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The meaning of our electoral success

24 February 2005, by Françisco Louçã

Rouge: What does the election result, with its overall Socialist victory and strong vote for the Bloc, mean?

Francisco Louçã: Over the last three years the rightwing coalition government imposed policies which led to a social crisis, the most visible effect of which is the biggest rise in unemployment in the whole EU. The country is socially very vulnerable, about 20% of the population lives under the poverty threshold and most unemployed receive no benefits. This result indicates that the vast majority of the population wanted to defeat a rightwing government with those policies.

What is the progress made by the Left Bloc?

In the last general election the Bloc got 2.9% of the vote, which showed a small rise in its influence after 5 years of existence. This time the Bloc got 6.6%, going from 150 000 to 364 000 votes. There are eight MPs elected, four men, four women and perhaps we'll get one more.

New Left Bloc MPs

We've got four in Lisbon [Ana Drago, Luis Fazenda, Francisco Louçã and Helena Pinto], two (Alda Macedo and João Lopes Teixeira] in Oporto, the second city and two [Mariana XXX and Fernando Rosas] in Setubal a historical working-class town near Lisbon. This good showing is repeated throughout the country and is particularly strong in the four major centres(Lisbon, Oporto, Cintra and Braga) where the Bloc has a better score than the Portuguese Communist Party. The PCO has overall gone up by half a point and has a national score of 7.5%.

As for the social makeup of the Bloc's voters; it is particularly strong among youth - it is the third most popular party among young voters. Unlike previous elections it has had a working-class and popular vote throughout the country. This shows the impact of the Bloc's campaigns against the war and against the rightwing government's austerity policies.

What initiatives is the Bloc going to take in the coming weeks?

On election night we said we had two priorities:

- relaunch the proposals we pout forward during the campaign against unemployment, against delocalisations, against fraudulent company bankruptcies, for the fight against corruption and for the abolition of bank secrecy, for a tax policy that is the basis for the redistribution of wealth and social justice;

- take an initiative on the question of abortion which is still illegal in Portugal , which leads to women being put on trial. Even though they are often acquitted, this shows a social vulnerability in relation to a repressive law. We are going to propose a referendum for people to vote on a draft abortion law and we will present it straightaway because the defeat of the right wing offers a favourable opportunity for such an initiative.

Big progress for Red Green Alliance

20 February 2005, by Thomas Eisler

RGA campaign

Though the election campaign was short - only three weeks - it was intense. The RGA had a very active campaign. From all branches the reports is that the level of activity and people active was higher than earlier campaigns. Four years of ultra-right government needs a clear alternative. This is neither offered by the Socialist Peoples Party nor the Social Democrats.

Logo of the Red Green Alliance

The RGA has developed the criticism of the government's policy along with our alternative. One of the main issues brought up in the debates was unemployment. While the Liberal party and the Social Democrats promised more employment without any concrete proposals, the RGA proposed more jobs in the public sector with the argument that it is almost without cost because benefits and other expenses can be used to create proper jobs. This would improve public services and reduce health problems due to work pressure.

The RGA also tried to put forward opposition to the Iraqi occupation and the proposed European Union constitution. On TV we where never able to put these issues on the agenda. But we succeeded in organising a demonstration together with the Socialist Peoples Party against the Iraqi occupation and for withdrawal of Danish troops just three days before the election. With 5000 in Copenhagen it was the biggest demonstration since the war formally ended and it was given some coverage in the newspapers.

The RGA was also backed by other parts of the left. The International Socialists made a campaign for the RGA, using both RGA material and their own. The Maoist DKP/ML daily newspaper "Arbejderen" (the Worker) also carried positive coverage of the RGA during the elections. The old communist party, the DKP, was one of the founding organisation of the RGA; however they were divided between those active in the campaign and a sceptical wing who are more eager to make a joint communist party with DKP/ML and the KPiD. The latter were the more Stalinist components of DKP who left the party in 1990.

Successful youth campaign

In Denmark we have experienced a radicalisation of the youth in recent years. We have seen the high school students as the most active movements against the right wing governments austerity policies. The RGA prepared a youth campaign together with Socialist Youth Front (SUF) a campaign aimed at the schools. It showed an improved cooperation between SUF and the RGA.

Red Green Alliance membership

The numbers are for October each year. In January 2005 membership was approximately 2,650. Almost 1000 has indicated they want to join the RGA since elections were announced on January 18 and 100 have already paid their dues to join.

Figures below give year, number of members and development.

1992	**1,082**	....
1993	**999**	(-7,7%)
1994	**1,093**	(+9,4%)
1995	**1,189**	(+8,8%)
1996	**1,282**	(+7,8%)
1997	**1,479**	(+15,4%)
1998	**2,023**	(+36,8%)
1999	**1,968**	(-2,7%)
2000	**1,945**	(-1,1%)
2001	**1,992**	(+2,4%)
2002	**2,366**	(+18,8%)
2003	**2,321**	(-1,9%)
2004	**2,524**	(+8,7%)

Red Green Alliance electoral results

Figures give the year, percentage and number of seats

1990	**1.7%**	(0 seats)
1994	**3.1%**	(6 seats)
1998	**2.7%**	(5)
2001	**2.4%**	(4)
2005	**3.4%**	(6)

Interview with Jørgen Arbo-Bæhr

JÃ¸rgen Arbo-BÃ¦hr

The RGA has a principle of rotation that doesn't allow MP's to run after seven years in parliament. Because of this Keld Albrechtsen and Søren Søndergaard, who had been MPs since 1994, were just able to run as candidates for the last time at the election in 2001. Søren Søndergaard is a member of SAP.

The New RGA MPs are Rune Lund, Per Clausen, Frank Aaen and - a surprise - Jørgen Arbo-Bæhr. The latter is a member of SAP and worked as secretary responsible for labour issues. Earlier he was a trade-union activist of the potters' union. Below is a brief interview I recently did with Jørgen

- What are the tasks after the election?

- We should make the difference clear between the rightwing government and its liberal policies and the leftwing. The RGA must show there is a leftwing alternative. This is very important because the other workers parties move to the right in their pursue of power. This is also important in an international perspective because the left is faced

with the same liberal policy in other EU countries.

- What can be your personal contribution to the RGA parliamentary group?

- I can contribute to the strengthening of the RGA's profile regarding the trade unions. Our task is to make the trade-unions an active movement. The trade unions suffer from the political crisis of social democracy. Fortunately there is a left current in the trade-unions.

- How has the relationship between the RGA and the trade-unions developed in the recent years?

- More and more there is an understanding within the trade unions that the RGA is necessary. Even Social Democrats in the top-layers of trade-unions see this. There is a need for a party that puts pressure on Social Democracy from the left. It is also because the RGA addresses issues that Social Democracy ought to take up.

- Can you give examples?

- Well, there is the shutting down of the industry and moving workplaces to low-wage countries. There is the pressure on wages. Employers start to demand lowering of the wages with the threat that otherwise they close. Also the use of unemployed in work-schemes is used to put pressure on wages along with workers from eastern Europe.

- There will be a renewal of the Collective Bargaining Agreement for workers in the public sector this spring. Will that be an important issue?

- No, not really. In the short term there has been created some space for improvements in working conditions. The big issue is the big reform of local and regional governments. This will put a lot of pressure on public sector workers. We have put focus on ensuring wage and work conditions. The reform is designed to open up for major privatisation and outsourcing this creates a lot of insecurity for the workers.

Oil Rich Equatorial Guinea - Time For Another Coup?

19 February 2005, by Norman Traub

Simon Mann and fellow mercenaries in court

In Mann's trial in Zimbabwe prosecutors alleged that Equatorial Guinea's Spanish based opposition leader, Severo Moto, offered Mann and his fellow mercenaries $1.8m and oil rights to overthrow President Obiang. Obiang who himself seized power from his uncle in a coup in 1979. Mann was arrested with 64 suspected South African mercenaries, who had flown from South Africa into Harare in March 04 in a Boeing727. Mann admitted trying to order assault rifles, grenades and anti-tank rocket launchers from Zimbabwe Defence Industries. Mann was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment for attempting to possess dangerous weapons and the 64 suspected mercenaries to 16 months imprisonment for violating immigration laws.

DuToit's was tried together with 14 other mercenaries and several Equatorial Guineans in Malabo in August 04 and admitted giving logistical support to the coup attempt. However, in the closing days of the trial he withdrew his confession, claiming it was made under torture. A member of the group imprisoned with DuToit, a German, died in prison. Amnesty International suspected the death was due to torture.

Mark Thatcher

Sir Mark Thatcher, Lady Thatcher's son, was arrested in Cape Town in August 04 over accusations that he helped finance the attempted coup. Crause Steyl, a former crack mercenary pilot, who was convicted in Dec 04 of violating South Africa's foreign military assistance act for his role in the botched coup in Equatorial Guinea, will be a star witness in Thatcher's trial. In his plea bargain deal, Steyl is reported to have given details of Sir Mark's as well as his own role in the plot.

He revealed that he was recruited by Simon Mann, who asked him to look into the acquisition of a helicopter to be used for the coup. He first met Sir Mark, together with Greg Wales, a British businessman at Lanseria Airport, north ofJohannesburg in Dec.03. He was told on this occasion that Thatcher would finance the purchase of the helicopter. Later, Thatcher, who is a trained pilot, tested the helicopter. In the event, the helicopter was not used due to original plans for the coup being stalled. Steyl was supposed to fly Severo Moto to Equatorial Guinea from Spain to take Obiang's place after the coup.

The South African state prosecutor, Michael Donen in arguing that Sir Mark must answer questions about the alleged failed coup attempt said "There is therefore a trend, apparently in Equatorial Guinea and in central Africa where chequebook colonialists hire small groups of former South African Defence Force people and they buy themselves a small African country which has oil". Sir Mark is also charged with violating South Africa's anti-mercenary laws.

U.S. and Britain aware of the plot

Inside and outside the courts there have been repeated allegations about the involvement of the US, British and Spanish governments in the attempted coup against Equatorial Guinea. In September04, Miguel Borico, the prime minister of Equatorial Guinea in the General Assembly of the UN charged that Spain was involved in plotting a coup against his government. Spain denied the charge.

