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Why our German friends are wrong on EU Constitution

27 May 2005, by **Alex Callinicos, Daniel Bensaïd, Domenico Jervolino, Francisco Fernandez Buey, Francisco Louçã, Stathis Kouvelakis**

For our German friends a French “No” would be a betrayal of progress and the Enlightenment (sic). And why not of “the meaning of History”? The serious nature of what they say calls for some clarifications.



Left to right: GÃ¼nter Grass,
Wolf Biermann, JÃ¼rgen
Habermas

Partisans of a “No from the left”, we are attached to the perspective of a Europe that is social, democratic, open and not limited to the uncertain frontiers of a Judeo-Christian civilisation. That is why we reject a treaty which gives constitutional force to a neoliberal Europe, continues to demolish social solidarities and public services, confirms the mandate of the European Central Bank to be outside any political control and favours (by the absence of social and fiscal harmonisation) social dumping and unequal development.

A European Union without a social programme, given over to the competition of all against all, is

necessarily anti-democratic. Declared neoliberals, who know their Montesquieu by heart, thus become enthusiastic for an institutional arrangement in which the executive arm (Council and Commission) and the judiciary (the Court of Justice) make laws, whereas the legislative arm (the Parliament) is a consultative ectoplasm.

Our German friends know, however, how heavily the Bismarckian bureaucratic unification on the ruins of aborted democratic revolutions has weighed in German history. To raise to constitutional status a treaty concocted behind the backs of the peoples, without an effective exercise of their constituent power, will in the end produce nothing but disappointment and resentment. The European idea itself will as a result be discredited.

It would have been more in conformity with reality to consider this treaty, draped in constitutional solemnity, as a “useful set of internal regulations”, according to the sober formula of Michel Rocard. To raise it to the rank of a Constitution does not however have a purely symbolic function. What

is involved is to give constitutional force to orientations (detailed in Part III) which should be the affair of elected bodies, so that what one majority has done, another majority can undo.

In engraving them in a Constitution that is practically impossible to modify, so improbable is a revision procedure involving twenty or thirty countries, popular sovereignty is caught in an iron grip and, in the name of untrammelled competition, policies which would give priority to the logic of needs and common well-being over the ruthless logic of the stock market are forbidden.

Carried away by their fervour, the proponents of the “Yes” vote attribute magical powers to a benevolent European spirit: peace, social rights, Airbus, all that is supposed to be thanks to Europe. Social rights were not however accorded by a benevolent ghost, but won dearly through real social struggles.

Peace is not a generous gift of the Brussels Commission, but the result of tragic historic ordeals and of the relationship of forces produced by the Second World War (not forgetting that

the corollary of sixty years of relative internal peace has been participation in all the colonial and imperial expeditions, in Africa or in the Gulf). As for Ariane and Airbus, they are not the fruit of a future Constitution, but the result of industrial cooperation backed by really existing states.

According to our German friends, the constitutional treaty is necessary to "balance relations with the United States". However, by accepting the tutelage of NATO, it confirms Europe's subordination to the hegemonic power of the United States, whose military budget is more than double that of the European Union. Seeking to reduce this gap significantly would lead either to renewed public deficits of vertiginous proportions or (which is obviously the most likely hypothesis) to a drastic reduction of social spending.

If there really exists a new "American challenge", it cannot be met by copying its liberal model. A response to imperial hegemony would on the contrary have to win the sympathy and the friendship of the peoples by presenting a real alternative model of social justice and peace.

If the European Union is sick today, it is not from the possibility of a French (or Dutch) "No" to the constitutional treaty. It is from a defect that is built into its genetic code. The scenario laid out in the Single European Act (1986) and the Maastricht Treaty (1992) did not take into account three major events. First of all, liberal globalisation has led to a concentration of capital that is transnational rather than European: the Union has as many and indeed more industrial partnerships with American or Japanese firms than it has what could properly be called European champions.

Secondly, the sudden collapse of the bureaucratic regimes in Eastern Europe precipitated the question of enlargement, which is heavy with social contradictions, but politically inevitable. Lastly, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, German unification and the rupture of the precarious equilibrium of the post-war period have put on the agenda a new division of the world and a new realignment of

alliances.

Thus the ingredients of a historic crisis have been brought together. Only a radical change of logic, giving priority to social, democratic and ecological convergences as against the egotistical calculations of profits and stock exchange revenues, could defuse it.

According to those who plead for a "Yes" vote, the choice is this treaty or nothing: "There is no alternative", Mrs Thatcher was fond of proclaiming! This rhetoric of resignation contributes to discrediting politics. We on the contrary are not only convinced that social convergence criteria (in terms of salaries, employment, public services, social protection) would constitute a measure of elementary social justice, but also that they would be the best means of avoiding social dumping.

They would lay the basis on which enlargements could be negotiated. Such criteria would, it is true, be of a nature to "interfere with free competition". They would therefore be in contradiction with the spirit and the letter of the present treaty.

Our German friends are worried that a "No" vote would "fatally isolate France". Their solicitude is the expression of a static view of the world. We can imagine on the contrary that such a "No" would break the vicious circle of timid steps and of the lesser evil that that often leads to the worst. It would invite the peoples of Europe to become actors of their own history. In reality, the isolation that is feared concerns only the governments and not the popular movements against war, the European Social Forums, the marches of women or of the unemployed. The governments pass, the peoples remain.

Our German friends fear a "populist No to the constitution" and the imprisoning of "left nationalists in a bunker". That shows how little they know the supporters of a "No" from the left. They are to a large degree, militants of the global justice movement, initiators of the Euro-marches, organisers of the European Social Forums. What can tip the balance of the vote on May 29th is on

the contrary the progress of a "No" that is social, a "No" of solidarity, and not the chauvinistic and islamophobic "No" of the old Right.

Our German friends entreat their "French friends" to "not make the European Constitution suffer the consequences of their discontent with their government". However, the experience and the common sense of working people make the logical connection between the policies that have been followed for twenty years and Giscard's treaty. If the Constitution that is proposed is the spirit of liberalism, the social counter-reform that people experience daily is liberalism in flesh and blood, and Chirac and Raffarin are its secular arm.

The main line of division now opposes a "No from the left" to an ecumenical "Yes" that, as the newly returned Jospin admits, illustrates the Euro-compatibility between the liberal Right and the liberal Left. If this Left, voluntarily enslaved by the constitutional straitjacket, returns to power, it will therefore have to pursue the road of Maastricht, of Amsterdam and of the Stability Pact.

Three years ago, François Hollande made his pilgrimage to Porto Alegre, where the World Social Forum was proclaiming that another world was possible. Barely a year ago, the Socialist Party was campaigning in the elections to the European Parliament under the slogan: "Now for a social Europe". "Yes" to the liberal treaty would signify today that another Europe (not to mention another world) is impossible. François Hollande can indulge in promises of a social Europe, for Easter or for some undetermined date in the future, but he cannot make people forget that in 1997 there were thirteen socialist governments in the European Union. Nor that Lionel Jospin, a year before becoming Prime Minister, attacked the Stability Pact that had been "absurdly conceded to the Germans" and denounced the Treaty of Amsterdam as a "super Maastricht".

As for Jacques Delors, who has just thrown the full weight of his experience into the battle for the "Yes", he confessed, scarcely two

years after having helped to give birth to the Treaty of Maastricht, to not having “ardently defended” it, because he “wasn’t madly in love with it”.

Today we can conclude from that that either he has fallen madly in love with Giscard’s treaty, which he is ardently

defending, or that he doesn’t like it any more than he did the Treaty of Maastricht, but that he will only tell us that in two years’ time.

The high school movement: a new generation opposes the governmental order

24 May 2005, by **Antoine Larrache**

Since mid-January we have seen a high school students’ revolt against the Fillon reform [1], a revolt that has proved to be lasting. It drew in tens of thousands of young people, while hundreds have not been attending classes for nearly two months.



All this is the expression of the fightback of a generation against a government that is the image of the society we live in: it gives nothing away. The movement should be situated in a particular context.

A context of defeats, the defeat of the mobilisations of workers in May-June 2003 and of the students in November 2003. A context where the revolt against the government is deepening with each electoral defeat, and with the refusal of most people to go to work on Whit Monday, a public holiday that the government turned into a working day.

And finally in a context where this revolt is beginning to be concretised by the popularity of the “No” in the campaign for referendum on the European Constitution, which gives workers a golden opportunity to express their rejection of the present policies; and also by the multiplication of strikes in different sectors (hospital emergency services, fishermen, radio personnel, postal workers, rail workers...).

The school student movement gives confidence to other sectors and challenges them (in the street, or at

the dinner table, between school students and their parents...).

Considerable obstacles

The lack of militant traditions makes itself felt: overall, the organisation of the movement at local level was weak, with few general assemblies, elected strike committees or financial autonomy. It only needed a racist offensive (conducted by the media, relayed by people’s prejudices, helped by the role of the police...) for the divisions that exist between the school students of the poorest neighbourhoods and the others to need several weeks to be overcome.

The betrayal of the union leaderships was very clear. After having played, under the pressure of the rank and file, a role in driving the movement forward on a national scale, the FIDL and UNL school student unions [2] took the violence that occurred on demonstrations as a pretext for abandoning the movement [3]



This role was widely understood by the school students who in demonstrations left the unions in a minority in relation to the coordination of high schools. The leadership of the main teachers’ union, the SNES [4], did everything to stop teachers mobilizing. Finally the determination of the government

prevented the school students from winning on their own. So it was up to them to build a broad movement against the government.

