding the postponement of the elections. The Iraqi Sunni "president" echoed staunch US allies in the region, like the Saudi and Jordanian monarchies, in warning of an Iranian conspiracy to get hold of Iraq as a major step toward establishing a "Shia crescent" stretching from Lebanon to Iran, a new version of the "axis of evil," more formidable than even Bush's original one. The Saudi/Wahhabi-linked Muslim Brotherhood, the key component of which is its Egyptian branch, denounced the elections under the guise that they are to be held under occupation. Its Iraqi branch, the Islamic Party, after having registered for the elections, announced its withdrawal, and joined the Sunni "Council of Muslim ulamas" in denouncing the elections in advance.

The fact is that the sharp increase in the level of violence fostered by the US occupation's own onslaughts jeopardized greatly the likelihood of a meaningful turnout of electors in the areas where the Sunni mixture of Fundamentalist-Nationalist-Baathist forces is active. Therefore, whatever their intentions, the Sunni forces proclaiming their withdrawal from the electoral race, are just acknowledging the fact that the major part of their potential electorate will very probably stay cautiously at home on the day of elections. Not that the Sunni population is politically convinced of the need to "boycott" the elections: earlier polls had shown them to be massively willing to enjoy, like their fellow citizens, this first pluralistic election after decades of despotism in their country. But they have been definitely frightened by deadly threats from various "resistance" groups into shunning the elections.

The so-called Iraqi resistance is a heterogeneous conglomerate of forces, many of them purely local. For a major part, these are people revolted by the heavy-handed occupation of their country, fighting against the occupiers and their armed Iraqi auxiliaries. But another segment of the forces engaged in violent actions in Iraq is composed of utterly reactionary fanatics, mainly of the Islamic Fundamentalist kind, who make no distinction between civilians, Iraqis included, and armed personnel, and resort to horrible acts, like the decapitation of Asian migrant workers and the kidnapping and/or assassination of all kinds of persons who are in no way hostile or harmful to the Iraqi national cause. These acts are being used in Washington to counterbalance the effect of the legitimate attacks against the US troops: the task of presenting the "enemy" as evil is thus made very easy.

This means, incidentally, that any unqualified support for the "Iraqi resistance" as a whole in Western countries, where the antiwar movement is badly needed, is utterly counter-productive as much as it is deeply wrong (when paved with good political intentions). There should be a clear-cut distinction between anti-occupation acts that are legitimate

and acts by so-called "resistance" groups that are to be denounced. One very obvious case in point are the sectarian attacks by Al-Zarqawi group against Shias. This being said, it has been clear until now that the most fruitful strategy in opposing the occupation is the one led by Sistani, and that attempts at derailing the elections and de-legitimizing them in advance can only play into the hands of the US occupation.

Those most active in trying to derail the elections are not really concerned by the fact that they will be held under continuing occupation. After all, the history of decolonization is full of instances of elections or consultations held under occupation as major steps toward independence and the evacuation of foreign troops. For many years, the Palestinians have been fighting for the right to hold elections under Israeli occupation. This argument is a thin disguise for the fear of holding elections on the part of forces who know that they are condemned to be in a minority or to be completely marginalized in free elections. (This also holds true for Allawi, whose total lack of popularity would be expressed in the outcome of any fair elections, though he is compelled to act according to his mandate and cannot state openly his true wishes.)

To this is added the argument of the likes of Zarqawi, recently endorsed by Bin Laden: the elections are impious because they are held under "positive," i.e. man-made, law, whereas the only "legitimate" elections are those held under the rule of the Shariah. The utterly reactionary character of this argument needs no comment. But the truth is that there is a common ground here between Bin Laden and Sistani: both of them believe that the Shariah should be the main, if not unique, source of legislation. The difference is that Bin Laden, aside from being much more fanatical, is dedicated to his crazy belief that he could achieve victory through terrorist violence, whereas Sistani - who warned the UN and others against any consecration of the regulations introduced by the occupation (for example, through referring to them in a UN resolution) - wants to secure control of power

through elections first, in order to have the parliament elaborate a constitution and laws to his taste.

The real mood of the Shia population and their view of the elections was pretty well expressed in a report by Washington Post reporter Anthony Shadid, commenting on the main Shia popular neighborhood of Baghdad: "Shiite empowerment is just one facet of the clerical campaign, and it is usually couched in coded language. More common are visceral appeals to an electorate that has grown fatigued and disillusioned with the carnage of war... At one end of the road, banners promised a new era of stability with the vote. At the other, they cast the election as the surest way to end an occupation that has grown increasingly unpopular. 'Brother Iraqis, the future of Iraq is in your hands. Elections are the ideal way to expel the occupier from Iraq,' one white banner proclaimed. 'Brother Iraqi, your vote in the elections is better than a bullet in battle,' an adjacent sign read" (December 7, 2004).

The electoral slate prepared under the auspices of Sistani, the "Unified Iraqi Coalition," encompasses the broadest range of Shia forces, from Chalabi (definitely a "man for all seasons") to al-Sadr (who tries actually to hedge his bets: while having people of his entourage on the unified slate, he states that he won't personally "enter the political game"). The slate gives pre-eminence to the pro-Iranian

"Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq." To its credit, this list took pains to include Sunni, Kurdish and Turkmen candidates, including tribal leaders, so as not to be a sectarian slate - though it is being labeled as such by the media. The list will certainly receive an overwhelming majority of the votes if the elections proceed on January 30. This will give way to a Parliament and a government in which Shia Fundamentalist forces, more or less friendly with Iran, are hegemonic. A central item in the program of the coalition, which says it will assert the "Islamic identity" of Iraq, is to negotiate with the occupation authorities a date for the withdrawal of their troops from the country.