As regards the US and Britain, Johann Smith, a former commander in South African Special Forces revealed that he had sent separate reports to two senior officers in British intelligence and to Michael Westphal, an adviser to Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defence Secretary, warning them of the impending coup attempt. Britain at first denied all prior knowledge of the coup attempt but Jack Straw, the British Foreign Minister was forced to admit later that he knew about it six weeks before it was supposed to take place The Equatorial Guinea government complained that neither the US nor Britain had warned it of the coup attempt and it thanked South Africa for informing it of the plot.

Gulf of Guinea Oil vital for U.S.

Ten years after the discovery of vast quantities of oil and gas in its waters by ExxonMobil, tiny Equatorial Guinea now produces 440,000 barrels of oil daily, almost half the yield of Nigeria. Within five years it will probably become Africa's second biggest producer and one of the US's largest providers. According to the IMF, its income from oil and gas is about $1bn a year based on 1992 oil prices and output. It is more likely that its income from oil is $3bn.

Large quantities of oil have also been discovered in the waters off the tiny neighbouring island of Sao Tome e Principe, where over 20 oil companies have bid for the right to drill. The U.S. is negotiating with the government of this island to establish a strategic regional base there.

The African Oil Policy Group, a Washington lobbying group, reported to the House of Representatives African Subcommittee in 2002, "the Gulf of Guinea oil basin in West Africa, with greater western and southern Africa and its attendant market of 250 million people located astride key sea lanes of communication, [is] a vital interest in U.S. national security calculations".

The U.S. has used the "war on terrorism" to increase its military presence in Africa. General James Jones, commander of the US European command with responsibility for African operations, on the eve of President Bush's visit to Africa in June 03 stated that the US was trying to negotiate the long term use of a "family" of military bases across Africa. Augmenting these bases would be a strong U.S. Navy and Marine force operating in the Gulf of Guinea off the coast of West Africa "The carrier battle groups of the future may not spend six months in the Mediterranean sea," Jones said "but I'll bet they spend half the time going down the west coast of Africa".

In October 04 the U.S. European Command sponsored a three day Gulf of Guinea Maritime Security Conference, which was hosted by Admiral Gregory Johnson, Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe. Leaders of 17 navies from West Africa, Europe and the U.S. were present . High on the list of subjects discussed was the need to reduce maritime threats to economic development such as offshore oil production.

Wealthy few, majority poor

It is estimated that the giant U.S. oil companies Exxon Mobil, Marathon and others have invested more than $3bn in Equatorial Guinea, a country with a population of about 500,000 people. According to a government source, the deal the oil companies struck is for the government to receive 15% of oil revenues .The average income is said to have grown to $5000 a head from less than $500, the economy is growing by 65%. A new motorway and a new airport have been built in Malabo, the capital city and the hospital has a new wing.

The social conditions of the majority of the people have not improved and in Malabo 30,000 people live in some of Africa's worst slums. Only a minority of the population have really benefited from the oil wealth. The president, his family and a small elite are very wealthy. In the course of an overall investigation of account transactions at Riggs, an old-line Washington bank, U.S. Senate investigators discovered large payments made by the oil companies to officials of Equatorial Guinea and their relatives.$700million in accounts and certificates of deposit for the Equatorial Guinea government, its officials and their relatives were held with the Riggs Bank. Using wire transfers some $35 million was drained from an account that held oil revenues for the country's people and into offshore companies. Riggs was fined $25million for a "wilful, systemic" violation of anti-money laundering laws.

The corrupt, repressive regime of President Obiang has survived frequent coup attempts. The failed coup attempt in March 04 is not likely to be the last to decide who takes over from Obiang. Until now it appears that his regime has served the interests of the multinational oil corporations. The failure of the U.S. and Britain to give Equatorial Guinea prior warning of the attempted coup begs the question as to whether the imperialists are now looking for an alternative to replace him.

Links between Pentagon and alleged plotter

Links have been discovered between a senior U.S. defence official and the British businessman, Greg Wales, who has been implicated in the coup attempt by the convicted mercenary pilot, Crause Steyl as well as by the Equatorial Guinea government. The former British Home Secretary, David Blunkett acceded to a request of the Equatorial Guinea government to

authorise the police to investigate the role of Greg Wales in the attempted coup.

According to the Equatorial Guinea government, when the plot was in its early stages in November 03, Simon Mann paid Wales $8000. The following January, Wales's firm, the Sherbourne Foundation was paid another $35,000 by the coup plotters. A few days after the alleged first payment Wales went to Washington to a conference organised by an influential group of U.S. "private military companies", the IPOA(International Peace Operations Association). There he met Theresa Whelan, a member of the Bush administration in charge of African affairs at the Pentagon. He had a further meeting with her a few months later. The Equatorial Guinea government accused the U.S. of backing the coup attempt, which the Pentagon denied, claiming it was Mr Wales who made all the approaches to them.

Ms. Whelan told the IPOA conference that the Pentagon was keen to see private military companies operating in Africa. She said "Contractors are here to stay in supporting U.S. national security objectives overseas". They were cheaper and saved the use of U.S. forces in peacekeeping and training. She added "The U.S. can be supportive in trying to ameliorate regional crises without necessarily having to put U.S. troops on the ground, which is often a very difficult political decision.....Sometimes we may not want to be very visible".

Ms Whelan merely confirmed the practice pursued by successive U.S. governments over many years. They secretly support or approve of private armies and mercenaries in many parts of the world, who serve their interests and disclaim all knowledge and responsibility for their actions when accusing fingers are pointed at them. Whatever the truth behind the bungled plot against the Equatorial Guinea government, U.S. military circles are sympathetic to the coup attempt. One of the officials present at the IPOA dinner said "Ethically you have to want to see Obiang removed.... It's a real indictment of the international community that they've failed to get rid of him".

New Successes, New Challenges

16 February 2005, by Pierre Rousset

In going back to Porto Alegre after having migrated last year to Mumbai in India, the WSF could have lost its momentum. And indeed there were many who announced that it was running out of steam, or even that it was in decline. The question deserved to be asked, insofar as the international situation is bad and the policies applied in Brazil by the Lula government could have had a demobilizing effect.

However it very quickly became clear that there was a significant increase in the number of people registering for the WSF. The success of the Forum was thus foreseeable in November 2004, even though some people continued speculating about its failure right up until the opening day.

The particular success of the 5th WSF can be explained to a considerable extent by the Latin American context: the scale of neo-liberal attacks, coupled with the aggressive policy of intervention and of so-called "preventive" wars that Bush is so fond of, are creating profound instability and new phases or radicalisation, of politicisation. Demonstrating this politicisation, the debates over questions of orientation and strategy were particularly well attended. But the phenomenon is not just Latin American.

The process of social forums is spreading on an international scale. It resisted the ideological counter-shock of the attacks of September 11, 2001, as well as Berlusconi's repression at Genoa. It still expresses the offensive frame of mind that has characterised it since the beginning, in 2001, even though the bourgeoisie is still dealing severe blows against the workers' and peoples' movements.

Elements of continuity

Quite logically, the numerical scope of a social forum depends on the host country (in Europe, for example, it was smaller in London than in Florence or Paris). But since 2001, although not uniform, it is much more consistent than social or anti-war mobilizations; is even on the increase. That depends on at least one condition: that the range of organizations involved in its preparation is sufficiently representative and diversified. So the forums fill a specific function.

The conception of the forums flows from the characteristics of the present period. It provides for both defensive regroupment faced with the universal nature of neo-liberal, anti-democratic and militarist attacks and for the offensive expression of alternatives incarnated by new generations of fighters. It replies to an essential question: how to build links of solidarity and ensure convergences in struggle between very varied sectors of society (all of whom are hit by the ultimate "commodification" of the world), in a situation where in the industrialized countries the organized workers' movement no longer plays the centralizing role that it once did (there are still some exceptions, like the KCTU in South Korea). And where in the countries of the Third World, armed struggles (real or potential) are generally no longer the backbone of social resistance. The forums also provide a way of getting involved in politics at a time when the authority of political parties is being challenged.

The attraction of the social forums flows largely from that: they offer an indispensable space for coming together, a space that is both free and militant. Porto Alegre shows that this function remains essential today in Latin America. The resounding impact of Mumbai, last year, allowed the process to grapple with Asian reality. In Europe the ESF is helping to define a common action programme on a specifically European level, which the unions on their own have been unable to do for the last forty years. The task is not simple, success is not guaranteed but it is highly significant that the question is being posed today in the framework provided by the forums.

Nothing is eternal, not even the social forums; but everything indicates that they remain extremely useful. In this sense, they have demonstrated over the last five years a high degree of continuity.

Evolutions

Continuity does not mean immobility. Mumbai represented a turning point in the history of the World Social Forum. The return to Porto Alegre benefited positively from it. The forum represented an opening on many levels. Physically: by leaving the campus of the Catholic University, by pitching its tents by the side of the lagoon, by getting closer to the centre of the city and to the local population. In terms of generations: by placing the Youth Camp at the very heart of the site and not on the far fringes (it accommodated 35,000 people, especially Brazilians, followed by Argentinians). In terms of practice: taking environmental questions fully into account in the way the site was conceived, using small producers for food supplies, using free software, the role of the Babel network of voluntary interpreters - all these are examples. Organizationally: the priority was given to self-organized initiatives.

A new "methodology" (to use the vocabulary of the Forum) was applied. The programme was worked out after very wide consultation of base organizations. Eleven "axes" or "terrains" were defined, so as to ensure the visibility of the major themes dealt with. All the movements were invited to check whether their initiatives could be regrouped, in order to reinforce dialogue and collaboration (the process known as "agglutination"). Every theme had to try to link reflection to proposals for actions and campaigns, to make a closer link between debates and mobilizations.

This new, complex, methodology was implemented in a very short space of time. A little time will need to pass before we can judge its results. But it seems really to have enabled networks of militants to discuss different approaches and to define, over and above political differences, common campaigning grounds. It also created a new balance between the themes of debate within the Forum and the Assembly of Social Movements, which in Porto Alegre remained the place where a common calendar for action on an international scale was worked out.

Expansion and articulation

Never in the past have the same (neo-liberal and antidemocratic) policies been applied by the same institutions in such a universal way: from East to West and from South to North, we are all confronted with the same deregulations, privatizations and opening up of markets, with the same attacks on civil liberties. "Preventive" war and "anti-terrorist" ideology appear as the counterparts of capitalist globalization. As a result we really need to build a common international front of resistance and of alternatives. But there is a real danger of disarticulation between the process of the forums and mobilisations.