This perspective was opposed to what was defended by some school students, out of despair: minority actions that did not enable us to draw in either school students or workers. In the course of the confrontation the school students rediscovered very traditional forms of struggle: general assemblies, strike pickets, demonstrations, the need for an all-out strike. One of the problems was that the understanding of these four aspects was too weak.

To face up to these difficulties, the school students could only rely on their own forces and limited help from revolutionaries. The setting up of the national coordination played a decisive role. It enabled us to continue the mobilization after the FIDL and the UNL had given up, by proposing dates, organising blockades, exercising a pressure on the union leaderships, trying to unify the movement...

This coordination was not however without weaknesses: mandates hardly existed; there was a disheartening degree of disorder; the elected leadership was practically powerless; some school students disconnected from the coordination and fell back on their own schools. These difficulties are essentially the result of the weak understanding that of the capital importance of organizing on a national scale.

The role of the young revolutionaries

In the organization of the movement and the definition of its political objectives, the revolutionaries, mainly the JCR with the backing of the LCR, played a decisive role. We tried from September onwards to explain what the future law was all about, then we were at the origin of the coordinations and of the first blockades of schools, and we pushed (without much success) for the democratic organization of the movement.

Thousands of young people discovered that to defend their interests, they found themselves allied with those who have nothing to defend on this society and are ready to push confrontation to the end. Faced with a government that concedes nothing, there are only two attitudes possible: give up, as the union leaderships did, or try to build a general strike.

The outcome of the movement will have consequences: it will affect the amount of confidence a generation has in its own strength. A defeat would reinforce two kinds of error: electoral illusions and ultraleftism. But whatever the outcome of the movement, important lessons will have to be drawn from it. The first is that we can only count on our own forces and that we have to be ready to fight. We will see this generation in action, in the coming working-class struggles or in the universities.

The second lesson, less widely shared, is that there isn't much to expect from this society, since it couldn't care less about the demands of those directly concerned. That is leading to a healthy lack of respect towards various

institutions (the police, government administrations and ministries ...) and for a minority, by a movement towards revolutionary organizations.

Several hundred young people will probably get organized in this way, mainly in the JCR, to a lesser extent in Alternative liberataire or the CNT. [5]

That shows that the best way to build a force that is broader than our own political organization today is to defend a united front policy in the mobilizations, but at the same time to be clearly opposed to this society. That is the role we have to seek to play in the coming years: to help this new generation to understand, through a succession of experiences, that we have to overthrow this society.

Appendix

The unfolding of the movement

End of August 2004: the provisional Thélot Report sets out the main lines of the future Fillon Law.

September 2004: first leaflets about the Thélot Report.

January 6th, 2005: police identity checks in 1800 schools. Protest rallies. Local movements against lack of resources in the schools.

Thursday 20th January: demonstrations of 300,000 public sectors workers. Several thousand school students join the demonstrations. Coordinations are established in Nantes and Paris. There are more and more local demonstrations.

Saturday February 5th: Demonstrations in defence of the 35-hour week. 500,000 demonstrators nationally. There are 43 high schools represented at the meeting of the Parisian coordination.

Thursday February 10th: 100,000 school students demonstrate. The school holidays begin (in a third of France), the demonstrations continue.

Saturday March 5th: First national coordination;

Tuesday March 8th: 165,000 school students demonstrate. Violent incidents at the Paris demonstration.

Thursday March 10th: National trade union day of action: a million demonstrators across France. On the Parisian demonstration, violent clashes between the stewards of the school student contingent and gangs of youth. The FIDL and the UNL gradually withdraw from the movement. The demonstrations are no longer massive, but blockades of schools spread.

Thursday March 31st: 180 high schools blockaded (out of 2600).

Saturday April 2nd: demonstrations of teachers and school students; 60,000 take part.

Thursday April 7th: 480 high schools blockaded.

Wednesday April 20th: police hold 140 school students after the occupation of a building of the Ministry of Education: ten of them are charged.

Thursday May 12th: demonstrations called by the coordination in protest against the Fillon Law and the police repression of previous demonstrations.

Monday May 16th: school students stay away from school in large numbers, as do teachers, in protest at the suppression of the Whit Monday holiday.

Photos on this page by Patrice Leclerc, [Phototheque du mouvement social](#)

How Should Socialists See World War Two?

24 May 2005, by **Duncan Chapel**

Some of the most powerful socialist arguments against the world war are crucial in understanding the growing hostility of the US regime to governments in the Arab world and in Asia which refuse to obey Bush.

To mark this anniversary, International Viewpoint is republishing Ernest Mandel's speech on **Trotskyists and World War Two**, which explains how the socialists in occupied Europe saw the war during war time.

During the world war, revolutionary socialists argued, in the face of huge repression, that the German-Japanese "Axis" and the US-British "Allies" were fighting an imperialist war; and that working people should support neither side.



To the victors the spoils -
Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at
Tehran conference

Mandel delivered this speech to a 1976 London meeting of the British section of the Fourth International [6]. It anticipates some of the ideas in Mandel's 1986 book *The Meaning of the Second World War*. That book also

explains these socialist ideas about war in a way that is both strong and easy to explain. Mandel's book argues that "the meaning of the Second World War, like that of its predecessor, can be grasped only in the context of the imperialist drive for world domination". Mandel was almost unique in producing an easily-understood outline of the war for later generations.

Mandel's book also argues that this imperialist action provoked some anti-imperialist reactions: "the overall character of the Second World War must be grasped as a combination of five different conflicts:

1. An inter-imperialist war fought for world hegemony and won by the United States (though its rule would be territorially truncated by the extension of the non-capitalist sector in Europe and Asia).
2. A just war of self-defence by the Soviet Union against an imperialist attempt to colonize the country and destroy the achievements of the 1917 Revolution.
3. A just war of the Chinese people against imperialism which would develop into a socialist revolution.

4. A just war of Asian colonial peoples against the various military powers and for national liberation and sovereignty, which in some cases (e.g. Indochina) spilled over into socialist revolution.

5. A just war of national liberation fought by populations of the occupied countries of Europe, which would grow into socialist revolution (Yugoslavia and Albania) or open civil war (Greece, North Italy). In the European East, the old order collapsed under the dual, uneven pressure of popular aspirations and Soviet military-bureaucratic action, whereas in the West and South bourgeois order was restored — often against the wishes of the masses — by Western Allied troops." [7]

Go to:

Trotskyists and the Resistance in World War 2

Ernest Mandel

The Fall of Lucio Gutiérrez

23 May 2005, by **Hugo González, Margarita Aguinaga**

The fall of Lucio Gutierrez has an economic and political character. However, there is a predominance of the political element. For this part of the analysis we start with the same question as in 1997 and 2000. Why, if Lucio Gutiérrez was really a neoliberal president, was he overthrown?



Storming the presidential palace

The political factors.

Due to the changes demanded by the Tratado de Libre Comercio (TLC - Free Trade Agreement) with the United States, and permanent political

crises for eight consecutive years, there have been constant redefinitions of the "class forces", with the continued hegemony of the dominant class being far from certain. This seems to be what motivated the last political crisis - who will lead the current process of transformation, what political orientations and distribution will prevail in class and

state terms?

The economic factors.

The economic crisis was not the main reason for the recent political crisis, as it was at the time of Mahuad's fall in 2000, when the financial crisis reached a boiling point, but it does constitute part of the background to this new conflict.

It is motivated by conflict over the distribution of economic resources generated by oil and stemming from privileges in relation to the US, with Gutiérrez shifting his alliance from one class fraction to another, and still more by the possibility of boosting the process of capitalist accumulation with the income from global bonds, with the offer by the US to renegotiate the foreign debt; the possible economic income generated through privatization, the capital that would be generated from the sale of banks saved from bankruptcy and which were going to be sold off cheap by Gutiérrez through the AGD deposit insurance agency.

In addition, there were disagreements about certain points concerning the application of the TLC. Conflicts between different fractions exist over the TLC and Gutiérrez was unable to act as the axis of reconciliation between the factions of the dominant class to articulate agreements benefiting them all.

The position of the US in the negotiations has been extremely rigid, as opposed to which Peru, Ecuador and Colombia have displayed an impressive servility. It seems that this led to frictions between Gutiérrez and groups that had experienced greater difficulty in the negotiations, for example, the agricultural, cattle, floriculture and pharmaceutical sectors among others.

This exacerbated disputes over who was to derive the greatest benefit from the TLC within the dominant class.

In the midst of the struggle, the political crisis eroded the impression that Gutiérrez had created among wide segments of the popular sectors that certain aspects of economic crisis of the neoliberal model had been overcome, that the financial crisis of

2000 was over, that economic crises no longer exist and that fiscal packages nor structural adjustment measures "are no longer necessary" due to the increase in oil prices.

The successive overthrows of the government in 1997 (Abdala Bucaram), 2000 (Jamil Mahuad) and April 2005 (Lucio Gutiérrez) can be analysed together. Again it is necessary to go back to 1997 when Abdalá Bucaram's government fell after a very deep political crisis and 2000, when Mahuad's government collapsed following an economic and political fiasco. The two governmental collapses opened a crisis of hegemony of the dominant class and a deep political instability in its alliances.

The deterioration of the relationship of forces between the dominant class and the regime was obvious, although they are united behind neoliberalism and capitalist domination.

In 1997 and 2000 the governments fell as a result of a deep crisis of the neoliberal model and the globalization of economies. In 2005, Gutiérrez's presidency collapsed at a time of some economic growth, but an unresolved political crisis.

Above all in 1997 and 2005, after the fall of the respective presidents, the neoliberal model tends to back down momentarily before resuming and advancing.

In these eight years, political crises were connected to the process of dependency and the crisis of the state structure, the political parties and the resulting organizational forms of society with the same origin, an ever greater submission to US imperialism.