What will Washington do after the January 30 elections? It is difficult to predict. The Bush administration has a clear strategic objective: securing control of Iraq for the long haul. But Washington does not know how to achieve this goal or how to reconcile it with the forecast result of the elections, which an anonymous senior official residing in Baghdad's Green Zone aptly described to the New York Times as a "jungle of ambiguity" (December 18, 2004). One scenario, which has been greatly facilitated by the behavior of the occupying forces, is the one that many neocons came to favor after the collapse of their illusions about securing control of Iraq "democratically": a de facto, if not de jure, carving up of the country along sectarian lines (Israel's favored scenario from the beginning).

In order to retain control of the land, Washington could very well resort to the well-tried imperial recipe of divide and rule, taking the risk of setting Iraq on the devastating fire of a civil war - both sectarian (Shia v. Sunni) and ethnic (Arab v. Kurd). The way in which the US occupation is letting the situation deteriorate between Kurds and Arabs in the North, without trying earnestly to broker a compromise that would be satisfactory to all, as well as the way it has dealt with the issue of the elections fostering tensions between Shia and Sunnis, is very revealing in that regard.

This grave danger will keep hanging over the heads of the Iraqi people unless the situation quickly reaches a point where Washington's objective would shift to getting out of Iraq at short range and at minimal cost and damage to US interests. For that point to be reached, the combination of pressure from the Iraqi people from within and pressure from the antiwar movement abroad - above all in the US - is indispensable. This means that the most urgent task outside of Iraq is to supplement the January 30 elections, and the legitimate actions of resistance to the US occupation and its allies in Iraq, with building as widely and effectively as possible for the March 19 global antiwar demonstration.

January 1, 2005

This article was first posted at ZNet. Thanks to Anthony Arnone for his kind editing of this piece.

Another Europe is possible! No to the multinationals' constitution!

11 January 2005, by European Anti-Capitalist Left

It consecrates the absolute primacy of the "free market". It legally forbids any infringement of private property and market relations. It refuses to give any legal status to social gains won on national level through a century and a half of workers' struggles.

It consecrates budgetary constraints previously institutionalised through the Maastricht criteria that will drastically reduce social benefits and hamstring public economic policy. Systematic privatisation of public services and social security will

become "inevitable" and public services will be considered as "unaffordable".



The constitutional treaty confirms the European Community's semi-despotic and undemocratic character. Real political power remains centralized in the hands of the governments and bodies such as the Commission, which are not directly elected. The European Central Bank remains "independent" - that means that its power does not emanate from citizens or peoples - and accountable to no one, except corporate and shareholders.

The constitution does not recognize the rights of women to choose free and legal access to abortion. This goes along with the situation of brutal oppression of women that prevails in Portugal, Ireland and Poland. Though the principle of equality between women and men has been included in the constitution as a goal of EU, the Constitution in itself impedes the goal by imposing liberalisation of social services.

The constitutional treaty does not recognize citizenship rights, including the right to vote, for citizens of a third country residing in a member state and confirms that its project is to build a "fortress Europe" closed to asylum seekers.

The constitution draft does not recognize the multinational character

of the member states and deny the right to self-determination for oppressed peoples and "nations without state" in the name of territorial integrity principle.

The Constitution legally obliges the EU and its members to reinforce their military capabilities under the rule of NATO. Far from being an alternative to US imperialism, this means European militarism and will strengthen imperialist system. We say "NO" to this Europe and its Constitution. Because this Europe means more attacks against social rights, more privatisations and destruction of public services, more legislation in favour of the rich and the powerful, more military expenses and less democracy.

We say "No" to this Europe because we are fighting for a socialist, democratic society, self-managed from below, without exploitation at work or oppression of women, founded on sustainable development as opposed to a "growth model" that threatens the planet.

We are committed to develop in each European country and internationally the widest movement against this constitution treaty and in favour of social and democratic demands. As

radical, revolutionary and anti-capitalist parties we will cooperate to defeat this constitution along with the vast majority of European Left forces opposed to the constitution.

Another Europe is possible. The first step towards is to defeat the neo-liberal and undemocratic constitution.

Amsterdam, the 5th December 2004

signed by:

Bloco do Esquerda (Portugal),

Espacio Alternativo (Spain),

La Gauche/Dei Lenk (Luxemburg),

Izquierda Unida (Spain),

Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (France),

Ä-zgürlük Dayanisma Partisi (Turkey),

Red/Green Alliance (Denmark),

Respect (England and Wales),

Scottish Socialist Party (Scotland),

Socialist Party (Britain),

Socialist Workers Party (Britain),

SolidaritéS (Switzerland)

Confronting the attacks of the bourgeoisie

11 January 2005, by **François Sabado**

1) Europe is experiencing a new and brutal phase of the ruling-class offensive aimed at speeding up the integration of the continent into capitalist globalisation and remodelling social and economic relations. Since the Lisbon and Barcelona summits, the principal governments of the Union have worked out a strategy aimed at giving the European bourgeoisies fresh room for manoeuvre. This strategy is a response to a new sharpening of inter-imperialist contradictions. These

contradictions have been visible during the war in Iraq, but they also express a ruthless struggle to carve out the biggest market share of the world economy. Another example of this new inter-imperialist rivalry is today the policy of weakening the dollar, which in its turn seeks to favour American commodities and companies. Engaged in capitalist globalisation, the European ruling classes are reacting to this increased rivalry by further reorganising economic and social relations.



Francois Sabado

2) What it comes down to is abandoning what remains of the "European social model", of developing a series of measures to lower the cost of labour, dismantle social security systems, privatise public services and increase working hours, as German, Belgian and French companies are at present doing by suppressing the mechanisms of

reduction of the working week. This attack is being conducted right across the board, in particular in Germany, the country that embodied, from a certain point of view, what we call the "Welfare State". The Schröder government has gone particularly on the offensive in the recent period, by a Draconian reduction of the rights of the unemployed, by lengthening working hours and reducing the percentage of reimbursement of certain vital medicines. This confirms once again that under a left government - the SPD and the Greens - there is no room for manoeuvre in globalised liberal capitalism for Keynesian or neo-Keynesian policies aimed at stimulating the economy.