The specific, thematic campaigns are today occupying a more important place, after the big "general" mobilizations of past years: for the cancellation of Third World debt, against discrimination (see the publication by the World March of Women of a 31-point charter [1]) and against the war in Iraq, for example. That is in itself a good thing. But it also reinforces the need for common rallying points where all the fronts of struggle can converge.

In the coming two years, the role of the regional forums will probably be reinforced in relation to the world forum. Struggles tend to be rooted at the national or sub-continental level (the question of Venezuela in Latin America, the question of the Constitution and of public services in Europe). In 2006, the World Social Forum will be "decentralised", inevitably taking on a more regional content than previously.

These evolutions are taking place in response to real developments and there is nothing negative about them as such; they are necessary. The problem is that the places where information and reflection are collectivised on an international level, where regional and thematic processes are articulated, are being weakened at the very moment when the movement as a whole is further diversifying. In its composition and its functioning, the international council of the WSF does not correspond to this need (it was not capable of concluding the very important discussion on the rhythm of the forums), even though its commissions can be more effective.

The organizing pole of the network of social movements has to be renewed, but how to do it is not at all obvious. The various so-called "intellectual" themes which are trying to make the link between developing fundamental analyses and bringing answers to the needs of militants have to co-operate more closely, but they are not yet doing so.

If we want to avoid the decentralisation of the movement leading to its disarticulation (and to a weakening of the capacity of collective resistance to liberal and military globalisation), new and concrete answers will also have to be found on this level.

Footnotes

[1] "World Charter of Women for Humanity" adopted at the 5th international meeting of the World March of Women in Rwanda, 10 December 2004.

Then there were 25

13 February 2005, by Brendan Young

It is likely that the EU Constitution will be ratified in all the new East European Member States and most of the 'old' EU-15 over the coming two years. But the socio-economic prospects for the new Members and across the EU are rather inauspicious. The entry conditions laid down by the EU for the new East European member states, to be followed by Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, have de-industrialised their economies. Official unemployment in southern Poland is 40%, with an overall rate of 20%. Imports are primarily consumer goods, with little import of capital goods; and exports are predominantly of labour-intensive goods. This indicates that the de-industrialisation of the 1990's has not changed. A similar pattern exists in Hungary and Slovakia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic having fared a little better. But the future is not the rosy one of a Polish or Hungarian 'Tiger', reflecting the recent Irish experience.

The EU bluntly stated in 2000 that levels of capital formation, productivity and GDP per person in the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) would take decades to match those of Western Europe. That projection was based upon European patterns of production and accumulation of the 1990s: it did not account for the boom in the Chinese economy and its impact on the Eurozone economy. Globalized sub-contracting has had a sharp impact. Unemployment in Germany, the industrial motor of the Eurozone economy, is 10% in the 'west' and 20% in what was the 'east'. General Motors (GM) is planning to shed 9,500 German jobs in its Opel operations, though its 'eastern' plant is safe due to lower wage rates; the GM-owned Saab plant in Sweden is under threat of closure; VW and Siemens have increased working hours for no extra pay; and both VW and Mercedes have set up car factories in China.

Sub-contracting component production to China, where wages are approximately 5% of British rates, has had the effect of turning part of the German economy to more of an 'assembly' than 'production' economy. This 'east-west' polarisation in Germany reflects the general failure to re-industrialise the CEECs after the collapse brought about by capitalist restoration. And this is despite massive financial transfers to Germany's 'eastern' Lander - â‚¬130 billion over 13 years, equivalent to approximately 5% of German GDP per annum.

Add to this the changed conditions on the farm, and the mix is heady. The present enlargement of the EU to twenty-five countries will double the area of agricultural land, and more than double the agricultural workforce in the EU. The number of Polish farmers is at present more than the total for France and Germany combined. [1] Agricultural unemployment, almost 40% in south-eastern Poland, [2] will be worsened by the Common Agricultural Policy, which favours large-scale farming over smaller units. EU estimates are that only 600,000 of the estimated 2 million Polish farms will survive full EU membership. A serious crisis for the rural population of Eastern Europe is on the cards. This will have significant knock-on effects, both on small farmers and on migration patterns, in Western Europe.

So the chickens are coming home to roost. Flowing from the EU and International Monetary Fund's neo-liberal policies, an enlarged Union including Bulgaria and Romania would have approximately 153 million - almost a third of a total population of approximately 485 million people - living in regions with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per head below 75% of the previous EU-15 average. [3]

Competition between poor and very poor

Neo-liberal enlargement has thus created competition for scarce EU resources between the poor regions of the EU-15 countries (where GDP per capita is below 75% of the EU average), [4] and the very poor of the CEECs, where average GDP per capita is approximately 50% of the EU-15 average (not to mention Bulgaria and Romania, where GDP per capita is approx 30% of EU-15 average). None of the core EU states is willing to increase its contributions to bail out the CEECs: Germany's Finance Minister Hans Eichel has argued that money going to the poor of Eastern Europe is money being taken away from poor regions of Germany; and that the transfer regime is holding back the German economy. [5]

And even if bigger financial transfers were made, 'East' Germany illustrates that of themselves these do not work. Controls on the movement and location of capital are an absolute necessity if regional disparity is to be addressed. EU Regional Policy, comprising small-scale subsidies and infrastructural development, is marginal. It was and is designed to placate political movements that reflect dissatisfaction with regional inequalities in the EU-15, and will have little impact in the enlarged EU. The indications are that the capital cities and western border regions of the CEECs will experience a growth of investment and employment. [6]
But in the context of globalised production systems, de-industrialisation and extensive

regional impoverishment in Eastern Europe are likely to become structural features of the EU.

What has emerged from EU enlargement is the creation of a very large internal periphery with its own pattern of uneven development; and a pool of very cheap labour of about a quarter of the EU's working population. Combined with this we have stagnation in the German economy - the biggest in the EU - and increased competition from a booming low-cost Chinese economy.

A Race to the Bottom

The response to this from the European Commission, from governments and capitalist organisations has been calls for increased competitiveness and productivity, as well as cuts in social spending. These are encapsulated in the Lisbon Agenda, 'to make the EU the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world', during the coming years. But for European workers, competition with an increasingly capitalized Chinese economy, where millions of peasants provide a vast pool of cheap labour, is a race to the bottom. [7] Likewise the calls for increased competitiveness will do little for impoverished regions other than drive down wages, since the tendency is for high value-added production to locate in core EU regions. [8]

The official leadership of the European labour movements have bought into this 'competitive approach' although there is some fraying at the edges. The most signifi cant breach has been over the 'country of origin' principle in the Commission's Directive on Services in the Internal Market - the Bolkestein Directive. This would allow a privately-owned provider, based in a country where regulations allow low standards, to operate according to 'country of origin' regulations in other EU countries. It has been argued that the Bolkestein Directive will nullify existing laws which require a foreign employer to observe the pay and conditions of the country of employment. The dispute over 'outsourcing' of staff at Irish Ferries, where the company is using low-paid agency workers from Eastern Europe to replace unionised Irish staff, showed just how weak this protection already is: Bolkestein would wipe it out.

While not opposed to the whole Directive, the European TUC and other union organisations have declared their opposition to the 'country of origin' aspect of Bolkestein and in favour of retaining existing protection regimes. This 'national' defence against the use of cheap Eastern European labour to undermine 'western' wages and conditions is a useless strategy in the face of the relative impoverishment of one third of the EU population and the emergence of a huge pool of cheap labour; and it abandons millions of people in the CEECs to the mercy of the market.

Does the EU Constitution provide the means to deal with impoverishment in the 'east' and attacks on wages, conditions and social provision in the 'west'? The Constitution contains some positive values and objectives: the broad statements of Parts I and II. But these are undermined and contradicted by the means, as detailed in Part III - the policies and functioning of the Union.

The Neo-liberal Agenda

In continuity with previous EU treaties, the Constitution commits the EU to economic liberalisation. It enshrines the 'free movement of persons, services, goods and capital', and 'an internal market where competition is free and undistorted'. This rules out public control of capital movement or economic planning. Public utilities, water, energy, transport, communications, and state firms are also subject to the EU's competition rules: they cannot be given priority, for social or environmental reasons, above the interests of private capital. The European Central Bank, which has no democratic accountability, has price stability as its objective, rather than employment or sustainability. It is this neo-liberal approach that created and has failed to correct the current polarization - rich west and poor east.

But the Constitution takes liberalisation a step further by providing a framework that makes it much easier for the Commission to liberalise trade in health, education, cultural and audio-visual services. The new Common Commercial Policy would end the unrestricted veto on international trade in these areas, in particular through the General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS). The GATS agreements entail progressive elimination of regulations, so that a foreign company can compete to provide a service, with no preferences allowed for existing domestic providers. The provisions of the Bolkestein Directive are very similar to the GATS rules, and would bring both deregulation and a single European market in services, enhancing the negotiating position of EU trade negotiators (led by Peter Mandelson) in the GATS talks.

Such trade leads to part or full privatisation and means that profitability becomes increasingly important in the provision, quality and access to these services. And the drive to liberalise applies also to trade with developing countries, as illustrated by the European Partnership Agreements currently being negotiated by the EU with the ex-colonies - the African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) countries. These agreements require the ACP countries to lift their restrictions on imports and service providers from the EU in return for limited access to EU markets - to the advantage of European companies and contributing to poverty in these countries.

So rather than alter the socio-economic trajectory of the EU, the Constitution will deepen it and enshrine it in constitutional law.

A Superstate?

As to structures and democracy, the Constitution would give the EU some more of the characteristics of a state. The EU is to have 'legal personality', enabling it to act internationally on behalf and instead of the Member States. There is to be an EU President

and a Foreign Minister, with foreign policy being formulated by a Foreign Policy and Security Committee, supporting a diplomatic corps of 40,000. The Constitution explicitly states that EU law is superior to Member State law in those areas where the Constitution gives the EU the competence to do so. In the past this referred to broadly economic matters. But the Constitution ends the previous distinction between 'Community' areas, where EU law was supreme, and 'intergovernmental' areas, where national laws applied. In principle, all government policy can now come under EU law, with foreign policy, civil and criminal law immediately coming under EU influence.