Molotov cocktails and tear gas in the streets

This explains the fragility of the political system and the instability of the alliances. On the one hand the PSC (party of the right) is the party axis in the disputes, and perhaps is the one which has benefited most from the falls of government, in 1997 there was an alliance of the PSC [8] and Fabian Alarcón- FRA [9], in 2000 there

was a PSC-DP alliance, which ended in crisis, fragmentation and the virtual extinction of the DP; in 2005 the PSC-Gutiérrez alliance did not last long, and the present alliance of the PSC and ID-MUPNP [10] is equally fragile.

In the three cases the inter-bourgeois alliances expressed extremely aggressive struggles between economic groups. The recent alliances express high levels of competition and discordance.

All three presidents who have fallen from power have been similar in their authoritarian attempts to concentrate power. It is clear that Gutiérrez was much more bold than the others in wanting to concentrate power to his favour in the executive, legislature and judiciary. The change in the Supreme Court was a detonator. In 2005 a general crisis in the three functions of the state was obvious, a crisis that became untenable for Gutiérrez.

In the three governmental collapses, the behaviour of the US has been similar: to ensure that whoever succeeds to government is firm on the US military base at Manta, the foreign debt and the FTAA - TLC trade agreement and to ensure a constitutional resolution.

The successive crisis reveals a deteriorated political apparatus and demonstrates serious internal conflicts inside the armed forces. In 2000, the internal fissure in the armed forces that led to the coup d'état was obvious. During the first quarter of 2005, there were internal clashes, denunciations of the level of repression, corruption and scandals concerning arms sales by the armed forces during a territorial conflict with Peru.

The three crises have not involved the highest levels of armed confrontation with the civilian population; nevertheless, civil confrontation and brutal repression have become increasingly normal. In 2000 16 indigenous activists died, in April 2005 there were several deaths, among them Julio Garcia, a Chilean journalist, and overall there was the highest degree of repression, persecution, belligerence, violence and civil

confrontation in Quito between defenders of Gutiérrez and opponents, something not before experienced and which deepened the regional conflicts.



Lucio Gutiérrez in 2002

The expulsions of Bucaram in 1997 and Lucio in 2005 were a product of multi-class spontaneous movements, but with different actors on each occasion. In 1997 Bucaram was defeated by a great national spontaneous democratic movement, with a significant presence of the popular sectors. In the case of Gutiérrez, although the mobilization was not at the same level, the presence of actors with democratic slogans was intense and exerted high levels of pressure. Unlike 1997, the broad popular sectors stayed depoliticized, on the margins.

The strength of the mobilization was constituted more by middle-class and petty bourgeois layers, with a broad layer of radicalized young people and women. On April 13, 2005 there was a mobilization of the middle-class, petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie in Guayaquil, Quito and Cuenca, related to the PSC and ID, whereas from April 14, at least in Quito, the mobilization, summoned by means of the radio "La Luna", advanced alone, self-managing its own forms of struggle without political parties; certain popular sectors appeared openly supporting the Gutiérrez regime.

In the successive crises mobilization has become a space of pressure for citizens to overthrow governments and to question the institutions as a whole. Criticism of the lack of democracy of the state institutions has been more evident in 1997 and in this recent mobilization.

In the three experiences two possible ways of resolution have emerged that demonstrate that the period of class struggle opened in 1982 has not been closed: a conservative way out and a democratic way out. Generally, the dominant sectors seek to sideline the democratic content and to consolidate the bourgeois class programme, within the framework of the existing

institutions.

While the mobilizations express a democratic content and citizens' political demands, racial and sexual discrimination among groups that participate in the struggle has been obvious.

In this occasion, the more important economic problems related to the TLC have not been resolved. The mass media were under pressure to support the most democratic groups.

The successive falls of government are initially motivated by inter-bourgeois conflicts but the subsequent mobilizations go beyond this. After the fall of the presidents, the right seeks to deactivate.

The democratic struggles and the necessity of a revolutionary leadership

Through the democratic road combined senses of participatory and direct democracy are built, escaping the structures of the political parties and after the fall of the governments more organic constructions have emerged.

Thus in 1997 the Popular Assemblies mobilized for the Constituent Assembly that emerged in 1998. In 2000 the indigenous movement impelled the articulation of indigenous and popular parliaments.

From the beginnings of April 20, 2005, various attempts at participation were made: the National Assembly of Peoples was set up by CONAIE [11] and other urban social sectors. It is independent of the political parties and its slogans are "Out with all of them, No to the TLC and out with the Manta base" but it does not manage to articulate an axis of confluence of the spontaneous struggle. In addition, assemblies in the south and north of Quito have emerged to discuss action for a refoundation of the country.

In the three crises the indigenous movement and the social organizations have been hard hit. In 1997, the populist policy of Abdalá Bucaram divided the indigenous movement in the second electoral round, while in 2000, after the military-indigenous alliance, the

indigenous movement was betrayed and harshly repressed. Now the indigenous movement, co-opted by the Gutiérrez government, is very divided and barely participated in the recent process, its bases have questioned the objectives of bringing down the government, others are caught up in the clientelist policy and as a whole distanced from the struggle of the poorest sectors of Ecuador.

The political crisis benefited the most reformist sectors of the left, at all times rooted to the alliances of the right opposing the government, as was the case with the Pachakutik movement. Other left groups have assumed independent positions but have not converted them into processes of broad leadership. A certain independent left exists although it is weak and has not taken on its final form. The CONAIE and other urban social organizations have for now decided to stay independent from the government of Palacio. During the April mobilization questions were opened on the signature of the TLC. .

Political perspectives

1. The Palacio government has made slight modifications in orientation on themes like the distribution of oil funds for health and education as a priority and the TLC, extension of militarization and citizen participation.
2. Inter-bourgeois conflicts will remain on the TLC, the distribution of economic resources and the political crisis.
3. The big mobilizations and democratic demands have already raised the necessity of making changes, but the parties are already interpreting this as a cosmetic change to the political structure.
4. The Ecuadorian political system is characterised by great political and economic risk and instability.
5. If we observe the struggles from 1997 to today, the two axes of confrontation that have managed to influence the correlation of forces have been the fight against the neoliberal model and the fight for democracy and sovereignty.

6. "The fight for democracy must be oriented by the Refoundation of a New Country and against imperialism". The slogan "Que se vayan todos" ("Out with all of them") was an element of pressure for the overthrow of Lucio, and the basis to continue with the

formation of Popular Assemblies.

7. The defeat of the left is evident, but a breathing space for the organizations to continue fighting has been created.

8. Advance towards the constitution of a political leadership based on a democratic and left content expressed in the mobilizations and construct independence in relation to the new government.

"We will return to the land from which we were expelled"

23 May 2005, by David San Mart  n , Luke Stobart

How long have people been living at the Baqa'a Camp?

People first went to the Baqa'a camp as a result of the first big Zionist expulsions in 1948. First they built refugee camps in the West Bank and Jordan valley, but after the 1967 war the refugees were forced to move east, finally creating the Baqa'a camp near Amman.

The Zionists say that the historical basis to their project is the suffering of the Jews in Europe. Our people are suffering now and have already been the victims of two big waves of forced emigration: in 1948, with massacres and expulsions, and in 1967, with another war and wave of expulsions. Sharon's criminal wall is aiming to induce a third wave of emigration by making Palestinians' lives impossible where their homes are.



Baqa'a - the world's biggest Palestinian camp

What are the main objectives of the Popular Committees?

Defending the right of return for all Palestinian refugees and opposing all forms of integration of refugees outside Palestine. We inform the refugee community in Jordan about the danger of integration projects, the importance of the right of return and the basic rights of the Palestinian

people. Lastly our aim is to form an international Arab coalition to defend the right of return.

What do you do to achieve these objectives?

We perform popular activities on the ground. For example, we are doing a campaign of visits to Palestinian refugee families in which we meet them and talk to them about the right of return and current issues related to such. We organize activities to explain the right of return, such as lectures, discussion forums and the printing of leaflets and pamphlets; and we hold seminars for children and youths on this subject and Palestinian culture.

The first international initiative we participated in was with the Arab Cause Solidarity Committee (ACSC), who ran a camp for refugee children in Asturias, Spain. We found this way of working to be very efficient, so we started to apply the same idea locally. Next month, the PCDRR is holding a general congress on the right of return, which will take place in a refugee camp in Jordan -probably Baqa'a.

What are the relations like between the PCDRR and the Jordanian government?

There is no relation. If at all, it is a relation between authority and opposition. We are in the opposition in Jordan because the Jordanian regime is like any other pro-imperialist Arab dictatorship and supports the

imperialist occupation projects. A small example of this is that the first two missiles launched against Iraq during the latest war were fired from a Jordanian aircraft carrier. Another example is that when Palestinians from refugee camps in Jordan go to join the national liberation struggle in Palestine, they first have to deal with the Jordanian Army patrolling the borders. I know that many young people that reached the borders had to come back because they didn't want to fight against Jordanian soldiers, who are Arabs too. A regime of that nature must be a pro-imperialist regime.

The media in the Spanish State are talking positively about the "peace" negotiations between Ariel Sharon and the new Palestinian premier Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen). What are your thoughts on these?

I would expect the official Spanish media to treat the negotiations positively, but I would imagine that the Spanish public have the same reservations that we have about an unjust "peace" coming from meetings between Abbas and Sharon. I don't hold out any hopes that a man like Sharon, with his bloody record, can make peace with Abbas or with any other Palestinian. We reject any kind of peace within the framework of the occupation; and the Spanish media and the Spanish people shouldn't forget that the central problem is the Zionist occupation of Arab land.