3) These policies are being conducted both by right wing governments under Chirac and Berlusconi and by left governments like those of Schröder or Blair. It is worth noting that although the Zapatero government has taken a series of bold measures, for the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq or on "questions of society" (women's rights, gay marriage, etc,) it is fundamentally implementing neo-liberal capitalist policies. Both the Right and the traditional Left subscribe to the neo-liberal agenda, which is leading them to step up the anti-social and anti-democratic offensive. We have to base ourselves on the movements that reject these policies. We also have to make "the concrete analysis of a concrete situation ". When the Right is in government and the Left in opposition, working people can at certain elections use the left parties to express this rejection. During such phases, that doesn't really change the relationship they have with these parties, because we are in a new historical period, characterised by the social-liberal evolution of the Socialist parties and the decline of the parties of Stalinist origin. Thus, the French SP did not at any time participate in the mobilisations that rejected the liberal reforms of the pension system in 2003, but it nevertheless reaped the electoral benefit of this rejection a few months later, in the 2004 regional and European elections. The votes for the Left did not reflect increased confidence in these parties, nor did it demonstrate more control of the mass movement by their apparatuses. But

they did reflect, in working class circles, fear and rejection of liberal reforms and a desire to weaken their impact by punishing those who were applying them. When the ultraliberal Right is in government, we organise to kick out such right-wing governments, by mass mobilisations or by the ballot box, and we actively build these mobilisations, because that is obviously one aspect of our fight for an alternative to liberalism. The big difficulty for the anti-capitalist Left is to appear as a useful instrument, including on the electoral level, for conducting this battle to the finish. That is the limit that was shown in France during the recent elections.

Logically, when the social-liberal Left is in government and it implements capitalist plans, sectors of working people reject its liberal policies and express this rejection by in punishing them, again on the electoral level. In these cases, without any hesitation, we conduct a policy of mobilising against these governments, bringing out even more sharply the need for a real alternative. Let's not forget that in 1998, the PRC refused to vote for the policies of the Italian centre-left and brought down the government.

So we have to take stock of the sharp changes in the political situation and adjust our tactical objectives accordingly. All the more because if these policies are brutal, if they have scored a series of points and forced the working class to retreat, this very brutality provokes a rejection of liberalism, creating tensions and elements of political crisis in the majority of traditional European political formations. Crisis of the Right - in Italy, in France with the Chirac-Sarkozy duel, in Portugal with the resignation of the Santana government and the calling of new elections... - but also crisis of the social-liberal Left where sectors of Social Democracy consider that adaptation to liberalism has gone too far, especially when there are important social movements that reject it. That is what explains the differentiations that are taking place in Germany, with the emergence of "the Electoral Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice" or the position against the European constitution taken by someone like Laurent Fabius in the

French SP. These currents are not breaking with the framework of neo-liberal policies but they consider that these policies have gone too far...that these tensions and political crises are undermining the legitimacy of the liberal projects. So we have to follow attentively all these movements of opinion and all these differentiations, in order to find points of support for organising resistance to the capitalist attacks.

4) From this point of view, the results of the referendum in the French SP illustrate well the evolutions of Social Democracy and the repercussions of the social resistance within these parties. Looked at from the rest of Europe, the French SP still demonstrates a certain singularity. It is the only Socialist Party where more than 40 per cent of the members vote "No" to the European constitution. We don't have similar situations in other Socialist parties. The Socialist "lefts" in the other parties are in general calling for a "Yes" vote, as in Spain and Portugal. This 40 per cent of opposition to the Constitution remains a singularity and a point of support in the coming united-front battles for the "No". But the 60 per cent for the "Yes" in the French SP represents a turning point in the evolution of this party. As its principal leader explained, this "Yes" confirms the integration of the French SP into European Social Democracy ...and represents a certain break with the specificities of the Socialist Party of Epinay. The "Yes" is presented by its partisans as a fundamental political act of adhesion to what the leadership calls "left reformism". A "left reformism" that is neither left nor reformist but which appears as a break with the history of a SP that is anchored in the union of the Left... So the "Yes" of the SP in France confirms a deepening of a whole process of adaptation of this party to present-day capitalist politics and economics...which oblige the traditional Left, when it goes into government, to conduct frontal attacks against the living standards and working conditions of working people.

5) In this unfavourable context for workers, not only the working class, but even broader social layers, in fact the majority, nevertheless reject neo-liberalism. That leads to increasingly

short and regular cycles of alternating governments of Left and Right. The "outgoing" governments are regularly kicked...out. So these resistances are reflected in by-elections or at general elections, by majorities against the governments in place; against the Right in France, in Italy, in Spain and probably soon in Portugal; against the social-liberal Left in Britain or Germany. The workers who suffer social defeats or come up against blockages in the struggles they engage in tend to use the ballot paper to punish the governments in place. As far as social conflicts are concerned, the situation is unequal, depending on the country.

- Italy has just experienced a massive general strike, with more than 6 million strikers. The Netherlands have seen one of the biggest strikes in recent years against the government's social reforms.

- Germany has seen a wave of demonstrations against the 2010 Agenda of Chancellor Schröder and strikes against lay-offs which up to now have been unsuccessful.

- In France, the strikes against pension reform or the privatisation of electricity and gas and the mobilisations against the social security reforms have ended in defeat.

When we are dealing with struggles and social movements, each national conjuncture is specific, marked by the ups and downs of the class struggle, but the overall relationship of social and political forces regularly sustains movements of social resistance.

That is not where the problem is. The difficulties lie elsewhere. The characteristics of the historical period, the balance-sheet of the previous century, the obstacles that any perspective of social transformation comes up against, have fundamental consequences for the most militant or advanced sectors: struggles do not lead to the development of a consciousness of the need for the socialist transformation of society, still less a revolutionary consciousness. The social movements, the unions, the parties, as well as the "class struggle" currents, are not experiencing organic growth. The electoral space

conquered by revolutionary or anti-capitalist formations like the LCR in France in the 2002 presidential elections or the Left Bloc in Portugal during recent elections, are more the result of the crisis of the traditional Left - in particular the Communist parties - than of self-activity of the mass movement...