Member States have lost the power of veto in 27 policy areas, in particular on liberalisation of trade in public services. The European Parliament has gained power of veto in a number of areas, but despite it being the only directly elected institution of the EU, it still cannot initiate legislation: only the Commission can do this. While the Charter of Fundamental Rights is incorporated into the Constitution, this can be overridden: the Council of Europe (25 heads of state) can limit these Rights by law, 'to meet general objectives recognized by the Union'.

ETUC leaders have lauded the Constitution for the supposed right to hold a Europe-wide strike. But this right to strike does not override the labour laws of the Member States, and is thus highly restricted, if not nullified, by them. And while the Charter gives legal standing to public services, such legal standing does not override relevant national legislation. So there is no provision requiring minimum levels of service or adequate funding to ensure universal access to high quality services. Under the Constitution, the European Commission and the Council of Ministers would gain powers in at least 25 new areas, Member States would lose powers, and there would be limited additions to public accountability via the European Parliament. These changes will undermine rather than enhance democracy in the EU. While the new powers gained by the EU, including military enhancement, advance the state-like characteristics of the EU, it remains a quasi-state. The EU does not have a police force; and none of the Member States is giving up its armed forces. All EU law, including tax-raising, is implemented by the state institutions of the Member States themselves, rather than an EU state as such.

There has been a passing-up of legislative and executive powers to supra-national bodies, but the European social formation remains nationally fragmented and the nation state remains essential in the maintenance of capitalist social power. The EU does not challenge this order. But although the class struggle begins at the national level and against the 'nation' state, an internationalist strategy is vital for the workers' movement. Such a strategy must also include support for the right to self-determination, which is absent from the Constitution. Indeed the leader to the conservative Partido Popular in the Spanish state, Mariano Rajoy, has cited Article 1.1 of the EU Constitution - which refers to citizens and states as establishing the EU - as 'shutting the door on delusions of self-determination', in his denunciation of the Ibarretxe plan for Basque autonomy within the Spanish state.

Mirroring the Bush Doctrine

On military matters, the EU agreed a new Security Strategy in December 2003, which was followed by a European Council agreement specifying the 2010 Headline Goals. These expanded the security and military brief of the Amsterdam Treaty and included a commitment to engage in 'preventative' wars. This mirrors the Bush doctrine. The same Council confirmed the EU's links with NATO, confirming the EU-NATO permanent arrangements for crisis management. NATO military doctrine includes first-strike strategy, with a willingness to use nuclear weapons.

It is in this military framework that the Constitution would oblige Member States to show mutual solidarity and loyalty to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy; to make civilian and military facilities available to the EU; and to progressively improve military capabilities. It declares that EU defence policy 'will lead to a common defence when the European Council acting unanimously so decides'. Some States can also, 'establish permanent structured co-operation within the Union framework.....in accordance with the principle of a single set of forces', which amounts to an EU army. Nowhere is it mentioned that EU military activity overseas will require a UN mandate; or that nuclear disarmament is an EU objective. Indeed the Constitution commits the EU to continued support for nuclear power by incorporating the Euratom Treaty.

All of this is supposedly for 'peace-making'. But of course it will be a Pax Europeana, as against a Pax Americana. The likely theatre of EU military activity is Africa. European states want to stabilise African states that are sympathetic to the needs of European capital regarding strategic raw materials, cheap food production, markets for EU goods, and to control mass migration to Europe in the context of social crisis. [9] And the Spanish Socialist Party prime minister Zapatero revealed the aspirations of European leaders when he said last November that the EU will be one of the great military power-blocs of the world in 20 years' time.

In summary, the Constitution reduces democracy and accountability within the EU; it prioritises the market above the needs of working people and enshrines neo-liberalism as European economic policy; it advances the militarisation of the EU in strategic alliance with NATO; and it undermines social and environmentally sustainable development, at home and abroad.

Social Democrats as Grave-Diggers of the Welfare State

Good sense tells you that when you are in a hole, you should stop digging. But in the face of social storm-clouds

gathering on the horizon, the social-democratic supporters of the EU Constitution are acting as the grave-diggers of the post-war social contract. The essentials of this were the ceding of control of production to capital, in exchange for basic social protection for the working class, education, health-care, unemployment protection, pensions - the welfare state. While pensions are under attack across Europe and there is pressure to replace welfare with workfare, education and health-care had been regarded as sacrosanct. But the Constitution would provide the framework for commercialisation of these services, deepening two-tier patterns of access and quality that already exist.

By embracing the EU Constitution, which entrenches in constitutional law the economic precepts that have given rise to the current socioeconomic circumstances, the official leadership of the labour movement is politically neutralised in the face of the assault on wages, working conditions, and the social wage; nor has it any strategy to reverse the crisis faced by impoverished millions in the 'east' - and their impact in the 'west'.

NO to the EU Constitution

In the spirit of solidarity rather than mutual competition, we reject this Constitution and call for a NO vote in any referendum. We reject the de-humanising race to the bottom advocated by the EU and by governments across Europe. Where is the social rationality in lengthening the working week and working life when millions are without work? We need a trans-European strategy that puts social and environmental needs to the fore, irrespective of the protestations of big business. The commitment to liberalisation must be broken if regional and social polarisation are to be tackled. Public utilities, including transport, water, communications, energy and environmental services should be run as need-driven services, not profit-oriented commercial activities. Essential social services like health and education should have no commercial influences acting on them. A Constitution that allows trade in public utilities, and facilitates trade in health, education, cultural and audio-visual services should be opposed. Nor should we support a Constitution that maintains the current secrecy in the EU's international trade negotiations at the GATS and WTO.

There must be an end to the militarisation of the EU. The total military spending by EU Member States is approximately E200 billion per annum, about half of the US military budget: this should be diverted to socially useful projects. The history of the European imperial powers is one of plunder and exploitation, we can place no trust in them to extend their military remit under the cover of the EU. Similarly, there should be no support for nuclear power, no nuclear weapons, and no military alliance with NATO.

Giving the European Parliament - the only directly elected EU institution - full law-making powers would go some way to redressing the democratic deficit at the heart of the EU. Under current circumstances, preservation of Member State vetos is the only means of political accountability: why elect a left-wing government that can be outvoted in the Council of Ministers. To enshrine in constitutional law a set of political institutions as anti-democratic as those of the EU is to acknowledge that the future trajectory of the EU will be anti-social and unpopular; and that decision-making bodies must be insulated from popular pressure. No supporter of democracy can tolerate this. No future left-wing government could abide by it.

The coming debate on the EU Constitution will see the nationalist right attempting to lead a NO campaign. If this is to be avoided, the Left will have to unite in a fight to take the leading role - using internationalist arguments and challenging the neo-liberal trajectory of this reactionary Constitution. Vote No in any EU Constitution referendum.

This article first appeared in Socialist Outlook, a marxist review produced by the ISG, British section of the FI.

Footnotes

[1] Monica Boduszynski (2003) 'Challenges of EU Expansion: can the CAP be uprooted?'

[2] European Commission (2004) Third Cohesion Report on economic and social cohesion. www.europa.eu includes Main Regional Indicators.

[3] Ibid

[4] The criterion for Objective 1 funds

[5] The EU agreed a 2004-07 development budget of E22 billion for the ten new Member States, E7 billion per annum for approx 75 million population, compared to transfers of E100 billion per annum to 'East' Germany for a population of approx 20 million. Britain, France and Germany want to reduce the EU budget from 1.23% to 1% of EU GDP.

[6] Martin Heidenreich, 'Regional inequalities in an enlarged Europe', Journal of European Social Policy 13:4., 2003 Sage

[7] Mike Davis, 'Planet of the Slums', New Left Review 26, 2004

[8] Janicki & Wunnava, 'Determinants of foreign direct investment: empirical evidence from EU accession candidates', Applied Economics 36, 2004. DIW - EPRC, 'The Impact of EU Enlargement on Cohesion', DIW (German Institute for Economic Research) & EPRC (European Policies Research Centre). European Commission Tender PO/00-1/RegioA4. 2001

[9] See Davis, 2004

Direct Democracy in Brazil

8 February 2005, by Alex Cowper

For fifteen years or so, beginning in the late eighties in the southern city of Porto Alegre, there was a radical experiment in direct democracy which involved thousands of citizens in improving the conditions under which they lived. This experiment was called the Participatory Budget (PB).

The book begins with an interview with grassroots PB activists and brings together articles by the broadcaster and writer Iain Bruce, Raul Pont (ex-mayor of Porto Alegre), Joao Machado and other leading Brazilian leftists. In effect, it shows why Porto Alegre was the natural choice to host the World Social Forum and why it became a beacon for the anti-globalisation movement.

Together, the contributors give us one of the best pictures available of how the PB operated. Every year, over a period of months, people met in their neighbourhoods to decide the priorities for the allocation of resources in next year's municipal budget. In a series of mass meetings (involving upwards of 30,000 people every year by the early 2000s) these decisions were refined upon and co-ordinated. This process was later extended to the whole of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, involving one-third of a million people in 2002.

Was the PB a democratic figleaf, a way of securing the consent of the masses for their inadequate level of public services, a way to limit rather than expand horizons? Potentially, and in the case of some cities, administered by less radical forces, actually.

But this is what Jose, an activist, says: "More than just public works, [the PB] manages to discuss the big issues... The PB should be implemented across Brazil. I think this is a model that the WORLD needs." At its best, the PB was Paulo Freire's revolutionary educational process in action.

But aren't the possibilities of making substantial changes to people's lives very limited at municipal level in a "Third World" country? In fact, the southern part of Brazil is the most developed part of the country, with a relatively high local tax base.

Admittedly, municipalities still only get 14 per cent of total national tax revenue. But in the first ten years of the PT administration in Porto Alegre local taxes went up by 196 per cent and became more progressive, targeting holders of real estate, for example.

Aided by popular scrutiny of the budget, the PT clamped down severely on corruption, releasing more money for other projects. The net result was the development of the best bus service in Brazil, 99.5 per cent of people enjoying access to fresh water, the most liberal laws on squatting in the country - and much more.

Iain is right to emphasise the central importance of Democracia Socialista (DS), the Brazilian section of the Fourth International, to the PB. In the late 70s, the FI, as he says, had discussed and elaborated a sophisticated approach to the role of democratic demands in the battle for power and during the construction of a socialist society which (I would argue) makes it unique among revolutionary currents.