What is the response by the Palestinian resistance outside the Occupied Territories to this "peace process"?

Firstly I'd like to make clear that Palestinians, wherever they live - whether outside or inside Palestine-, desire peace. We have the human right to live in peace; it is inhuman to be in an eternal stage of killing or being killed. It is our right to drink coffee with milk and sugar and not with blood. By that, I mean we have a right to a normal life.



Children play in the dusty camp streets

If our situation wasn't clear before, now we have modern forms of communication, which can be used to show who is really acting violently: who is really killing and expelling people (which is also a form of violence).

It is important to point out that as long as the occupation remains, there will never be peace, because you can't have peace under occupation.

Another important point is that our anti-Zionist liberation project will continue in the future, as it is part of an older anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle, and the Zionist project is part of the colonial project. The Zionist project will be defeated through the defeat of the colonial project.

What forms does the struggle take?

We are confronting any attempt to take away Palestinian rights and the right of return. To do so, we use a variety of methods: The main method is the armed struggle, which is very important for the Palestinian resistance in the 'Territories'. This resistance is not an isolated phenomenon; it is part of a wider resistance against injustice and complements the Iraqi resistance against the imperialist project in our region. So we are talking about one single resistance.

Resistance also takes place on a political and legal level: we are confronting all of the attempts to eliminate the Palestinian right of return and attempts to legitimize the occupation of Iraq. We are fighting on all levels.

To complement our fight on an international level, there is the struggle by the international forces of freedom, such as the very effective initiative in Spain.

Does participating in the Palestinian elections mean legitimising the occupation?

Under the present conditions, yes.

Would you accept returning to a Palestinian State neighbouring Israel?

No. For us there is only a historical Palestine, which was occupied; and we

will return to the land from which we were expelled.

Does the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) represent the whole of the Palestinian community, including Palestinians in exile?

No, the Palestinian Diaspora never had the right to participate in the PNA elections.

If the PNA isn't the main political reference point for the Palestinian community as a whole, what then is the main political authority for the Palestinians?

The political reference point is the fixed rights of the Palestinian people and these are non-negotiable. The rights are outlined in the PLO national charter.

What can people in the Spanish state do to help your struggle?

Firstly we know that the Spanish are an educated people with a long history and that you shouldn't believe the simple lies spread by the media. You must seek the truth, and now the new media allow a better contact with the forces fighting for rights in Palestine. Secondly we also need solidarity groups, because we have a common resistance against injustice and tyranny. Lastly as the child of a refugee camp, I would like to invite any Spanish person to come and visit us in the camps and see what things really are like.

"The Fire is under the Ashes"

22 May 2005, by Luke Stobart

LS: What difficulties do activists in Egypt come up against when organising?

K: We live under an imposed state of emergency that entitles the authorities to arrest anybody without having to offer any justification. There are 20-thousand detainees; torture in

widespread -and torture in the state-security intelligence headquarters includes the use of electricity and burning. We also have an army of riot police of roughly one million! (in a national population of 70 million).

In 1986, there was a strike and demonstration by the riot police and

at that time there were 600 thousand. We cannot have marches in Egypt. The minute we assemble, we are surrounded by police and they do not allow the demonstration to march. If the demonstration has 500 people, you would have 5,000 police surrounding you.

In Egypt if we had the right to demonstrate and march freely, our demonstrations would be of tens or hundreds of thousands of people. On 2nd April 2002, there were actually one million demonstrators across the whole of Egypt, as was confirmed by all news agencies. Demonstrations are not only controlled by surrounding them with police; when demonstrators managed to break out of the siege, they face water cannons and attacks using batons and rubber bullets. A number of demonstrators at the Palestinian-solidarity demonstrations lost their eye because of such bullets.



Third Cairo Conference against Globalization, Imperialism and Zionism, March 2005

The freedom to form parties, that they claim exists in Egypt, is not real; the government does not approve of any political parties except those who have reached a compromise with the Mubarak regime. We as socialists and the left in general build our organisations in a clandestine way; so we do not have to submit to any compromises with the Mubarak regime.

Workers in the new industrial cities have no union. In the old industrial cities the unions are under the control of a federation affiliated to the government. We consider these trade unions to be workers' "police stations". There is no right for workers to independently organise. Many of the professional bodies are also under control.

I am a member of the engineers union but my union has been banned for 10 years by a court order. The same applies to doctors' and pharmacists' professional bodies. We are under really oppressive conditions. But we shall fight and we shall win!

Does the same situation apply to the women's movement?

A: Yes, there are no independent women's political organisations. The Egyptian women's union was dissolved by Nasser in 1956 -the same year that Nasser allowed women to stand as

candidates for parliament. Since then, women have been banned from having an independent union. But there are women's organisations and most of them are trapped in the development discourse -doing income generating projects for women-; they are not political organisations. If existing organisations adopt a political agenda, they could be closed down and the people involved arrested.

Could you say something about the movement for change in Egypt?

K: The dictatorial regime is riddled with corruption, and it is now at its weakest point. The central demand of the movement for change in Egypt is to reject a new 5th mandate for Mubarak, because he has presided over the country for 24 years. That is why the Kefeya (Enough) movement has been started.

We revolutionary socialists are also against the inheritance of the presidency by Mubarak's son Gamal. The movement for change is also demanding the lifting of the existing state of emergency in Egypt, the release of 20,000 detainees in prison, an end to torture and mistreatment by the police in prison and a new constitution for the country.

As revolutionary socialists we do not stop at democratic demands only. We are also demanding jobs for more than 6 million unemployed people in Egypt. We are demanding to link the democratic agenda with the social agenda for change, and we have joined our struggle with that of peasants fighting eviction from their land, asbestos workers [who have occupied their factory against the harmful effects of working with asbestos] and other groups.

To limit ourselves to democratic demands would be a dangerous mistake. We play an important role in demonstrations and we are trying to unite all of the different leftist groups in Egypt. At the moment we are working towards building a socialist alliance in Egypt. At the same time we are coordinating our struggle with other movements struggling for change in the country.

There is a real opportunity to remove

the regime in Egypt. And this is not an exaggerated claim; it happened in Indonesia and Argentina. In Egypt, as the saying goes, 'the fire is under the ashes'. There is a good possibility of a popular intifada (uprising). People's living conditions are very bad. In 1973 we used to protest and chant that "a kilogram of meat costs one [Egyptian] pound!". Today a kilo of lentils, which is the basic foodstuff of poor people's, costs 7 pounds. There is widespread misery and a terrible increase in prices and unemployment. All these conditions will definitely lead to mass uprisings. The regime has nothing to offer to solve all of these problems.

A: I work with the 20th March movement. This was established two months after the invasion of Iraq. The movement was inspired by the 50 thousand Egyptians that took to the streets in Tahrir Square and who not only raised slogans against the war in Iraq but who spontaneously shouted slogans linking the war with the Mubarak dictatorship.

I also work specifically against torture, which is widespread and not only directed against political activists in the country. Around 2000 torture victims have come to us for help over the past 10 years and the majority of those are ordinary Egyptian citizens.

What they share is that they are poor, marginalised, do not have the right phone number to call when they are in trouble and for some unfortunate reason they are taken to the police station -there are horror stories about what happens in these.

We have been to Sarandu (where peasants have been tortured and killed for opposing land evictions) and other areas. We try to be there with people rather than sit in Cairo and issue statements. We try as much as possible to organise events on the street. The government helps us in this a great deal because it refuses to rent us any venues for events! - if you want to rent a venue, you have to personally contact the state-security intelligence and ask for permission; we do not negotiate with them on that matter - so we take to the streets whenever we can.

I am also a feminist. I struggle for women's rights and believe in feminism as a political vision. But I do not address women's rights only from a technical human/women's-rights angle or merely as an attempt to help empower poor women.

If you want to organise and mobilise the most marginalised sectors of society -those that have absolutely nothing to lose - in Egypt this means poor working-class women because they are also oppressed as women by working class men within the domestic sphere. If you want to go further and add religious oppression onto everything else, then a poor working-class Coptic [Christian] woman really embodies all forms of oppression that we have in this country.

Has the international anti-globalisation and anti-war movement had an impact here in Egypt?

K: Yes, of course. We have joined every international activity against the war. When the international movement has organised demonstrations, we have organised a demonstration as well. The international movement has given us strength. When we were arrested, the anti-war movement everywhere expressed its solidarity with us. I was arrested before the 20th March demonstration [against the invasion of Iraq in 2003] and the reason I was released was international solidarity. We are in one battle; we are all in it together. All of your activities have given us strength.

Also the international anti-war movement has had a big impact in correcting a mistaken perception that the world is divided, as the Islamists used to say, into Muslims and Christians. We Socialists would say that all of the millions of people marching against the war in the West are not Muslims and yet they are demonstrating because of an issue related to us. Some groups in Egypt, such as the Islamists and Arab nationalists, see that there is a conflict between East and West or between Islam and Christianity.

The left in Egypt in general believe in international revolution and the unity

of the oppressed in East and West. We believe that the struggle by revolutionaries in Europe and the US against their imperial governments is complementary to our struggle against imperialism. We want to continue struggling together against imperialism but also against the oppressive regimes in our region.

A, you have been very involved in the organisation of the Cairo Conference. Could you describe why it was started? And how has it progressed from the First Conference to the Third?

A: The First Cairo Conference was organised before the war and was itself a demonstration against the war. The first Cairo Declaration was OK. It spoke about the invasion of Iraq but there was only a very vague reference to the Arab regimes including the regime under which the Conference was held. Considering that the Arab regimes played an important role in making the Iraq war possible, this was a weak point. The left was invited to the Conference only to participate in the final press conference.