6) In this context, a new phenomenon has appeared, free from the grip of the problems of the traditional workers' movement - the global justice movement, in particular the youth. This is a movement of decisive importance for building a relationship of forces against the liberal projects and also for the renewal of generations of the Left and the anti-capitalist organisations. This movement may not be up to confronting the scale of capitalist attacks, the processes of capitalist globalisation or armed globalisation, illustrated by the war that is raging in Iraq. But having said that, it has strategic importance as a broad united front against globalisation, a front of all the currents, of all the experiences, of all the associations, but also as a forum to debate and exchange ideas on the question of a political and programmatic alternative.

7) In this context, the elements of an alternative must be articulated around three axes:

a) A policy of united action. The phase in which we are at present intervening is a defensive phase for the workers' movement, a phase of resistance. That implies taking a positive approach to and participating in all the movements, all the struggles, even the most elementary, in order to try and give fresh confidence to workers and young people, in order to win even partial victories. In this context we have to develop a united front approach in mobilisations, aiming to build mass movements that are unitary, democratic and pluralist. That is what we do when we build antiwar movements, or in the global justice movement. That is also our response on the question of the European Constitution. Particularly in the countries confronted with referendums, we launch a battle for a united "No" of all the left forces opposed to the constitution.

b) Elements of programmatic response. The refounding of a programmatic project that combines social questions in the broadest sense of the term, taking in feminism and ecology, in an anti-capitalist perspective. We have to take the national question into account in all the countries where it is posed, there too combining it with the social question. These programmatic responses must start from the aspirations and demands of the mass movement in order to push them "right to the end". A red thread must guide our approach: the logic of social rights, the satisfaction of social needs must take precedence over the logic of profit and capitalist profitability. As was indicated in the theme of the LCR's electoral campaign: "Our lives must take precedence over their profits". So a democratic and social emergency programme must pose the questions of sharing out wealth differently and of making inroads into the private property of the big companies and of capital, either by the defence and extension of public services or by measures that encroach on the power of the employers. This programme can be expressed - as it is by the Left Bloc in Portugal - in the demand for five measures such as: a plan for jobs, against unemployment and job insecurity, the refusal to turn hospitals into limited companies, the right to free abortion on demand, the regularisation of illegal immigrants and the fight against corruption. But we know that any serious application of a plan against job insecurity means today, in the liberal Europe that we know, a confrontation with the employers and the government, a break from the principles that now govern the capitalist economy...

c) A position on the questions of power and of government. The question of the anti-capitalist alternative must also include an answer on the questions of power and of government. This question is posed in the debates within the Left. It can even, directly or indirectly, be posed for us in our intervention. This question has for a long time divided the workers' movement. It also divides the Left to the left of the Socialist parties, and in particular differentiates anti-capitalist formations from currents linked to the Communist

milieu. It is also one of the differences between the Conference of the Anti-capitalist Left and the European Left Party, which is made up of many Communist parties, most of which agree on the need to govern with the Socialists... In France, the government of the plural Left included the Socialist Party, but also the PCF and the Greens. In Germany, the PDS (which came out of the former ruling party of the GDR) is part of coalitions that govern regions and major cities such as Berlin, along with the SPD and the Greens. In Spain, the leadership of the United Left defends a policy of a "majority of the lefts" in order to support the Zapatero government. The left sector, organised in particular by our comrades of Espacio Alternativo, rejects this proposition and defends a policy of "left opposition" to the government. More recently, the leadership of Rifondazione Comunista in Italy has made a turn, seeking to create the conditions for participation in a government dominated by the centre-left and by Romano Prodi, ex-president of the European Commission! Our comrades, while proposing an electoral agreement against the parties of the Right, are today conducting a fight against Rifondazione taking part in this kind of government which, as in the past, will endorse the capitalist policies of all the governments that place themselves in the liberal framework... Outside of the European situation, in Brazil, we are confronted with the question of participation in government. The balance sheet of two years of the Lula government has confirmed its first measures. By respecting the agreements with the IMF and the policies of the financial

markets, the Lula government has carried out a third-rate agrarian reform, has adopted a liberal-style reform of civil service pensions and has not reduced the levels of unemployment and poverty. The result has been demobilisation and disillusion of the sectors that are loyal to the PT. The question is posed of the PT left, and in particular the Socialist Democracy tendency, breaking with the government. It is impossible to build an alternative to the Lula government ... while at the same time participating in this government. For our current, the question of the government must be linked to its policies. We are in favour of governments that break with capitalism, undertaking social transformations that open the way to socialism. In fact, you cannot satisfy the main demands of working people without breaking with capitalist institutions and the capitalist economy. That's why the anti-capitalist left cannot participate in governments that place themselves in this framework. That's what leads, for example, our Portuguese comrades to refuse any participation in or support to a SP government, contrary to the Portuguese Communist Party, which is by the way very anti-Socialist... They also reject any global parliamentary agreement with the Socialists and they will judge each case, each measure, each law, on its merits, voting for what is good for the workers while combating what is bad.

8) We are entering a new phase of building anti-capitalist formations and revolutionary currents and organisations. The new characteristics of the period place on the agenda the search for new paths towards the

formation of a broad anti-capitalist party. That implies, to start with, a discussion on content - a programme, a profile and political outlines that define an alternative to social-liberalism, in particular on questions of government (see above). We also have to seek the coming together, the convergence of forces of varying political origin and culture which are broader than the existing organisations.