The importance of these ideas for today's social movements and hence for revolutionaries has never been greater. People don't trust revolutionaries who play fast and loose with democratic structures. Nor will we ever make a revolution without winning the majority to our ideas through open argument and discussion. There are no short cuts.

In an underdeveloped country like Brazil, DS argued, the pursuit of democratic demands has an inescapably revolutionary dynamic, the logic of which leads to a rupture with the existing system.

But, leaving aside for a moment the problem of what happens when a left party achieves national power under conditions of a low level of struggle (as the PT did in 2003) could we have been more cautious about how this democratic discourse could be hijacked by social-democrats and by openly capitalist forces? As Assis Brazil points out in the book: "the reason the World Bank is in favour of the PB is that it likes the transparency that it provides".

The defeat of Raul Pont, the PTs candidate for mayor of Porto Alegre in the municipal elections of autumn 2004, after a campaign which was very close to the party's line nationally, constituted a symbolic endpoint to this whole experience. The Brazilian left will have to start again, but not from scratch.

Of course, the Lula government has not implemented the PB across Brazil, contrary to Jose's hopes. Except in Fortaleza, surviving PT local administrations are shifting sharply to the right. But this should not be allowed to obscure the achievement that the Participatory Budget represents, however short-lived it was.

The Porto Alegre Alternative: direct democracy in action

Iain Bruce, editor

IIRE/Pluto Press, Notebook for Study and Research No 35/36 (162 pp, â‚¬19.20, £12.99, $23.50)

Brazilian socialists André Passos Cordeiro, Ubiratan de Souza, Pepe Vargas, Raul Pont and João Machado describe in The Porto Alegre

Alternative how Porto Alegre's participatory budget was born, how it works, how it developed in interaction with popular movements and spread with local Workers' Party (PT) victories, and how it has staked out new ground in promising a radically democratic alternative in the interests of the poor to top-down political and economic decision-making.

Iain Bruce is a British journalist and filmmaker who has made documentaries for Channel 4 and the BBC. His latest documentary touches on Porto Alegre and its connection with the wider global justice movement.

"Iain Bruce's impressive collection is the first book-length study available in English of Porto Alegre's participatory political project. Refreshingly unwilling to romanticise its subject matter, it takes a robustly multifaceted approach. A must for those seriously interested in global democracy from the grassroots up." - The Guardian

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A 'Civil War' that is French and Neo-Colonial

7 February 2005, by Jean Nanga

Trampling on the accords of Linas-Marcoussis (January 2003) and Accra III (July 2004), Laurent Gbagbo launched on November 4 "Operation Dignity", an air and land offensive against the positions of the New Forces. In spite of the "unlimited war" promised by FN leader Guillaume Soro, this offensive didn't encounter any serious opposition in the first two days. But in the course of the operation the FANCI air force bombed a French military camp at Bouké, in the centre of the country and situated in the zone controlled by the New Forces. Stationed in the country (since September 2002) in the framework of "Operation Unicorn", the French Army also has a mandate from the United Nations Operation in Ivory Coast (ONUCI) as a "force of intervention."

Laurent Gbagbo hand-in-hand with Dominique de Villepin, French foreign minister

The bombardment left nine French soldiers and a US civilian dead and thirty injured. In an immediate reaction, the French army destroyed the aircraft that had carried out the attack, then, on orders from the French President, its air force destroyed the entire Ivory Coast air force. This disproportionate riposte sparked off a mobilisation of Gbagbo's supporters in Abidjan: there was anti-French and anti-opposition violence, and demonstrators headed for the permanent French base of the 43rd Battalion of Marine Infantry (BIMA), as well as for the airport and the Hotel d'Ivoire, which is occupied by the French army (it is situated about 500 yards from the presidential residence!).

A murderous confrontation ensued between the French Army, which opened fire, and demonstrators led by the "Young Patriots", as the FANCI looked on. The official Ivorian balance sheet is of about 60 Ivorian dead and over a thousand wounded, victims of the French troops - a 'Franco-Ivorian war'.

"You don't get away with killing…French people"

At an emergency summit in Abuja (Nigeria), the heads of state of the African Union adopted a resolution condemning the violation of the ceasefire by the FANCI and the attack on the French military camp and entrusting South African president Thabo Mbeki - who was not present and had not even sent anyone to represent him - with the task of holding talks with the (Ivorian…) protagonists. On November 15 the UN Security Council adopted in its turn Resolution 1572, proposed by France, by which it "imposes an embargo on arms for the Ivory Coast and envisages freezing the financial assets and restricting travel abroad of any person threatening the process of peace and national reconciliation in this country."

French soldiers clash with government supporters

In France, a propaganda campaign was unleashed by the President himself, echoed massively in the media. [1] The Africa experts of the main French newspapers seized the occasion to recall that " Françafrique " didn't exist any more: all that had been dead and buried for a long time, according to them. [2] This claim was invalidated by the facts, which as everyone knows are stubborn things.

Gone was the air of superiority that had been manifested with regard to the US invasion of Iraq. Back came the reflexes of the imperialist ethos, of old colonial habits, of ontological superiority, "white" or French. These attitudes were expressed by the media as well as by the governing right and the opposition social democracy. And also by tough talk from one of the vanguard sectors of colonialism, still nostalgic for the colonial epoch, the army of the French Republic: "You don't get away with killing French people." Should one get away with killing Africans?

There was no compassion for the families of the Ivorian civilians who were victims of the French army, and whose existence was scarcely admitted. The property and belongings looted from French families and companies in Abidjan got more attention than the Ivorian casualties of the army of the French Republic. An army that stooped, via its spokesperson (on the radio station RFI on 10 November 2004) to blaming these deaths on the FANCI, after its own Chief of the General Staff had proudly spoken of his troops who might have "wounded or killed a few people", while "showing very great calm and complete control of the violence."

This version was backed up by the Minister of Defence, who added that the crowd of Ivorians was "armed with Kalashnikovs and pistols" [3] "There were no doubt some casualties; we don't know exactly, because when things happen at night, it is extremely difficult to know what's going on." In the darkness of the night, with all these Blacks around, they nevertheless managed to make out "Kalashnikovs" and "pistols."..The French side could also speak proudly of its "soldiers in the service of peace", certain that we are living in an epoch where news is quickly rubbed off the slate; the French army had already fired without warning on unarmed Gbagboist demonstrators in November 2003 at M'Bahiakro, seriously wounding three of them.

The haughty arrogance shown at the highest level of the French state reeks of colonialism. For the French Minister of Defence, on the evening of November 6 "we were in an insurrectional situation."..in Ivory Coast. The insurgents being, need we remind you, the partisans of the Ivorian government! These are the remarks of someone who is nostalgic for the colonial epoch. French head of state Jacques Chirac struck the same note, addressing students in Marseilles in the good old tradition of colonial ethnology, in its Negrophile version: "The Africans are by nature joyful. They are enthusiastic. They smile. They clap. They are happy..." [4] .

"Ivorian" crisis? "Franco-Ivorian" crisis? "Françafrican" crisis, or crisis of French domination in Africa, as is implied in reactions like those of the Open Letter to Koffi Annan by Burkinabé intellectuals denouncing France, or the Open Letter of the Committee of Initiative of Senegalese Intellectuals to the French Ambassador to Senegal ("France is behaving like a third belligerent") and other Pan-Africanist reactions? [5]

The result of Linas-Marcoussis

What happened is one of the logical consequences of the solution to the Ivorian crisis initiated by the French state and underwritten by the African Union, then by the United Nations, at Linas-Marcoussis. These accords have become a dogma for national reconciliation, whereas they carried within them the germs of conflict. Allow me to remind readers that after the signature of what are called the Accords of National Reconciliation, I considered that they were opposed to the interests of the Ivorian people and said that they were likely to "make the Ivory Coast even more of a nightmare." [6] Because the purpose of the manoeuvre was obvious: on the pretext of opposing the consequences of the ideology of "Ivority", [7] (which is legitimate and necessary), these agreements were an instrument of pressure on the Gbagbo faction. The policy of restructuring dependence ("Refoundation" in the terminology of the Gbagboists) at the expense of the FranCafrican tradition had to be put a stop to.

Resolution 1464 (4 February 2004) of the UN Security Council contributed to the preparation of the present episode, by going along with Operation Unicorn and by subsequently subordinating the MINUCI and the ONUCI to it, logistically, instead of helping to set up a force of intervention that was not involved in Ivorian affairs. Forced as he was to accept the French presence, Gbagbo took advantage of it to reorganise his army.

A truce is a classic occasion to rearm. After the non-respect of the 1961 Defence Agreement (see below) - which in the present case should have led the French army to back Gbagbo against the rebellion - the French arms dealers ended up by delivering the equipment ordered by the Ivorian army, fearing the consequences of the diversification of military alliances initiated by Gbagbo. France, not wanting to push the extremists within the Gbagbo faction to demand the dismantling of the base of the 43rd BIMA, and relying on the sympathy of certain officers of the FANCI, attempted reconciliation by several times dispatching the Minister of Defence, Michele Alliot-Marie, to Ivory Coast, even during the festive period at the end of 2003.

As a present for New Year 2004, Gbagbo even made her Commander of the Ivorian National Order. Gbagbo's realism, aimed at reducing the pressure on himself, led France to launch calls to order, relayed by the media, to the rebellion. But without any real pressure for the respect of the programme of disarmament-demobilisation-reinsertion. This led to a surprisingly symmetrical position, on the part of these bourgeois politicians, between the Ivorian Army and the rebellion, as far as disarmament was concerned. This change of attitude created friction between the New Forces and the French Army, with French soldiers being killed (at that time these deaths were described as "unfortunate mistakes").

Once the reorganisation of the FANCI had been completed, Gbagbo activated the return to a military solution. His first show of force was the criminal repression of an opposition demonstration in March 2003. The New Forces couldn't disarm, even in the event of the adoption of an amendment to article 35 of the Constitution to permit Alassane Ouattara and many other victims of "Ivority" to stand for election. So there was a double violation of the Accra III agreements: on the one hand, the Gbagbo camp evoked the idea of a referendum on the revision of the Constitution, on the other, there was non-respect of the October 15 date for disarmament. [8]

Since the transformation of the New Forces into a political organisation hadn't taken place, they couldn't commit suicide and thus lose their principal instrument of "legitimacy." Furthermore, the control of the North and the Centre of the country pays dividends: apart from ministerial income and the hold-up of the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO), [9] there are highly profitable illicit dealings in various mining raw materials, for example gold, [10] but also in agricultural produce... The offensive of the FANCI - which also led to Ivorian casualties and provoked fresh movements of population - shouldn't have surprised Western governments.