The second conference was very different. We managed to get more people involved; it was held in the journalists' union and involved the participation of trade unionists and other groups. It was also a more political conference. But with the end of the conference the event ended abruptly.

This year I think we have something much much better. There is a real involvement by the left, who in fact convinced the Islamists and Nasserite [Arab Nationalists] to hold the 3rd Cairo Conference. We were part of each and every step of organising the Conference. And it was our idea to follow the conference with a forum which involved different sections of Egyptian society.

We had forums for women, for workers and peasants and one against torture and dictatorships in the region. People worked together on this Conference and were exposed to each others' ideas and saw the extent to which different political groups can work together on a project like this. I'm happy with the result and

especially happy with the forum activities. I can see that the Conference has really inspired people.

The bookstalls, exhibitions and films have turned the Conference into an exciting experience. There will also be a post-Cairo Conference meeting in which we will deal with some tactical issues that have arisen. The organisational committee consisted of 5 members from the left, 5 from the Nasserites and 5 from the Islamist movement.

In Europe there is a debate about whether the left should work alongside the Islamist movement or not. What has been the experience of the left in Egypt on this issue?

K: We work with the Islamists but not on strategic issues because there we disagree with them on most of their agenda and ideas. We coordinate with them on particular issues and positions, such as lifting the state of emergency and the release of detainees. We oppose the torture of Islamists. Along with the Islamists, the Arab Nationalists and other groups, we have established a National Committee of Prisoners of Consciousness. Our position is that as revolutionary socialists we are sometimes with the Islamists.

A, how do you feel as a women and feminist working alongside Islamists?

A: My tolerance of working with Islamists is much smaller than Kamal's. As Kamal said, there are many movements for change in Egypt. But if you talk to an Islamist they will only tell you about the Muslim Brotherhood and the Arab Nationalists will tell you about Kefeya. None of them will tell you that also [radical] socialists are organising for change.

I am 50 years old. I have a long record of struggle. I can stand up to the Muslim Brotherhood when necessary, but some of the young women who worked on this conference were verbally abused by the Brotherhood because they wear short sleeves or something like that. On this issue I do not compromise.

Now Mubarak is allowing other

candidates to stand in the general elections...

K: Mubarak says that in Egypt there is the freedom to form parties but at the same time his regime decides which party is acceptable and which is not. That's not freedom. Mubarak has established a National Council for Human Rights, but the Council has no authority.

Mubarak has established a National Council for Women's Rights, which is chaired by his wife, and at the same time his police force is arresting numerous women peasants in Sarandu. Everything he does is just a message to George Bush and the West that here we have freedom and democracy. But everything Mubarak does is devoid of any such content. His latest move is in the same vein.

From the outside it looks like he will allow other candidates to be nominated democratically. But at the same time he is regulating and restricting the nominations. The condition is that any candidate should get the signatures of support from 500 members of parliament and the shura council. Both have a majority from the ruling party and are appointed by the regime.

Will you call for a boycott of the elections?

K: People are confused about how to react. No decision has been made yet. There are two roads ahead of us. The first is to nominate our own candidate even if he or she does not fulfil the stated criteria. Through this candidacy we would create an electoral campaign on the street. We would lose the electoral campaign, but through the campaign we can mobilise the masses. The other route is that of boycott, which some people are putting forward. From my point of view this is negative. We should take to the street at every chance and take advantage of the opportunity we have been presented with.

A: I haven't decided yet which option we should take. I do think you can organise an active boycott as well. A boycott does not necessarily mean sitting at home and doing nothing. Because the situation is so oppressive no real candidate can fulfil the criteria and the oppressor will be very hard on anyone who takes to the street. That is why they want to restrict the candidacies. They know that Mubarak is going to win in the end, and the restrictions are not because somebody

else might become president but because the absence of restrictions might mean we could nominate Kamal as president. We don't care about the presidency but we are in favour of the campaign itself.

In the Spanish state last March, Jose MarÃa Aznar was removed from office due to opposition against the war in Iraq. Do people in Egypt know about that?

K: We know about the demonstrations in Spain and Aznar's removal from office. Socialists are very aware of it and so are Egyptians in general too. We salute the struggle by the Spanish people that achieved this result and believe that the decision to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq has encouraged other countries to do the same.

In our anti-war demonstrations here we shouted a famous slogan against the former Prime Minister Aznar calling him a hypocrite. The slogan became well-known and was repeated on other demonstrations. The slogan was "Jose Maria Aznar is a liar, a hypocrite and a donkey" (which rhymes in Arabic). So when he fell, it was a very welcome event. The donkey was beaten.

George Galloway slams US war-mongers

21 May 2005, by George Galloway

Introduction

Respect supporters gave Galloway a three-minute standing ovation when he appeared at a rally in central London the day after his appearance before the Senate committee. The committee chair, Republican neo-conservative Norm Coleman, made a big error of judgement in allowing Galloway to appear before the committee.

Formally Galloway was there to reply to charges that he was given vouchers to sell 20 million barrels of oil by the

Saddam government, in return for his opposition to the threat of US invasion.

These charges were easily brushed aside by Galloway, and were indeed in substance identical to similar accusations made by the right-wing London Daily Telegraph, which resulted in a High Court libel victory for Galloway in December 2004, along with £100,000 damages (the Telegraph is appealing against the ruling).



Instead Galloway turned the tables, becoming the accuser and not the accused. He launched a sustained attack on the war and the continued occupation of Iraq, as well as the US's previous history of supporting Saddam and selling him arms.

His entire testimony was shown live on major US television networks, putting eloquently the anti-war case in a country where anti-war and anti-Bush views are rarely heard in the

mass media. BBC's News 24 channel, which is broadcast by satellite and cable worldwide, carried the whole 47 minutes of Galloway's appearance.

The London Independent daily newspaper commented that "it would be an odd judge who did not agree that Galloway emerged as the victor" in the confrontation. The right-wing New York Daily News carried the banner headline: "Brit roasts senators in oil."

Galloway's propaganda coup is another boost for Respect, following some very good results in the May 5th general election, especially of course Galloway's victory in Bethnal Green and Bow. Reports from around the country in the wake of the speech all suggest - for the moment at least - a big boost in interest in Respect and attendance at meetings.

At the Respect rally on May 18, national secretary John Rees argued that Respect had established a "bridgehead", but like all bridgeheads it means either going forward or being driven back into the sea. For him going forward meant establishing a "mass membership party."

We can be sure that attacks on Galloway will intensify. Already he has assumed the role of previous popular left-wing leaders like Arthur Scargill and Tony Benn as being the 'whipping boy' for the right-wing press and right-wing broadcasters. New 'scandals' will be 'discovered' against him, it is possible that a legal attempt to overturn his election result may be made (on the grounds of some electors voting twice) and Senator Norm Coleman made an oblique threat against him after the committee appearance.

If Galloway had lied, said Coleman, "there would have to be consequences of that." In other words if the committee judges that he was lying, they can demand Galloway's extradition to the US to face charges of perjury, where he could face a year of more in prison.

- Galloway's testimony has been removed from the website of the committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. Their press

office refused to say why.

Download sound files of [Galloway speech](#).

Go to [BBC report](#) including video.

Transcript of Galloway's opening statement

Senator, I am not now, nor have I ever been, an oil trader and neither has anyone on my behalf. I have never seen a barrel of oil, owned one, bought one, sold one - and neither has anyone on my behalf.

Now I know that standards have slipped in the last few years in Washington, but for a lawyer you are remarkably cavalier with any idea of justice. I am here today, but last week you already found me guilty.

You traduced my name around the world without ever having asked me a single question, without ever having contacted me, without ever written to me or telephoned me, without any attempt to contact me whatsoever and you call that justice.

Now, I want to deal with the pages that relate to me in this dossier and I want to point out areas where there are - let's be charitable and say errors.

Then, I want to put this in the context where I believe it ought to be. On the very first page of your document about me, you assert that I have had "many meetings" with Saddam Hussein. This is false.

I have had two meetings with Saddam Hussein, once in 1994 and once in August 2002. By no stretch of the English language can that be described as "many meetings" with Saddam Hussein.

As a matter of fact, I have met Saddam Hussein exactly the same number of times as Donald Rumsfeld met him. The difference is that Donald Rumsfeld met him to sell him guns and to give him maps the better to target those guns.

I met him to try and bring about an end to sanctions, suffering and war and, on the second of the two occasions, I met him to try and persuade him to let Dr Hans Blix and the United Nations weapons inspectors back into the country - a rather better use of two meetings with Saddam Hussein than your own Secretary of State for Defence made of his.

I was an opponent of Saddam Hussein when British and Americans governments and businessmen were selling him guns and gas. I used to demonstrate outside the Iraqi embassy when British and American officials were going in and doing commerce.



Sen. Norm Coleman

You will see from the official parliamentary record Hansard, from March 15 1990 onwards, voluminous evidence that I have a rather better record of opposition to Saddam Hussein than you do and than any other member of the British or American governments do.

Now you say in this document, you quote a source, you have the gall to quote a source, without ever having asked me whether the allegation from the source is true, that I am "the owner of a company which has made substantial profits from trading in Iraqi oil." Senator, I do not own any companies, beyond a small company whose entire purpose, whose sole purpose, is to receive the income from my journalistic earnings from my employer Associated Newspapers in London. I do not own a company that's been trading in Iraqi oil. And you have no business to carry a quotation, utterly unsubstantiated and false, implying otherwise.

Now, you have nothing on me, senator, except my name on lists of names from Iraq, many of which have been drawn up after the installation of your puppet government in Baghdad.