In each case of the emergence of these new forces, the dialogue between political organisations or currents is decisive. Political content and dynamic forms of organisation are also decisive, all the more so since anti-capitalist currents are at this stage confronted with the following contradiction: they can occupy a significant political space - as do the Left Bloc in Portugal or the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) - without that corresponding to a high level of self-activity of the mass movement. Their development results in particular from the crisis of the traditional Left, from the social-liberal evolution of the SPs and the decline of the CPs, linked to specific national conjunctures. As a result our anti-capitalist or revolutionary organisations experience tensions and contradictions between their significant presence in political life, in the media and in political institutions, and a politico-organisational reality that is well below their influence. That should lead us to define "demanding political content", aiming to develop our organisations, while preserving their independence and their capacity to encourage the political and social activity of working people.

Fortaleza: the campaign that relied on the militants

10 January 2005, by **Luizianne Lins**

Luizianne was one of the rare PT candidates to receive the active

support of militants who had left the party after the expulsion of Senator

Heloisa Helena and the MPs Baba, Joao Fontes and Luciana Genro, to

found the party of Socialism and Freedom (PSoL). Predicted to lose by the opinion polls, Luizianne created a sensation by coming second in the first round with 22.3 per cent of the votes. In the second round she won with 56.2 per cent of the votes against Moroni Torgan, the candidate of the Party of the Liberal Front, and was described by the press as “the new star of the Brazilian Left”. We publish here the interview she gave to the monthly *Democracia Socialista* (n.º 8, November-December 2004).



Democracia Socialista: *Can you say a few words about your campaign...*

Luizianne Lins: The success in the first round was decisive - the people of Fortaleza got involved in the campaign. We chose to make an alliance with the Brazilian Socialist party (PSB) which chose the candidate for deputy mayor.

The motor force of the campaign was the people of Fortaleza, because the middle classes were divided between our candidature and the PCdoB. Since in the first round we had received neither resources nor help from the party nationally, we staked everything on a militant campaign. The militants were just as active when the polls were giving us 3 per cent as when we had a chance of winning after the result of the first round.

From the point of view of electoral marketing we chose to talk about love. So I was asked if talking about love wasn't depoliticising the debate: I replied that there couldn't be a feeling that was stronger, more revolutionary and with more power to transform, than love. Our slogan was “For love of Fortaleza”.

For the second round we received the support of seven parties (PHS, PV, PPS, PRP, PCdoB, PCB and PDT) [22] but we refused the support of the others. We had said in advance that we didn't want the support of the PMDB, the PSDB and the PL. But we didn't refuse the support of certain people belonging to those parties.

It was a very hard campaign, our

opponents didn't hesitate to resort to homophobia, accusing us of defending the rights of homosexuals. There were also a lot of pamphlets of doubtful origin...

DS: *And that he fact that you are a woman? Was that also used by your opponents?*

LL: Always. They insisted on the fact that I was the only woman PT candidate for mayor of a state capital. It's not a coincidence. The participation of women in various spheres of social activity is difficult, politics is just one more. But after all, the other ten candidates were men and it's me, the only woman, who was elected...

DS: *What other aspects contributed to your victory?*

LL: The fact that the PT was reunified after the first round was important. President Lula took the initiative of according me an audience to demonstrate that as a militant he wanted me to win. It was a gesture of great political grandeur that other leaders didn't show. I think it was an important lesson for the PT and for the country. A lesson that you have to trust the people and the society when you take decisions at the top.

Before the first round we sold shirts because we didn't have any money. For the second round campaign we received material from the PT, but we chose not to organise mega-shows. First of all, because before the first round, all the shows were organised for the candidate of the PCdoB, secondly because we thought that it had a depoliticising effect.

The only thing we had during the campaign was the orchestra of the Legiao Urbana. To music by Monte Castelo they sang: “In spite of myself I spoke the language of the angels/ In spite of myself I spoke the language of men/Without love I would be nothing/I sing a song of love that is transforming, revolutionary and socialist”.

DS: *What other lessons can the PT learn from this process?*

LL: That you have to place your faith in militancy, do politics differently

from the bourgeoisie. Our success is a clear indication in that direction. We didn't have paid activists, everything was done by people who were fighting for their ideals, the way the PT always did it before.

DS: *Do you counter-pose that to the excessive importance given to marketing in the PT's campaigns?*

LL: If you look at it objectively, marketing and advertising have never won an election. Where they were used the most, the elections weren't won. Society is capable of being sufficiently discerning to not give in to political marketing. It can only be a back-up, the instrument for an idea for a project. Politics is not aesthetics. This election was important for people who have other preoccupations than just an interest in marketing.

DS: *You're going to govern the city, what will be the mechanisms of developing participatory democracy?*

LL: We are planning to build in all the neighbourhoods popular organisations that won't be institutionalised Thematic councils. The goal is a popular organisation that will enable everyone to discuss with the city hall and with the mayoress.

The participatory budget will be a principle for the administration. But the idea that we have is to broaden participatory democracy beyond the single issue of the budget. We have to radicalise democracy, that's exactly what is missing from the PT at national level.

Popular participation will be something absolutely new for Fortaleza. For the moment there exists an apparatus of the city hall with some mechanisms of participatory democracy...There's nothing new there, and - although I don't like the word - nothing different. It's just a way of “doing politics”.

DS: *What will your priorities be?*

LL: We are going to stake a lot on children and young people. Nearly 40 per cent of the population of Fortaleza is under 18. Those sectors will be our priority. In addition, Fortaleza suffers from a terrible scourge, which I denounced as a municipal councillor

and MP - sexual tourism. Those are questions that the society will have to discuss.

We have serious problems with education. Basic education is reasonably accessible to everyone, but that doesn't mean that the pupils stay in school. So the big challenge is to improve municipal education.

In Fortaleza the system of family health care only reaches 15.4 per cent of the population. That's absurd when we are over-supplied with health centres and hospitals. The universalisation of the family health care programme, including dental care, is a priority.

The question of housing is also very important. We have 92 sectors that are dangerous and 75,000 people live there. All the year round these people die because of the rains (which cause mudslides).