The United States have installed in Abidjan, in the neighbourhood of the presidential palace, the African staging post of the Echelon system of electronic eavesdropping. The Canard Enchainé (10 November 2004) referred to the telephone call from Chirac to Gbagbo, in which he warned him about respecting French interests. Which could make you think that the attack on the camp was a self-fulfilling prophecy. In this case, Gbagbo neglected the warning, so inflated was he at the imminent success of the operation entitled "reconquest of territorial integrity", which was going to put him in a position of strength until the elections in November 2005.

On his part, by ordering reprisals, Chirac underestimated the patriotism that this demonstration of imperialist arrogance would provoke - reviving memories of the colonial repression at Dimbokro in 1950, [11] in a sub-region where part of the elite is more or less Pan-Africanist, even though both Burkinabé and Senegalese intellectuals are perfectly well aware of the "Ivority" policy conducted by Gbagbo.

Thus, in the Elysée palace, the Françafrican reflex won out over the ambiguous UN mandate of Operation Unicorn. The Elysée found its Oussama Ben Laden in the person of Laurent Gbagbo. With the advantage over the White House that they knew exactly where to find Gbagbo: French tanks of the 43rd BIMA even managed to "take a wrong turning" and end up just outside his front door.

Is Françafrique dead?

The Report of the International Commission of Enquiry on the allegations of violations of human rights in Ivory Coast between 19 September and 15 October 2004, in spite of its origins in the UN and the Linas-Marcoussis accords, confirms, although it is carefully worded, what is at stake economically in the Ivorian crisis. We read for example:

"The Commission has received testimony concerning events that could justify a certain optimism about the economic future of Ivory Coast. This concerned in particular the discovery of oilfields whose reserves are close to those of Kuwait and that thus Ivory Coast could become the second biggest African oil producer, after Nigeria. On top of that it would appear, still according to this testimony, that the reserves are of the much sought after 'green' oil. Apart from oil, it seems, according to this testimony, that gas deposits have been discovered between San Pedro and Sassandra: the reserves are enough for a hundred years of exploitation. It seems that other resources also exist, such as gold and diamonds, not to mention the rare metals that are now used for building satellites." These are sources of neo-colonial capitalist barbarism.

The report doesn't mention it, but according to Annex II of the Defence Agreement signed between the governments of the French Republic, the Republic of Ivory Coast, the Republic of Dahomey and the Republic of Niger on 24 April 1961, France has priority in the acquisition of those "raw materials classified as strategic." In fact, according to article 2 of the agreement, "the French Republic regularly informs the Republic of Ivory Coast(...) of the policy that it intends to follow concerning strategic raw materials and products, taking into account the general needs of defence, the evolution of resources and the situation of the world market."

According to article 3, "the Republic of Ivory Coast (and the other two) inform the French Republic of the policy they intend to follow concerning strategic raw materials and products and the measures that they propose to take to implement this policy." And to conclude, article 5: "Concerning these same products, the Republic of Ivory Coast (and the two others) for defence needs, reserve them in priority for sale to the French Republic, after having satisfied the needs of internal consumption, and they will import what they need in priority from it." The reciprocity between the signatories, need we point out, is rendered false by the inequality of the actual relations of domination by the colonial power that had, in the case of these countries, organised "independence" a few months previously (in August 1960).

This privileged position of France is confirmed by the UN Commission: "The testimony we have assembled has also enabled us to see that the law of 1998 concerning rural property is linked to the dominant position that France and French interests occupy in Ivory Coast. According to these sources, the French own 45 per cent of the land and, curiously, the buildings of the Presidency of the Republic and of the Ivorian National assembly are subject to leases concluded with the French. French interests are said to control the sectors of water and electricity, which are worth 10 billion francs CFA per

month."

Omnipresence of French capital

The report doesn't give details about this dominant position of French interests. But it is not superfluous to recall it, in these times when the injurious myth of the generous action of Western capital in Africa is being propagated. We find many of the leading players of the French capitalist class:

- Bolloré (leader in French maritime transport in 2003), principal operator of maritime transport along with Saga, SDV and Delmas, practically controls the port of Abidjan, the leading transit port in the West African region and the second container port in Africa, whose main container terminal at Vridi was recently acquired by Bolloré in a scandalous fashion, according the other port operators, both French and Ivorian. It also controls the Ivorian-BurkinabÉ railway, Sitarail. Although it has recently withdrawn from the cocoa business, it has on the contrary maintained its leading position in tobacco and rubber...

- Bouygues (leader in construction and public works in France, also present as Vinci, the second company in public works in France) has been traditionally, since independence, number one in construction and public works (we also find Colas, third-ranking firm in road building in France). It also has, through privatisation and obtaining concessions, control of water distribution (Société des Eaux de Côte d'Ivoire), of production and distribution of electricity through the Compagnie Ivoirienne d'Electricité and the Compagnie Ivoirienne de Production d'Electricité. It has also been involved in the recent exploitation of Ivorian oil...

- Total (the biggest French oil company) holds a quarter of the shares of the Société Ivoirienne de Raffinage (SIR, no. 1 company in Ivory Coast) and owns 160 petrol stations.

- France Telecom (seventh in rank among companies in France and leader in the telecommunications sector) is the main shareholder of Côte d'Ivoire Telecom and of the Société Ivoirienne des Mobiles (it holds about 85 per cent of the capital), since concessions were granted in this sector, in the context of the privatisation of public enterprises.

- In the banking and insurance sector, there is the Société Générale(sixth bank in France - the Société Générale des Banques de Côte d'Ivoire has 55 branches) the CrÉdit Lyonnais, BNP-Paribas, AXA (the second largest company in France and leader of the insurance sector, which has been present in Ivory Coast since the colonial period).

- The most long-established of French companies is the Groupe Compagnie Francaise de l'Afrique de l'Ouest de Côte d'Ivoire (CFAO-CI, principal "FranCafrican" company of the French colonial empire in sub-Saharan Africa, the private-sector colonial equivalent of ELF), which operates in many sectors (cars, pharmaceuticals, new technologies... after having for a long time monopolised exports and the retail trade...) and whose profitability (not a single year of loss, from its creation in 1887 until 2003) led to it being recently taken over the Pinault-Printemps-La Redoute group. [12] It occupies the ninth rank among companies in Ivory Coast, after having ceding its interests the logging industry, in which it had been very much present for decades.

- Honour where honour is due. We couldn't conclude the list without mentioning the presence of the boss of French bosses, Baron Ernest-Antoine Seillères, through Technip (plant for the oil sector) and Bivac (which in May 2004 was attributed the scanner of the port of Abidjan).

This presence of French capital is a demonstration of the capitalist profitability of Ivory Coast. And although French direct investment is only 3.5 billion euros - the most profitable ex-state enterprises having often been acquired at knock-down prices - the annual profits from this investment are enormous. As former French senator Jean-Pierre Camoin (of the BollorÉ group and President of the Circle of Friendship and Support to Franco-Ivorian Renewal, created in February 2004) put it so well: "industrialists are not philanthropists. An enterprise only exists if it makes profits, if it progresses; otherwise it disappears."
[13]

Behind "Ivority."..what is at stake for the capitalists

It is paradoxical that in these times of spectacular denunciation of the way everything in the world I being turned into a commodity, the understanding of the crises that affect that part of humanity that is most victim of the neo-liberal steamroller has difficulty escaping from culturalism, from the underestimation of economic interests. The genocide of the Tutsis, coupled with the massacre of Hutu democrats in Rwanda in 1994, is regularly used (often in glossing over the massacre of Hutu democrats) to legitimise culturalism.

So, in the Ivorian crisis, "Ivority" is presented as the major cause, instead of understanding it as a reactionary response to the structural crisis of neo-colonialism (in the same way, for example, as the electoral results of the National Front in France are the expression of social insecurity). But the relationship between the development of neo-liberalism and the spread of xenophobia, chauvinism and other forms of exclusion, of hatred of those who are different, seems obvious. That in no way signifies the absence of precedents or of the relative autonomy of racist and xenophobic consciousness. In the case of "Ivority" the ingredients were produced by the colonial system, then by the ascendant phase of neo-colonialism, of indirect or reformed colonialism, of which Ivory Coast was really the "model."

The public demand for a distinction to be made between Ivorians and non-Ivorians was expressed in 1990, during the "democratic opening", on the eve of the first multiparty elections in so-called independent

Ivory Coast, by presidential candidate Laurent Gbagbo, opponent of the autocrat Houphouet-Boigny. This "democratic opening" was a response to social and political protests against the effects of the structural crisis of neo-colonialism, characterised, among other things, by problems in public finances. The distinction between Ivorians and non-Ivorians was one possible way of increasing state income, by instituting residence permits for foreigners.

This measure was also advocated by Alassane Dramane Ouattara (who was then Houphouet-Boigny's Prime Minister), who also decided to introduce a forgery-proof national identity card. These measures were not specifically Ivorian. Alassane Ouattara, former Africa director of the IMF, travelled through sub-Saharan Africa during the 1980s to explain to states that were deeply in debt and subject to, or candidates for, Structural Adjustment programmes, that they had from then on to cut social spending and increase state income. The introduction (or the increase in the cost of) residence permits for African residents was also on the agenda in other countries than Ivory Coast, from Nigeria to post-apartheid South Africa. It was entirely in harmony with the policies on this question that were being applied by the developed capitalist countries.

The attempt at a theorisation of "Ivority" by the organic intelligentsia of the Bédié faction, after the victory of Konan Bédié over Ouattara in the battle to succeed Houphouet-Boigny, was not only an operation aimed at legitimising the patrimonialist-capitalist hegemony of this faction of the Democratic Party of Ivory Coast (PDCI, the former Ivorian Democratic Rally, the state party of Houphouet-Boigny) but also a legitimisation of the Houphouetist FranCafrican tradition, threatened by the orthodox and self-serving neo-liberalism of the former Africa director of the IMF.