If you had any of the letters against me that you had against Zhirinovskiy and even Pasqua, they would have been up there in your slideshow for

the members of your committee today.

You have my name on lists provided to you by the Duelfer inquiry, provided to him by the convicted bank robber and fraudster and conman Ahmed Chalabi, who many people to their credit in your country now realise played a decisive role in leading your country into the disaster in Iraq.

There were 270 names on that list originally. That's somehow been filleted down to the names you chose to deal with in this committee.

Some of the names on that committee included the former secretary to his holiness Pope John Paul II, the former head of the African National Congress presidential office and many others who had one defining characteristic in common - they all stood against the policy of sanctions and war which you vociferously prosecuted and which has led us to this disaster.

You quote Mr Dahar Yassein Ramadan. Well, you have something on me. I've never met Mr Dahar Yassein Ramadan. Your sub-committee apparently has.

But I do know that he's your prisoner. I believe he's in Abu Ghraib prison.

I believe he is facing war crimes charges, punishable by death.

In these circumstances, knowing what the world knows about how you treat prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison, in Bagram airbase, in Guantanamo Bay, including I may say, British citizens being held in those places.

I'm not sure how much credibility anyone would put on anything you manage to get from a prisoner in those circumstances. But you quote 13 words from Dahar Yassein Ramadan whom I have never met. If he said what he said, then he is wrong.

And if you had any evidence that I had ever engaged in any actual oil transaction, if you had any evidence that anybody ever gave me any money, it would be before the public and before this committee today because I agreed with your (legal counsel) Mr Greenblatt.

Your Mr Greenblatt was absolutely

correct. What counts is not the names on the paper, what counts is where's the money, senator? Who paid me hundreds of thousands of dollars of money? The answer to that is nobody. And if you had anybody who ever paid me a penny, you would have produced them today.

Now, you refer at length to a company names in these documents as Aredio Petroleum. I say to you under oath here today, I have never heard of this company, I have never met anyone from this company.

This company has never paid a penny to me and I'll tell you something else.

I can assure you that Aredio Petroleum has never paid a single penny to the Mariam Appeal Campaign. Not a thin dime.

I don't know who Aredio Petroleum are, but I daresay if you were to ask them they would confirm that they have never met me or ever paid me a penny.

Whilst I'm on that subject, who is this senior former regime official that you spoke to yesterday? Don't you think I have a right to know? Don't you think the committee and the public have a right to know who this senior former regime official you were quoting against me interviewed yesterday actually is? Now, one of the most serious of the mistakes you have made in this set of documents is, to be frank, such a schoolboy howler as to make a fool of the efforts that you have made.

You assert on page 19, not once but twice, that the documents that you are referring to cover a different period in time from the documents covered by the Daily Telegraph which were a subject of a libel action won by me in the High Court in England late last year.

You state that the Daily Telegraph article cited documents from 1992 and 1993 whilst you are dealing with documents dating from 2001.

Senator, the Daily Telegraph's documents date identically to the documents that you were dealing with in your report here.

None of the Daily Telegraph's

documents dealt with a period of 1992-93. I had never set foot in Iraq until late in 1993 - never in my life.

There could possibly be no documents relating to oil-for-food matters in 1992-93, for the oil-for-food scheme did not exist at that time.

And yet you've allocated a full section of this document to claiming that your documents are from a different era to the Daily Telegraph documents when the opposite is true. Your documents and the Daily Telegraph documents deal with exactly the same period.

But perhaps you were confusing the Daily Telegraph action with the Christian Science Monitor. The Christian Science Monitor did indeed publish on its front pages a set of allegations against me very similar to the ones that your committee have made. They did indeed rely on documents which started in 1992-93. These documents were unmasked by the Christian Science Monitor themselves as forgeries.

Now, the neocon websites and newspapers in which you're such a hero, senator, were all absolutely cock-a-hoop at the publication of the Christian Science Monitor documents, they were all absolutely convinced of their authenticity.

They were all absolutely convinced that these documents showed me receiving \$10 million from the Saddam regime. And they were all lies.

In the same week as the Daily Telegraph published their documents against me, the Christian Science Monitor published theirs which turned out to be forgeries and the British newspaper, Mail on Sunday, purchased a third set of documents which also upon forensic examination turned out to be forgeries. So there's nothing fanciful about this. Nothing at all fanciful about it.

The existence of forged documents implicating me in commercial activities with the Iraqi regime is a proven fact. It's a proven fact that these forged documents existed and were being circulated amongst right-wing newspapers in Baghdad and around the world in the immediate

aftermath of the fall of the Iraqi regime.

Now, senator, I gave my heart and soul to oppose the policy that you promoted. I gave my political life's blood to try to stop the mass killing of Iraqis by the sanctions on Iraq which killed one million Iraqis, most of them children, most of them died before they even knew that they were Iraqis, but they died for no other reason other than that they were Iraqis with the misfortune to be born at that time.

I gave my heart and soul to stop you committing the disaster that you did commit in invading Iraq. And I told the world that your case for the war was a pack of lies.

I told the world that Iraq, contrary to your claims did not have weapons of mass destruction. I told the world, contrary to your claims, that Iraq had no connection to al-Qaida. I told the world, contrary to your claims, that Iraq had no connection to the atrocity on September 11 2001.

I told the world, contrary to your claims, that the Iraqi people would

resist a British and American invasion of their country and that the fall of Baghdad would not be the beginning of the end, but merely the end of the beginning.

Senator, in everything I said about Iraq, I turned out to be right and you turned out to be wrong and 100,000 people paid with their lives - 1,600 of them American soldiers sent to their deaths on a pack of lies, 15,000 of them wounded, many of them disabled forever on a pack of lies.

If the world had listened to Kofi Annan, whose dismissal you demanded, if the world had listened to President Chirac, who you want to paint as some kind of corrupt traitor, if the world had listened to me and the anti-war movement in Britain, we would not be in the disaster that we are in today.

Senator, this is the mother of all smokescreens. You are trying to divert attention from the crimes that you supported, from the theft of billions of dollars of Iraq's wealth.

Have a look at the real oil-for-food

scandal. Have a look at the 14 months you were in charge of Baghdad, the first 14 months when \$8.8 billion of Iraq's wealth went missing on your watch.

Have a look at Haliburton and the other American corporations that stole not only Iraq's money but the money of the American taxpayer.

Have a look at the oil that you didn't even meter, that you were shipping out of the country and selling, the proceeds of which went who knows where.

Have a look at the \$800 million you gave to American military commanders to hand out around the country without even counting it or weighing it.

Have a look at the real scandal breaking in the newspapers today, revealed in the earlier testimony in this committee. That the biggest sanctions busters were not me or Russian politicians or French politicians. The real sanctions busters were your own companies with the connivance of your own government.

European Constitution: a New European Absolutism

21 May 2005, by Jan Malewski

Just think of it, the immense majority of the European party machines (the Christian Democrats, the liberals, the Socialists and even the Greens) and of the trade union bureaucracies (practically all the union leaderships who are part of the European TUC) committed themselves to its ratification.

In France and in Holland, governments that were weakened by recent social mobilisations thought that they could in this way, a posteriori, easily give a legitimacy to their attacks on the gains of the working class, while at the same time

winning approval for a regression on the terrain of formal democracy and of guaranteed social rights. Killing two birds with one stone.



However...the recent opinion polls in the two countries where the plebiscite is to take place at the end of May and the beginning of June are demonstrating the crisis of representativity of the European political and trade union structures. That has frightened, and for good reason, those who had become used to

settling the fate of peoples behind their backs and who, through the "Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe" aim to make this state of affairs permanent.

From the moment this project appeared, we deciphered its content and underlined its retrograde social character [12]. We will not go over that again here. But one question remains: why a new Treaty, which abolishes the preceding ones (while taking on board their essential content) and which "establishes the European Union (article 1-1) whereas this Union had already been

"instituted" by the Treaty of Maastricht, which came into force on November 1st, 1993?

If it was only a question of modifying the allocation of votes established by the Treaty of Nice - which, it is true, gave the representatives of certain member states (including France and Poland) a weight that had bore little relation to the populations of these countries - did that make it necessary to "establish a Constitution"? In short, what does this Treaty aim to "constitute"?

A despotic European apparatus

The "Constitution" established by this Treaty is in itself a novelty: it does not emanate from a constituent assembly. Nor will it be directly ratified, not even by a plebiscite, by the entire population of Europe, because in the majority of member states ratification will be indirect. In short, it cannot be claimed that it "constitutes" a European popular sovereignty.

The European Union in no way substitutes for the member states and their machinery of state. It aims to complement them by reinforcing and rendering permanent a supranational machinery whose main difference with the existing state machines is that it is not based on what has traditionally been the founding principle of bourgeois democracy: the separation of powers between the legislative, the executive and the judiciary.

The specificity of this "complement" is that the new supranational machinery will in certain domains take precedence over the national state machinery, which does respect, at least formally, the principles of bourgeois democracy.

Chapters IV ("The institutions and organs of the Union") and V ("The exercise of the competences of the Union"), which constitute the foundations of the powers of this supranational machinery, are only clear concerning the restrictions they bring to the only directly elected

European institution: the European Parliament. This parliament does not have full legislative powers. Although it can adopt European laws, it can only do so "jointly" with the Council (of European ministers), in other words it can exercise its veto. It isn't even allowed to have the right to initiate legislation: although I can block laws, it cannot propose them. The initiatives remain confined to institutions that are not directly elected: the Council and the Commission, in the framework of the "orientations" and the "general political priorities" that are defined by the European Council (which is made up of heads of state or of government).