DS: *What relations do you plan to*

have with the municipal council (the legislative organ) and how do you see the composition of the executive?

LL: We are fighting to put together a majority on the Municipal council without using the same methods as the Right - buying votes, trading votes for posts, etc. I know that it's not going to be easy.

To do it we have to establish a process in which the society participates. That forces these institutions to have a different kind of relationship with the city hall. I was a municipal councillor and I know how important these representatives are for the people. They are a sounding board for society. And I don't want to spend four years managing a conflict with the Council.

DS: *How many councillors did the coalition get elected?*

LL: Three for the PT and one for the PSB. On top of that the left is weak - there are at most 10 left municipal

councillors out of a total of 41. So we'll have to grit our teeth, without abandoning our principles. For the composition of the executive we have decided to put together a transitional team, taking account of the opinions of the parties. But we have defined criteria: technical ability, party-political commitment and being available on a full-time basis. The PT and the PSB have given 13 names, the others will come from the parties that supported us.

At the same time we are setting up a party-political council and we are moving towards a political management council, which will involve the parties but also sectors of the society. All the social forces involved in the struggle, even the humblest, will be represented in the running of the city. A council like that existed alongside me during my first term as a municipal councillor and it was always very important. It can't only be the parties that define the orientations for running the city.

Disaster donations may well end up servicing the Third World Debt!

9 January 2005, by **Damien Millet, Éric Toussaint**

Eleven countries are affected: Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Somalia, the Maldives, Malaysia, Burma, Tanzania, Bangladesh and Kenya. A mixed bag, including countries from Africa and from Asia, countries with emerging economies and very poor countries, countries repaying colossal amounts on their debts and others which have suspended payments. However Nature made no distinction between these countries, so it would seem all the more shocking to grant to some what others might be denied.

At the end of 2003, the total external debt of the eleven countries came to 406 billion dollars. [23] Their economic performance varied greatly, as did their creditors. [24] Promising

countries like India and Thailand have a debt mainly to private lenders, contracted on the finance markets or with big banks. Poor countries like Sri Lanka or Bangladesh have a mainly multilateral debt, held by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the IMF. More internationally isolated countries like Somalia have a mainly bilateral debt contracted with rich countries. In 2003, the eleven countries repaid a total of 68 billion dollars to their foreign creditors, as compared to 60 billion the preceding year. Their governments alone repaid 38 billion dollars. [25] It is an enormous drain on their resources: between 1980 and 2003, repayments totalled eleven times the amount owed in 1980, while at the same time, that original debt had increased

fivefold. [26]

The amount of international aid so far pledged is estimated at 6 billion dollars, 4 billion of which will come from official institutions. Without wishing to discourage the wave of generosity, which relieves the donors' consciences long before it reaches the victims, it is urgent to point out that the eleven countries shell out six times that much in debt repayments each year. So the grossly over-publicised generosity, even when it is sincere, remains a very subtle mechanism for sucking the wealth of the populations of the South towards their rich creditors. If only December's tragedy could serve to highlight that other tragedy, going well beyond the eleven countries hit by the tsunami: the debt.

Because of it, and with the complicity of the local ruling classes who have a personal interest in keeping their countries indebted, States do not guarantee the fulfilment of their people's basic needs; poverty and corruption are widespread; political and economic sovereignty have become meaningless concepts for dozens of countries; natural resources are pillaged or sold off to powerful multinational corporations; farmers are forced to grow cash crops for export to the detriment of subsistence crops. The debt is the particularly vigorous nerve centre of a predatory and oppressive economic model.

What creditor would dare declare publicly that they still intend to obtain

repayments from such badly damaged countries? Nevertheless, none has definitely given up. The long-awaited Paris Club meeting, (17 days after the quake) attended by 19 rich countries, should fool no one. The creditors are ready to suspend repayments, with no significant cancellation of the debt, all the better to lay down strict conditionalities enforced by the IMF. Yet this is the same IMF which already distinguished itself during the 1997-1998 crisis with remedies worse than the disease.

As a matter of conscience, all creditors can decide to renounce their debts. Without delay. It has already happened in recent years for

geopolitical reasons. [27] Hundreds of social movements present in the region, particularly the CADTM and Jubilee South networks, have called for cancellation, showing the objective solidarity that exists among all those who have first-hand experience of the tyranny of the debt. A moratorium or simple reduction will not do. Only the total and unconditional cancellation of the external public debt of the stricken countries, with local citizens' control over the money thus freed up, can be an adequate response to the scale of the tsunami disaster. Otherwise, the only purpose your donations will serve, in the end, is to help the devastated countries to repay their debt - a debt that has become immoral.

The Beginnings of a Political Alternative to Neo-Liberalism

7 January 2005, by **Manuel Kellner**

The Offensive of Capital

The measure known as "Hartz IV", which will be implemented from January 2005, has lit the fuse. Peter Hartz, personnel manager of Volkswagen, was appointed by the government to head a commission (known as the "Hartz Commission") responsible for devising measures aimed officially at reducing unemployment. The measures Hartz I, II and III seek to increase the pressure on the unemployed to get them to accept any job at any price. They "reform" the public body that deals with the unemployed into a collection of "agencies" which are supposed to get everyone back to work. "Hartz IV" merges the second-class unemployment benefit (Arbeitslosenhilfe - a benefit that is considerably less than the "first-class" Arbeitslosengeld and is conditional on proof of "need") with the Sozialhilfe (the lowest rate of benefit,

officially designed to keep people out of dire poverty) to produce Arbeitslosengeld II. The result will be a million more people living below the poverty line, including many children.