His years as Prime Minister responsible for implementing the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) under the authority of Houphouet-Boigny - nevertheless safeguarding the sacrosanct interests of Françafrique, for example by curbing the ambitions of Cargill in the cocoa sector - were seen as a foretaste of neo-liberalisation if he ever became president. The alliance between Gbagbo and Ouattara against Bédié, in the form of the Republican Front that boycotted the 1995 presidential election (from which Ouattara had been excluded on the grounds that his nationality was questionable), was also based on the anti-Houphouetist project of Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (FPI).

The recourse to "Ivority" or the criticism of it, thus appear as fairly instrumental in the light of the tragic episodes of Guei - who carried ou a coup d'état in 2000, supposedly to put an end to "Ivority" and ended up by adopting it in order to ban Ouattara from the presidential race - and of Gbagbo, and indeed of the rebellion. For the report of the UN Commission confirms the existence of mass graves in the zone controlled by the New Forces, evidence of inverted chauvinism.

This "Ivority" is in fact determined by the neo-liberal capitalist advantages that flow from control of the state machine. The first anti-Ouattara offensive, conducted by Bédié before the death of Houphouet-Boigny, was the obstruction that he organised, as President of the National Assembly, to the privatisation of Côte d'Ivoire Telecom (CIT). Bouygues was ready to acquire CIT, after having inherited the Société des Eaux de Côte d'Ivoire by acquiring the SAUR at the start of privatisation in the middle of the 1980s, and having obtained in 1990 the concession for 15 years of Energie Electrique de Côte d'Ivoire, scandalously undervalued in a shady deal orchestrated by Alassane Ouattara. As befits a top civil servant of international finance, Ouattara is also an important businessman.

The acquisition by his friend Bouygues of CIT (finally conceded to France Telecom by Bédié when he became head of state) would have increased Bouyguesís power in Ivory Coast: "In 1991, the dark continent represented a turnover of 7 billion francs, of which 2 billion came from Ivory Coast alone…If Europe with 7.7 billion francs is slightly ahead of Africa in the group's activities, America and Asia come far behind with respectively 3.4 and 2.1 billion francs." [14] It would also have been further to the advantage of Alassane Ouattara, who didn't just privatise for the benefit of others, according to the other barons of the PDCI-RDA, his rivals, who were threatened or dethroned from their rentier fiefs by privatisation that they had no control over.

What is considered as a Dutch auction of the public sector is also perceived by a well-conditioned public opinion as "an unpatriotic action." Which led people to question the nationality of the person responsible for it. As Prime Minister, Ouattara thus played the role of a scapegoat for the untouchable Houphouet-Boigny. Ouattara, who had on top of everything else studied and worked outside his country, who had sent in the army against the students, was in a similar situation to that of Kengo Wa Dondo, Mobutu's Prime Minister in Zaire, whose zeal in implementing structural adjustment resulted in people remembering his Polish and Tutsi origins. Nationalist conditioning led them to believe that a "genuine Zairean" wouldn't have done that...

For conservative Françafrique, Ouattara was the one who had helped US capital to penetrate the coffee and cocoa sectors. Houpouet-Boigny, Francophile, didn't want to do that, having only made an exception for Nestlé. And for good reason: apart from French-speaking solidarity, he had property, bank accounts and shares in Switzerland. The multinationals who were interested in Ivorian cocoa - Archer Daniel Midland (ADM) and Cargill - were the leading players in this sector on a world scale. It was impossible to shut them out in a period of structural adjustment organised by the institutions of Bretton Woods, in which the United States holds a veto. So the door was left ajar for them.

Thus, under Bédié, ADM found itself in a minority partnership with one of the major companies of the sector, SIFCOM, in which Bédié owned nearly 12 per cent of the shares. This co-shareholding was not free of some expectation of political backing on the part of Bédié, former Ivory Coast ambassador to the United States,

before becoming Minister of the Economy and Finance, who was conscious of the relations with the United States of his rival for the presidential elections due in 2000.

Is it just a coincidence that Bédié, who while accentuating "Ivority" had created less unfavourable conditions for competition by ADM and Cargill, was overthrown in December 1999 by mutinous soldiers who had served in the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic under the command of the French Army, and that they installed as head of state Guéi, the former Chief of the General Staff under Houphouët-Boigny, who subsequently showed himself to be very Françafrican?

Although the putsch had been fairly well received by the population for its denunciation of it, the Government of Transition wasn't able to settle the problem of "Ivority." Because the Ã¬Ivoritarianî discourse covered capital accumulation by Bédié's "real Ivorians." The privatisation of state enterprises and the liberalisation of markets is a particular phase of accumulation and of the transformation of the upstart into a capitalist. Thus, in a rediscovered national unity (without Bédié, exiled in France), the transition was in Ivory Coast the occasion to reorganise the process of privatisation and liberalisation of markets that the Bédié faction had plotted with those who presented themselves as "generous investors rushing to help an unprofitable Africa", the powerful corrupters who are hidden by the media, which only targets those who are corrupted. Given the composition of the transitional government, with as principal political forces the Republican Rally (RDR, Ouattara's party) and the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI, Gbagbo), the agreement on what to do with the deals that had been made could only be limited to suspending their application.

If the generous share accorded to French companies (Bouygues, France Telecom, Total...) in these deals wasn't to the taste of Mamadou Koulibaly, Minister of the Budget and later of Economy and Finance, who was also economic advisor to Gbagbo, [15] the other liberal (Ouattara) doesn't seem to have opposed the favourable deals prepared, for example, for his friend Bouygues by Bédié's team. In other words, the transition government had to "clean up" the running of public affairs that had been mishandled by the Bédié regime and leave to the winners of the future elections the re-launching of privatisation and liberalisation.

Guillaume Soro with other leaders of the New Forces

Since the two candidates provisionally allied - Ouattara and Gbagbo - basically shared the programme of the Bretton Woods institutions, the race for politico-economic power couldn't do without what discriminated against Ouattara - "Ivority." As General Guéi's ambitions had made him lose the support of certain former putschists, who were more or less linked to Ouattara, the battle of "Ivority" was now going to be conducted also by armed violence. It has happened more than once in history that a crisis of political legitimacy is accompanied by the loss of the monopoly of violence. Thus, "Ivority" also became paramilitary, each camp getting ready for the end of the transition.

The constitutional battle - to be born of an Ivorian father and/or mother - over eligibility, was concluded at the expense of Ouattara, excluded from the elections, although he had called for a "Yes" vote in the referendum on the Constitution, sure of his "Ivority", proved by his citizenship papers. The transition ended with the mass grave at Yopougon, in the name of "Ivority": Ouattara's suppporters were assassinated by gendarmes backing Gbagbo, considered as victor after Guéi's attempted electoral putsch had been blocked by Gbagbo's supporters. This followed the repression of a demonstration by Ouattara's supporters, who had taken advantage of the situation to call for a re-run of the election in which they hadn't participated.

The operations of "reconciliation" undertaken by Gbagbo couldn't come to anything as long as they weren't accompanied by a willingness to redistribute equitably, for his opponents, the proceeds of privatisation, of the liberalisation of markets, of the landholding reform that penalised non-Ivorians in a country where agriculture is such a dominant part of production. The willingness to carry through the "refoundation", neo-liberal version of African nationalism, in a climate where the tissue of the nation was being torn apart, symbolised by the existence of partisan militias, mainly the government's one, could only encourage a rebellion.

When it did emerge, the rebellion crystallised the frustrations of a whole part of the population that was suffering from the exactions of the government's thugs and from the climate of social insecurity. If all the evidence points to the rebellion having been jointly organised by the Burkinabe regime, [16] which had become the military staging post of Françafrique in the region after the death of Houphouët-Boigny, the soil was fertile for it.

Concerning the mass graves discovered in the zone under the control of the New Forces, evidence gathered by the UN Commission on their relations with certain regimes in the sub-region including the Togolese tyrant Eyadema [17] , it is pretty obvious that the form chosen to combat "Ivority" was motivated more by traditional interests than by a passion for democracy. This could be seen in its lack of originality: an attempted putsch, then an armed rebellion, suposed to lead the politico-military leader of the rebels to power according to the method tried and tested in Liberia (Charles Taylor), Congo-Brazzaville (Sassou Nguesso) and the Central African Republic (Bozizé).

The fact that there was a lot of anti-Burkinabé discrimination and that the financial remittances of Burkinabé immigrants in Ivory Coast were considerable (tens of billions of Francs CFA every year, which could dry up if they were expelled...) would no doubt not have been enough to motivate the

destabilisation of the Ivory Coast, pillar of the West African economy and of the Franc CFA zone. For that there had to be more traditional reasons, or at least the approval of France.

Protection of France's "backyard" in Africa

The involvement, on humanitarian pretexts, of the French state in Ivory Coast doesn't depart from the principle of maintaining control over what it considers to be its "backyard" in sub-Saharan Africa. Its humanist fibre only becomes sensitive when there is a substantial challenge to France's interests as a neocolonial power, considered as historic and eternal, represented by its big business interests. Each time that a regime has tried to question or challenge the foundations of this domination, even if it didn't embody a revolutionary socialist alternative, it has in one way or another paid for it; and the people always paid more than the regime that was overthrown. "Independent Africa", marked by a succession of coups d'état, is a legacy of colonial policies, with its organised electoral frauds and overturning of majorities in the territorial assemblies through corruption, which already led in colonial times to so-called ethnic conflicts.

It is symbolic that the first murderous putschist of the CFA zone - the Togolese Etienne Eyadema - is still in power and also that he is backing the leader of the rebellion in Ivory Coast, Guillaume Soro. To refresh our memories, already in 1963 what occurred was a mutiny of soldiers, demobilised after the Algerian war, against the Togolese president, Sylvanus Olympio. What was Olympio supposed to have done, what was held against him? He asked in 1958 for the independence of Togo, which was then under a Franco-UN mandate.

Then, once independence had been achieved in 1960, he sought to revise the contract for the exploitation of Togolese phosphate, which he considered as giving the lion's share to French capital; he undertook the diversification of Togo's economic partnerships with other Western states, including Germany, the former colonial power, which was also going to help him create a national currency, which meant leaving the Franc zone...