Furthermore, the Constitutional Treaty makes permanent a Court of Justice, made up of judges and advocates-general appointed by governments for a period of six years (renewable). In 1964, this Court established that the Treaty of Rome was not "an ordinary international treaty", but that it instituted "a juridical order of its own", and having done that, it began to create juridical principles which took precedence over national laws and which were characterised by the prevalence of the norm. Thus a practice was imposed in the Union that accorded de facto political power to judges.

This juridical order - which is in harmony with the internationalisation of capital and at its service - and its autonomy are made permanent by articles I-6 and I-38. The Council can also suspend "certain rights that flow from the application of the Constitution to the member state in question, including the voting rights of the member of the Council representing this state". Furthermore, a "solidarity clause" (article I-43) authorises the Union to mobilise "all the instruments at its disposal, including military means" to "forestall the terrorist threat", "protect democratic institutions and the civil population" or "bring aid to a member state on its territory, at the request of its political authorities".

The term "terrorist" not being defined - and its customary definition having recently a strong tendency to be extensive - the "Constitution for Europe" thus contains an article that can be interpreted as authorising

recourse to European civil war. We should add that if - which is a novelty (article I-60-1) - a member state obtains the right to withdraw from the Union, this right is not accorded to its population but to its political authorities.

"Citizenship of the Union"?

The "Treaty establishing a Constitution" does not found a new citizenship, but confines itself to completing national citizenship: article I-10 of the Treaty stipulates that "the citizenship of the Union is in addition to national citizenship and does not replace it".



And this complementary citizenship in no way establishes new or enlarged civil rights: it confines itself to guaranteeing European citizens "the right to circulate and reside" on the territory of the Union; the right to vote and to be elected to the European Parliament (which is not allowed legislative powers) as well as the right to vote in municipal elections (but not in regional or national elections: "European citizens" are thus from the outset unequal among themselves, according to where they live); the right to benefit from the protection of diplomatic and consular authorities of a member state other than one's own (in cases where one's own does not guarantee this "protection" in a third country); the right to address petitions to the European Parliament (sic!), to have recourse to the European mediator and to address the institutions and the consultative organs of the Union in one's own language and receive a reply in the same language. That's all. We can especially appreciate "the right" to petition and to ask questions - we're going back to the feudal epoch!

So the Treaty establishes a "Constitution for Europe" (and not "for European citizens"), in other words for a supranational apparatus which can escape from the risks of representative democracy. It

establishes a “managed democracy”, which we could also call an “enlightened” or “tolerant” despotism, that is, a regime in which political choices are the prerogative of a self-perpetuating elite.

Padlocked democratic states

The analyses that we have published and the debate provoked by the partisans of the “No from the left”, particularly in France [13], have largely brought out another particularity of the “Constitution for Europe”: it “sets in stone political orientations which ought to be able to be periodically rediscussed. Once “constitutionalised” these orientations will not be able to be questioned and will be imposed on both European institutions and member states. In this way there is put in place an extremely strict framework of political decision-making” [14]. In other words, it is not enough to constitute a European regime that escapes from democratic control by citizens, it has also been deemed necessary to establish the limits that can be set on its future policies.

This policy can be summed up by two formulas, which crop up repeatedly in the text of the Treaty: “free and untrammelled competition” [15] and “the exclusion of all harmonisation of their (the states’) legislative and statutory dispositions”. The first formula concerns all activities that are a source of profit. The second covers all the social rights that have been won in any of the member states.

Neo-liberal policies are thus raised to the rank of constituent norms of Europe. The supranational European state machinery - which as we have seen is not even formally democratic - having not yet (?) totally replaced the traditional states, and these states (still?) maintaining control over

certain aspects of political life and having to face the risks of elections, part III of the Treaty (“The policies and functioning of the Union”) seeks to prevent the citizens of one of the states from forcing their government to adopt a policy that could be outside the framework of the policy decided once and for all by the higher instances of the Union [16].

So Part III does not, as has often been said, simply include what was in previous treaties. It completes the institutional structure of the Union, allowing the survival of regimes of formal democracy at the level of the member states, concealing the absolutist character of the European regime that has been thus established. By so doing it guarantees cohabitation between this absolutist regime and formal democratic regimes at the level of the member states, whose political sovereignty is fenced in by Part III and, in certain domains, is already delegated to the European absolutist regime.

In this way the profound democratic regression that the “Constitution for Europe” represents isn’t obvious to the citizens, who maintain their democratic rights in their countries, not noticing that these rights have been largely emptied of their content. The plebiscites (called “referendums”) - programmed only in the countries where the governments have, rightly or wrongly, considered them “feasible” have an important function in this context: to give legitimacy to this regression, to give a “civic” veneer to the absolutist regime, to found a jurisprudence on which future regressions can be based.

Absolutism with a democratic façade

The founding of a European state - that would be absolutist and bourgeois - having been judged too risky in

present conditions, the treaty “constitutes” a hybrid form, a duality between a formal democracy in the more and more empty shell of the national states and a “tolerant” despotism at the level that makes it possible to direct the major restructuring of European capital that is indispensable so that the decadent imperialisms of the Old World can feel strong enough to confront the competition from the US giant. Since the United States has an indisputable military hegemony [17], the Treaty also seeks to found a “common foreign and security policy”.

The setting up of an “Agency in the field of development of capacities of defence, research, acquisitions and arms (The European Defence Agency)” represents a step towards the restructure of military industry to “reinforce the industrial and technological base” and enable it to become “competitive” with the US. And to guarantee the financing of this military-industrial complex that is being reorganised, the Treaty stipulates that “the member states undertake to progressively improve their military capacities” (article I-41-3).

So the Treaty serves to “constitute” a political Europe of imperialist rentiers. Popular refusal to ratify it in the member states would put a brake on this attempt. It “would necessarily constitute a block on (European) political integration” [18] as it has been conducted up to now.

It would thus open the debate - so far stifled - on another project of society, on what could be this “possible other Europe” that is demanded by the global justice movement. We can understand that this is not to the taste of the neo-liberal political elites - in particular those of European social democracy (which, after having dropped any pretence of a social policy, is now burying its democratic aspirations - who could be swept aside by such a debate.

Why a French “No” vote will be a victory for the Left

18 May 2005, by **Olivier Besancenot**

Dear comrades, I would like to say to you, not just in the name of my party, but also in my own name, how touched and enthusiastic I am to be here. That is why I want to thank the Communist Party and its militants for this invitation, and I must say that for me it's a first. I am touched, because for quite a while we've been saying that it really had to happen, that one day we would find ourselves together.

For years, we've been meeting each other in the course of different militant struggles. So we had to at some point come together for a united political battle. And this anti-capitalist combat against the Constitution, that was the moment not to be missed. Because what is at stake in this referendum is really crucial and decisive: it really is about knowing what kind of society we are building.



We know that from a democratic and social, but also from a militarist point of view, this Constitution doesn't represent a rampart against present-day globalisation. On the contrary, it is one of the best supporters of the World Company.

So the Europe that they are building is not in any way a counterweight or an alternative model to the United States. This Europe is a rival, a competitor of the United States, but on its own terrain, the terrain of capitalism. A Europe that is more royalist than the king, that seeks to contest the leadership of the United States, but within the framework of globalisation.

So what is at stake is crucial, but we have two good reasons to be enthusiastic. Two good reasons, because not only can the “No” win today, but on top of that, if it does win

it will be because of the Left, and it is in the camp of the Left that that things can shift. And all that is thanks to this militant united front campaign that we have been conducting from the beginning with the Communist Party, the LCR, the opponents (of the majority line) in the Greens and in the SP, but also and especially all the activists of the social movement.

We know that from the beginning the “No” from the right rallied all its votes: it's the electorate of the far Right, in the Le Pen or de Villiers version. We can leave those people where they are, which is in the Middle Ages. On the other hand, if things can shift on the left, it is because the social climate has changed. Since January, there have been many social mobilisations, one after the other, on public services, wages, against sackings and of course the high school student movement.



Zenith platform: Besancenot (far left), Fausto Bertinotti (far right). CP general secretary Marie George Buffet is third from right.

All these struggles have had an immediate reflection: the progress in the country of a “No” that is not racist, nor chauvinist, nor anti-Turkish, but a “No” that is social, European and anti-liberal. And that is why this evening we can say, loud and clear, that there is really no reason to be afraid of the victory of the “No”. The victory of the “No” would be the hope of a new beginning, which would have repercussions from a social and political point of view.

From a social point of view, first of all, in France and in Europe. There would be the possibility for the social

movements to take off again on the right foot, to establish a new relationship of forces against the national governments, but also against the present European institutions. There would be the possibility of blazing a trail for the building of another Europe, by establishing new criteria of convergence, not financial and economic this time, but social and democratic.

We want to take what is best in the legislation of one country so that everyone can take advantage of it, because there is no reason why all we should share is poverty. Our project is the opposite, point for point, of what Bolkestein is proposing. Bolkestein, who had his electricity cut off by the workers of EDF, and a very good thing too. I hope that the postal workers will soon deal with his letterbox. Social repercussions also in France, even from now till May 29th.

Because the government has fully understood that the more struggles there are, the more the “No” goes up in the opinion polls. That's our strength. For example, there is something that is on the rise at present: the will not to obey the government's directive for Whit Monday. There are many of us in this country who don't want to work that day. And maybe, finally, Whit Monday will really be transformed into a day of solidarity between generations.

The only one worth talking about, a national one-day strike of the public and private sectors to underline our demands. Lastly, political repercussions, in terms of a new start. Because in this referendum it's on the left as well that we have to set things to rights. We have the possibility of choosing another political orientation on the left, for a Left that is 100 per cent left.