Anti-Hartz demonstration in Berlin

On November 1, 2003, everyone was taken by surprise by the number of demonstrators in Berlin, in view of the passivity of all the union leaderships, at least at the highest levels: 100,000 people, of whom about 30,000 were mobilised by militant trade unionists or by local leaders and middle-level union bodies, the rest being mobilised by the anti-capitalist Left, divided among several small organisations, by ATTAC, by the small social movements, etc. The union leaderships, so as not to be outflanked, reacted by preparing a large united mobilisation for April 3,

2004: on that occasion 500,000 people came into the streets in Berlin, Stuttgart and Cologne. Finally at the end of July and the beginning of August 2004, there was the explosion of the movement of "Monday demonstrations", [28] which appeared on the fringes of the traditional organisations, especially in the East of Germany, but also in nearly 200 towns and cities in the West, although with noticeably fewer people taking part. The top leaderships of the major unions remained very passive, returning to the road of an understanding with the SPD leadership and therefore with the government, obtaining purely cosmetic changes in the law known as "Hartz IV".



The year 2004 also brought the beginning of a change in the political landscape, a beginning of differentiation in Social Democracy

and in the union apparatus, although it is only at a very early stage and its programmatic content is pretty weak. This is the birth of Wahlalternative - an electoral alternative - seeking to create a political force that breaks with New Labour-style neo-liberalism under Schroeder's leadership. This reflects, among other things, the growing need of a certain layer of unionists to break with the traditional "symbiosis" with the SPD, because it has become increasingly difficult to justify this loyal relationship to the union rank and file. All the more so since on the wages front, the trade union movement has been on the defensive for along time, is in crisis and is losing many members every year. For its part the SPD is also losing members - 300,000 over the least few years.

Differentiations in the workers' movement

It is the first time that Social Democrats linked to the trade union/workers' movement have not just dropped out individually but are trying to launch an alternative.

For various reasons, the PDS [29] is not very credible as a political alternative, especially because it shares responsibility for neo-liberal policies at regional level where it is a junior partner in coalitions with the SPD, as in Berlin and in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Furthermore it has never succeeded in developing in the West of the country.

At the beginning of 2004, two initiatives appeared, posing the problem of challenging on a political level the governing (in alliance with the Greens) Social Democracy: the "Electoral Alternative 2006" and the "Initiative for Jobs and Social Justice". The notion of "jobs" (Arbeit) could also be translated as "work" or "working people". It expresses the search for answers to the problem of mass long-term unemployment, which is a major factor in the erosion of the standard of living of millions of workers, as well as contributing to the change in the relationship of forces between labour and capital, to the advantage of the

letter.

The two initiatives come from two different politico-social backgrounds, which have however, some common features. In the "Electoral alternative 2006" (the date of the next federal elections, which will take place towards the end of that year) there are roughly speaking three components. On the one hand, there are members or ex-members of the PDS who more or less formed part of the left opposition to participation in regional governments under SPD leadership and to the adaptation of the PDS to the mechanisms and to the general consensus of official politics in the framework of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. On the other hand, there are intellectuals, some of them university professors, who are partisans of an alternative economic policy to neo-liberalism, especially in the sense of a return to Keynesianism (even though these intellectuals define themselves as "socialists" or even "Marxists"). The third layer is made up of trade unionists, often with local or middle-level responsibilities in the apparatuses of the large service union (Ver.di) or other unions such as the small teachers' union (GEW). The journal Sozialismus and Express, a small monthly aimed at trade unionists, with a reformist socialist orientation and which argues in favour of trade union policies that are more militant than the official leaderships', are the references for this current.

The milieu of the "Initiative for Jobs and Social Justice" is more local and narrower. It involves trade union militants from IG-Metall who occupy leading positions at a local and middle level in the North of the Land of Bavaria (Bayern). They were all long-standing members of the SPD. In the beginning, they seemed rather to want to exert pressure on the SPD-Green government, to make it change its policies, brandishing the threat of a possible new party, but without really wanting to launch one. It was the SPD apparatus in Bavaria that forced the pace by threatening to expel the initiators from the party. They were brought before a disciplinary body, where they asked to be allowed to present their opinions and their positions collectively. The Bavarian SPD leadership reacted harshly,

replying that it was not a question of political positions but of infringing the statutes of the party and that the accused would have to appear individually to reply to the disciplinary charges. It was only then, in April 2004, that the initiators of the "Initiative for Jobs and Social justice" decided not to bow down before the apparatus of the SPD and to launch the perspective of a new party - essentially one that would go back to the positions of the old SPD: defence of the Welfare State, of social conquests and the interests of the workers, a policy seeking to significantly reduce the level of unemployment.

The First Debates

On June 20, 2004, the two initiatives came together to create form the "Electoral Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice" (WAsG, from its German initials). The initiators chose the form of an association and announced that this association could launch the process of creating a new party, under certain conditions (especially that the number of members of the association was sufficient).

A first public meeting in Berlin at the end of June attracted 700 people. The political and social composition of this meeting was subsequently confirmed at local level and in regional meetings: a large majority of male trade union militants aged between 35 and 55, especially from IG-Metall and Ver.di, with a Social Democratic past. A small minority came from the Greens or the PDS. Young people coming from the movement against neo-liberal globalisation are fairly rare in the WAsG. Another small minority is made up of militants of the small organisations of the German anti-capitalist Left. At the public meeting in Berlin the stands of the SAV, [30] Linksruck [31] and the ISL were particularly visible.

Over and above the protest against the anti-social policies of the government - a policy "not against unemployment, but against the unemployed" exclaimed Klaus Ernst, leader of IG-Metall in Schweinfurt in Bavaria and main leader of the WAsG,

to loud applause from the audience - and the reformist or anti-capitalist declarations of some participants, there was a militant and convincing speech from Bernard Riexinger, leader of Ver.di in Stuttgart, who wound up the meeting by evoking a probable consensus of everyone around concrete propositions: "Instead of unpaid increased working hours, reduction of working hours without loss of wages; instead of the progressive dismantling the Welfare State, defence and extension of social conquests; instead of the steadily spreading orgy of privatisations, public services and high-level social security; instead of continuing redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top, financing of social and human progress of society by the reintroduction of the Wealth Tax and by progressive taxation of high incomes!". The unanimous approval of the audience was expressed in its applause.