The mutiny in the course of which Olympio was assassinated took place, as it happened, a few days before Togo was due to officially leave the Franc zone. Sylvanus Olympio wasnít in the least bit inclined towards socialism, he was in fact a liberal, who had even subordinated "social justice" to the establishment of "macro-economic equilibrium", offering the Togolese soldiers of the colonial army in Algeria reintegration into civilian life rather than letting them swellthe ranks of a non-productive Togolese army of about 300 soldiers.

Other putsches and attempted putsches - sometimes with the help of mercenaries, those "pirates of the Republic", were to follow. Including the one against Hamani Diori, a declared partisan of Francophonie (the community of French-speaking countries), co-signatory with Houphouet-Boigny of the Defence Agreement of April 1961, which provided in an annex for the provision in priority of strategic raw materials to France; in this instance Nigeran uranium, handled exclusively by the French company COGEMA, which Diori, much to the displeasure of General De Gaulle, wanted to make available to the other Western powers who were concerned by nuclear power, [18] so that Niger could benefit more from this - harmful - natural resource, at a time when Nigeran youth was forcefully expressing its demands. He had also put on the agenda the closure of the French military base in Niger. Marien Ngouabi (Congo-Brazzaville) was assassinated in 1977, a few hours before a Franco-Congolese meeting in Paris to discuss the revision of the oil contract, also considered by the Congolese as according the lion's share to ELF. There was no more question of revising the contract for another ten years.

The list is long. As Mitterrand said, and we can agree with him, we're not talking about past practices: "In Africa the Gaullist way of operating remains exactly the same today. The personnel has changed, but the methods remain. The RPR at present controls all the operations of ELF in Africa. The RPR's men are also agents of the SDEC (intelligence services) (...) These kind of practices have continued into the present (...)Foccart is still going strong. Today he works for Chirac." [19]

Thus, without being in the least anti-capitalist, or even anti-imperialists - Gbagbo forgot his socialist convictions on the road of the "democratisation" of Africa - or sincere democrats, but rather an oligarchical pigsty of neo-liberal "nationalists", manipulators of ethnicity and Pentecostal businessmen with a direct line to their "born again" brothers and sisters of the American ruling class, the Ivorian "refounders" had the nerve to challenge certain eternal vested interests of French domination of the Franc zone. In so doing so they overestimated their legitimacy and their skill in manoeuvring. That France chose not to activate the Defence Agreement of April 1961, in spite of Gbagbo's request, can in no way be explained by some principle of non-interference in a crisis that is falsely portrayed as strictly Ivorian. The involvement of the BurkinabÉ regime couldn't have escaped French military surveillance of the region.

The Agreement couldn't be activated because in the French neocolonial conception, Gbagbo, who had chosen to maintain this neocolonial agreement, was guilty of having violated it. The rebellion as a prolongation of the aborted putsch was supposed to be a means of pressure on Gbagbo, and not an attempt to install an alternative government. France - "third belligerent, although belligerent in the shadows", according to the Initiative Committee of Senegalese Intellectuals - even acted to block the rebellion's march on Abidjan. So, from Lomé to Linas-Marcoussis, it was a question of calling to order, through a government of "national reconciliation", the various politico-economic interests of the ex-colonial power and of the different factions of the "Ivorian political class", which is

indistinguishable from Ivorian capital.

The Gbagboist neo-liberal "refoundation" was guilty of having reopened the dossiers of privatisations and concessions that had been suspended during the transition, of putting them out to tender "following the correct procedure." The consequence was the highly probable risk for certain French multinationals - those that had benefited from the favours of Houphouet-Boigny, Ouattara and Bédié - of not obtaining the renewal of juicy concessions that ran out under the Gbagbo regime. Of not being given favourable treatment to acquire the choice enterprises that were up for privatisation.

Of not benefiting from the most profitable public contracts, for which, contrary to the idea that if French companies withdrew they would be irreplaceable, there is competition from Chinese, South African, US and many other companies whose presence in the Ivorian market is not devoid of monopolist ambitions. [20] Since "in a period of recession, Africa can only survive in a monopoly situation". [21]

The case of ADM and Cargill in the cocoa sector has demonstrated the greater effectiveness of US multinationals when it comes to "free competition." From the end of the 1990s to the first years of the 2000 decade, they have progressed from being minority partners or second-rank companies to a position of leadership, absorbing along the way certain holdingd of their former majority partners, who were driven to astronomic loses.

As the African Development Bank and the OECD write: "remarkable evolutions have occurred in terms of the destination of Ivorian products even within the European Union. For example, whereas France and the Netherlands represented respectively 15.2 per cent and 9.8 per cent of Ivorian exports in 2000, the former only accounted for 13.9 per cent in 2001, as against 14.1 per cent for the Netherlands. This is explained by the fact that cocoa dominates Ivorian exports, cocoa whose processing is dominated by multinationals that have experienced profound changes in terms of the ownership of capital. These changes have taken place to the advantage of groups like Cargill, ADM, Callebaut, which have a tradition of transport in bulk, more advanced than in France, with the aim of gaining in efficiency and saving on costs linked to transport logistics.

Furthermore the ports that have the best logistics for receiving cocoa in bulk are Amsterdam and Hamburg, where important industrial subsidiaries belonging to these groups are situated" [22] . The breakthrough of US capital in this sector has for example driven Bolloré to shed its subsidiary, which was however one of the most important...

Secondary imperialism, divergent interests

The degree of sophistication of French attempts to recall President Gbagbo to order - a choice that is imposed on the Elysee by the relationship of forces on a world scale -,as well as the pressure of competition, has also laid bare the differences within French colonial capital. On the one hand to preserve their interests, and on the other hand faced with the weakening of French support for the rebellion, French bosses have created, along with Ivorian bosses who tend to be close to Gbagbo, the Circle of Friendship and Support to Franco-Ivorian Renewal (CARFI) chaired by UMP ex-senator Jean-Pierre Camoin (of the Bolloré group) which has among its benefactor members…Laurent Gbagbo.

The capitalist realism of the initiative has been expressed by the president of CARFI: "Everyone expected this economy to collapse, with a country cut in two, with transport hindered. In spite of that, Ivory Coast has proved that it could live on its own, without aid, pay its civil servants, keep electricity and water services functioning (...) We might ask why this situation got worse? I firmly believe that past generations did an enormous amount of work, were able to build Ivory Coast; but at present, the young generation is there, with young people educated in the best schools and universities, who want to show what they can do. It is this young generation that interests us.

What does it want? It wants a partnership based on equality, a real partnership where there is no longer a protective France that comes to give lessons to Ivory Coast on how to develop its industries, to develop all its exports. On the other hand there is an adult Ivory Coast with educated elites who need France in order to be able also to develop their country, thanks to a partnership with a country with which it shares the language, the culture and for which, when all is said and done, it has a certain affection (...) What interests us is business. Whether it's M. Gbagbo or M. X doesn't interest us! What we want is for the candidate and later on the President to take account of our opinion." [23]

As if by chance, the end of 2003 and the first half of 2004 were marked, on top of the purchase of French weapons by Gbagbo, by French market acquisitions: Alcatel, Technip and Bivac (Baron E-A Seillères)...and especially the scandalous concession to BollorÉ, for fifteen years, of the Container Terminal at Vridi, in the Autonomous Port of Abidjan, whose general manager, Marcel Gossio, is the vice-president of CARFI. This operation was publicly contested by Jean-Louis Billon, president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Ivory Coast (a warehousing operator like Bolloré, a transporter of SIFCA cocoa, a joint shareholder with Bédié under the latter's presidency and a non-member of CARFI). BollorÉ thus obtained a situation of quasi-monopoly over Africa's second port, after Durban in South Africa. Thus, "on Thursday 24 June last, Marc Rose, exploitation manager of the Company of Exploitation of the Container Terminal of Vridi (SETV) addressed a note to Jacques Remy of the SIVOM (one of Billonís companies) in which he wrote the following: 'We will no longer accept SIVOM containers at the terminal, with the exception of cargoes that are to be loaded on to our own ships'. [24]

The World Bank didn't fail to criticise this infringement on free enterprise: "The procedure followed puts into

question the efforts undertaken by the Bank and the other suppliers of funds to help Ivory Coast create an environment that is propitious to the development of the private sector, among other ways by guaranteeing loyal competition. The result is that the interests of the country have not been safeguarded and that the sharing of risks and profits between the country and the SETV is very inequitable, to the latter's advantage for a period of at least fifteen years". [25] So, in order to stabilise the "external" front, Gbagbo has resorted to the traditional procedures of Françafrique.

This scandalous concession, which resembled the electricity one accorded to Bouygues by Ouattara, was accompanied by a highly inequitable sharing-out of the managerships of state enterprises, considered as one of the causes of the blockage of the Marcoussis Agreement. Among the points on the agenda of the meetings between Gbagbo and his opponents during this period there figured the equitable and concerted distribution of management posts, in other words of highly profitable positions. This was a privilege that Gbagbo didn't intend to give up, taking care to allocate the enterprises that were most profitable and most in contact with foreign operators - a possible source of economic-political plotting - to those closest to him.

Having thus constituted a lobby within Françafrique, Gbagbo felt able to unleash the bloody repression of the opposition demonstration on 25-26 March, 2004, after the departure from the government of the ministers who contested the new economic set-up. Disorientated by France's reaction, in the towns under the control of the New Forces, its supporters demonstrated their anger against French soldiers, shouting at them, in Korhogo for example: "You are calculators like Gbagbo, get out of our town!" [26] The violation of the ceasefire in November 2004 - of which the UN and the French authorities had been forewarned by Gbagbo - fits well into this dynamic of reconciliation with sectors of French capital. Because the division of Ivory Coast is also a problem for the enterprises that have important activities (sugar cane, cotton...) in the Centre and the North and can't easily transport production towards the markets of the South.

The war climate is also favourable to the "disloyal competition" of merchandise fraudulently imported from neighbouring countries. So, for example, at the end of April, the very influential and discreet president of the Castel-BGI group, Pierre Castel, specialist in wine and breweries, asked the Ivorian president, Laurent Gbagbo, for a sharper struggle against the recurrent and massive frauds that had been identified in the sugar sector. Every year, according to M. Castel, the Ivorian branch of his group, the BGI-Solibra, and its different units lose 15 billion Francs CFA. [