Another debate, which appeared on the horizon before and during the Berlin meeting, concerned democracy in the WAsG and in the future party. A certain number of leaders were tempted (and still are) to not allow in the members of the small organisations of the anti-capitalist Left and they expressed this by referring to "sectarianism" and "extremism". We argued (and we still do) in favour of a plurality of opinions and currents in the new party and especially against the marginalisation or exclusion of the anti-capitalist elements. We did so for two reasons: first of all, nobody has all the ready-made answers to the problems of the 21st century and to the necessary renewal of the workers' movement and the political Left. Secondly, if the leadership and the majority of the WAsG or of the new party remain intransigent as far as immediate demands are concerned, and do not let themselves be drawn towards adaptation to the institutions by participating in neo-liberal governments, it is difficult to imagine them radicalising their positions concerning the capitalist system. So we have to try to have a common practice of mobilising in favour of immediate demands and on the basis of this new common experience, conduct a debate in the medium and long term on strategy and on a project

for society.

A Political Space

For the moment the WAsG has about 7,000 members. That may seem few (the young German Communist Party, the KPD, had 50,000 after the First World War, the VKPD that came out of the fusion of the KPD and the majority of the USPD in 1920 had at least 300,000 and even the small SAP at the beginning of the 1930s had 30,000). But it is an association that is mainly concerned with laying the basis for the building of a new party. A large part of this work is being done in a purely organisational way, which of course expresses a congenital weakness of the (trade union) apparatuses. Furthermore the WAsG, which had a resounding echo in the media when it was set up, has almost disappeared from the media. Its local groups are only slowly and partially starting to get involved in campaigns and the WAsG is not yet a party, but only an "association", which makes recruitment more difficult. Finally, the wave of mobilisation against Hartz IV and the other anti-social government measures of the 2010 Agenda became much weaker after reaching its high point at the end of August; and the workers have suffered fresh defeats (Daimler, Volkswagen, OpelÄ-). Under these conditions, the figure of 7,000 seems quite impressive.

The opinion polls conducted by institutes like Emnid (in July) or Infratest Dimap (in March, July and August) gave the WAsG between 4 and 11 per cent of the vote. Since the new party does not yet exist and the WAsG is little known to the public at large, that is encouraging. Commentaries from the above-mentioned institutes are consequently citing a much higher potential vote, going as high as 32 or even 37 per cent. The "political barometer" of ZDF (the second publicly-owned channel of German TV) announced in July 2004 that the WAsG could take 22 per cent of votes from the Greens, 15 per cent from the SPD and 41 per cent from the PDS. And probably a fairly high number of "ballot box boycotters" could be mobilised electorally by a new party to the left of the SPD. Of course, all that is still speculation. But the statements

of voting intentions in reply to the questions by the polling institutes show that a new left party with just a bit of dynamism could count on a significant electoral potential.

The Case of North Rhine Westphalia

The strongest regional section of the WAsG is in North Rhine Westphalia, with about 1,300 members. There, especially in Cologne, Bonn and Dusseldorf (as well as in Berlin, by the way) the forces of the small anti-capitalist Left (including the members and sympathisers of the International Socialist Left (ISL) play quite an important role and have won leading positions at local level as well as two places on the regional leadership (made up of 16 members). [32] One of the questions hotly debated in the WAsG concerned whether the "new party to be created" should make its debut at the regional elections that will take place on May 22, 2005 in North Rhine Westphalia or only at the federal elections in the winter of 2006. The majority of leading members argued against the first choice. Why was that? On the one hand, for fear of suffering a defeat, of not yet being organisationally ready to take up the challenge. On the other hand, Klaus Ernst for example expressed another fear, not very acceptable: "It could be that, with MPs in the parliament of the Land Of North Rhine Westphalia, we would get into an uncomfortable situation; we could be forced to support a "red-green" government of the SPD and the Greens in order to bar the road to the conservatives and liberals of the CDU and the FDP, and that would significantly lower our chances at the federal elections in 2006". It was clear that the anti-capitalist forces had to protest against such a position. They argued for; a) the WAsG to stand in the regional elections in North Rhine Westphalia; b) that at the same time the WAsG should publicly announce that it was not prepared to support a neo-liberal government that was organising the social mauling of the dispossessed; and c) that the WAsG should build through campaigns and not confine itself to taking part in elections and institutions. In an membership

aggregate of the WAsG in North Rhine Westphalia in Duisburg-Rheinhausen (with 500 people taking part of whom 403 had the right to vote), the anti-capitalist forces in the WAsG were able to defeat the leadership on the first point, because a big majority of members are getting impatient: when all is said and done we have to stand, take the offensive! The most convincing argument was this: the recent regional elections in Brandenburg and in Saxony-Anhalt showed that the absence of the sort of alternative that the WAsG could provide worked to the advantage of the forces of the far Right! Even Klaus Ernst, who was present at the meeting, could not manage to contain the feeling in favour of standing candidates from May 2005. On this

point, the members with an anti-capitalist profile won a large majority and since then the leaders of North Rhine Westphalia swear that they are going to carry out the rank and file's wishes. [33]

Towards a New Party

What stage is the process of launching the new party at? On November 20-21 2004 there was a federal conference of the WAsG in Nuremberg, this time with elected delegates. A new leadership was elected - in the main it maintains the continuity of the previous one, but with some changes. It should be noted that a comrade of

Linksruck - Christine Buchholz - was elected. The discussion, although largely dominated by the semi-bureaucratic preparation of the outgoing leadership, was on a good level. There too, there was a large majority in favour of taking part in the elections in North Rhine Westphalia in May 2005 and the leaders who argued against taking part, like Klaus Ernst, were contested. [34]

Now the WAsG has launched a postal referendum of its members to decide if it should proclaim a new party or not. There will very probably be a big majority in favour. If two thirds or more are in favour, the party will be formally created at an assembly of regional delegates on January 22, 2005. [