That means a Left which doesn't cave in to fashionable ideas, which doesn't subscribe to the idea that capitalism is the horizon beyond which we cannot go and that therefore all we can do is make a few changes around the edges. Yes, the hope of an anti-capitalist Left, capable of fighting to the end to increase everybody's income by 300 euros by sharing out wealth equitably.

A Left that would oppose privatisations, but would also fight to extend public services to areas like water. A Left that would fight to ban collective sackings, in particular in companies that are making profits. And finally a Left that would sometimes fight just to apply the law, for example the law that allows requisition of empty houses.

This hope is growing. This hope is thick-skinned. And the hammer blows from the government won't calm it down. Neither the hammer blows, nor the confidence tricks. Because at this

very moment Jacques Chirac is supposed to be convincing young people, in front of an audience that is supposed to be super-representative but is in fact handpicked [19].

Well, let me tell you, it's here, tonight, that we have the representative audience. I hope that this evening on TF1, there will be at least one young person to suggest to Chirac that if the "No" is victorious on the evening of May 29th, then on the morning of the 30th he'll have to go and take his acolyte Raffarin with him.

So our hope doesn't fear the attacks of the Right. But nor is it afraid of the ambitions of the social-liberal Left. It's time for the social-liberal Left to understand that it is no longer hegemonic over the whole of the Left. For it to understand that you don't settle fundamental political problems with scandalous amalgams between, for example, our anti-capitalist "No" to the Constitution and the "No" of the far Right.

It's time for the social-liberal Left to understand that it won't get us to do tomorrow in the state institutions, the opposite of what we are defending today in the public arena, in the context of this common anti-capitalist combat. In short, it's time for it to understand that this united front anti-capitalist combat isn't going to disappear tomorrow in a liberal government that will in practice apply the Constitution, or even a "light", slightly amended version of it if the "No" is victorious.

Well, to put a stop to discussion, some people reproach us with having a parasitical attitude to this referendum. When we affirm that another choice of society is possible, they call us romantics. I didn't know that was an insult. And to tell you the truth, I am proud of being among those who, including in this campaign, don't forget to say that another society than capitalism is still possible.

Internal Democracy and Public Debate in Revolutionary Parties

16 May 2005, by **Murray Smith**

The debate started with an article on an internet discussion list by the American Marxist Louis Proyect. Doug Lorimer replied to Proyect in the journal 'Links', issue 24. [20] Murray Smith's rejoinder (originally called 'Some remarks on democracy and debate in the Bolshevik Party') was published in the same journal, issue 26.

I would like to make some comments on Doug Lorimer's article, "The Bolshevik Party and Zinovievism": Comments on a Caricature of Leninism", published in Links 24. <emb1271|right> Louis Proyect's affirmation that there is no such thing as Leninism reflects an idea

that is now quite widespread on the left. Like many mistaken ideas, it has a kernel of truth. This kernel resides in the fact that the post-Lenin leadership of the Communist International invented the term "Leninism" in 1924 as what Daniel BensaÃd has called "a religiously mummified orthodoxy". Previously, as Doug Lorimer recalls, the term "Leninist" had been used only as a factional epithet in the debates of the pre-1917 socialist movement. The invention of the concept, according to BensaÃd, "corresponds to the codification of an

organisational model then associated with the Bolshevisation' of the Comintern, which allowed the Kremlin to brutally subjugate the young Communist parties to its own tutelage". [21] This process, often known as "Zinovievism" after its principal author, was really nothing more nor less than the first stage in the Stalinisation of the Comintern.



Gregory Zinoviev

BensaÃd explains that while defending what he considers to be essential in Lenin's ideas, he prefers to avoid using this particular "ism".

That may be understandable, but I think it is nevertheless useful to speak of Leninism. Not many political thinkers really deserve an "ism", because that implies that they developed a coherent body of ideas associated with their name. Lenin is quite definitely one of them. The "current of political thought" that we can also call Bolshevism was largely developed by him. If I had to give a definition of Leninism, it would be something like "the strategy and tactics necessary for the proletariat to take power in the imperialist epoch". And since strategy and tactics aren't much use without an instrument to put them into practice, the question of the party is at the very heart of Leninism.

The main point I want to take up is the question of democratic debate in the Bolshevik Party, and in particular the public expression of differences. I think that it is impossible to look at the history of the Bolshevik Party and its debates without recognising that, in their overwhelming majority, these debates were indeed public. In that sense, the norm, if we want to use that term, was for public debate. A norm does not mean an absolute principle, and there was no such principle in the Bolshevik Party. But it definitely was the normal practice to debate differences publicly, and I think it is worth looking at why, because it tells us something about Lenin's party and its relationship with the working class.

Before moving on to the main subject, I want to make a couple of other points.

The Second International

Lorimer describes Proyeck's presentation of the Bolshevik Party as having "more in common with the practice of the pre-1914 West European and North American parties of the Second International than with the actual views and practice of the Bolsheviks on questions of party organisation". It is probably true that Proyeck would approve of the largely inclusive nature of these parties. But I am not sure that there was a general model or practice concerning

democratic debate, public or otherwise, in the pre-1914 socialist movement. National parties varied considerably. There definitely was the idea that the parties should encompass all those who considered themselves to be Marxist or at least socialist, and indeed some who didn't, or whose conception of "socialism" was pretty questionable, notably in the case of the British Labour Party. The only explicit political demarcation was with the anarchist current in the 1890s.

As Lorimer has pointed out in another article, this all-inclusive conception was not the reflection of the theoretical conceptions of Marx and Engels, who during their lifetimes systematically combated the errors and weaknesses of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and considered a split with its opportunist wing inevitable. [22] Indeed, the parties of the Second International were not an expression of any a priori theoretically worked-out concept of the party.

They were the product of the workers' movement in their countries at a given moment, quite heterogeneous, more or less influenced by Marxism and by different interpretations of it. The Marxism of the Second International was heavily influenced by the conceptions of Kautsky, Plekhanov and others, a kind of fatalistic Marxism which considered that the victory of socialism would come about inevitably as the result of objective processes, through the development of capitalism. Their parties were not built to struggle for power but to wait for it to fall into their lap. This comes out very clearly in what is usually considered to be Kautsky's most radical work, *The Road to Power*, published in 1909.

The broad Second International is sometimes presented as a model of democracy in comparison with the Bolshevik tradition. But as Ernest Mandel has pointed out, the Bolshevik Party was more democratic than the German and Austrian social-democratic parties "even in their best moments". [23] Although there were certain restrictions on bourgeois democracy in pre-1914 Germany, the SPD, unlike the Russian social

democracy, was able to operate openly. However, its debates were actually less free. As the SPD became dominated by the party and trade union bureaucracy and by opportunist politics, and as the so-called "Marxist Centre" adapted to the rising bureaucracy, the party leadership increasingly tried to suppress debate on such sensitive questions as the mass strike, the demand for a republic and anti-militarism, and began to censor those, like Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who raised these questions.

As Lorimer has indicated in the article previously quoted, Lenin did not challenge the "Kautskyan conception of the workers' party" until 1914. But he certainly broke from it in practice in Russia, very early on. The fundamental thing about Lenin's party was not only its class character, but that it was a party of action organised around a programme. In defining at various times the frontiers of this party, Lenin applied criteria that were not ideological but essentially political and organisational. The two examples of expulsions that Lorimer cites (1905 and 1912) are not of individual expulsions but of mass expulsions, in fact splits. What you do not find in the history of the Bolshevik Party are individuals being expelled for having political differences or, indeed, with rare exceptions, for politically motivated breaches of discipline (see below).

Split and unity, 1905-06

Let us look at the two examples. In 1904-05, after some hesitation, Lenin concluded that the 1903 split had been justified. This was not only because of the organisational question but because the Mensheviks were beginning to demonstrate what had only been in the background in 1903 and would become the hallmark of Menshevism: the acceptance of the leading role of the bourgeoisie in the revolution and consequent adaptation to the bourgeois liberals.

The Bolsheviks organised the Third Congress on the basis of the rule of the majority. The Mensheviks

boycotted it, and the congress declared those who had boycotted outside the party. The Mensheviks were not expelled for specific political differences, but for refusal to accept the authority of the party. In fact, the division within social democracy was already being put in question by the unfolding of the revolution.

A secret resolution of the congress decided to open discussions with the Mensheviks. [24] Reunification took place at the Fourth Congress in 1906. Doug Lorimer writes, "Lenin favoured the unification because he accepted the Kautskyist conception of the socialist party as being inclusive of all those proclaiming themselves Marxists and because the previous disagreements on organisation had largely been eliminated".

The previous disagreements on organisation had indeed been largely eliminated. But more important than Lenin's acceptance of the Kautskyist conception of the party were two other factors. First of all was the pressure from below, from the party in Russia and the new adherents. Second was Lenin's appreciation that the Mensheviks had evolved positively under the impact of the revolution. Just before the congress, Lenin wrote that the revolution "had not distanced but brought together the two wings of social-democracy ... the old quarrels of before the revolution have given way to solidarity in practical questions". He went on, "Nachalo [the Menshevik paper] favours the dictatorship of the proletariat. Novaia Zhizn [a Bolshevik paper] holds to the point of view of a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. But doesn't any phase in the history of any European socialist party show us similar differences within social-democracy?" [25]

This latter point was somewhat deceptive, because although Nachalo was a Menshevik paper, its editorial line was largely influenced by Trotsky, who was not at that point a Menshevik and whose conception of the leading force of the revolution was quite different from theirs. [26] The opposition between Lenin's and Trotsky's conceptions of the revolution proved to be surmountable because both were based on the leading role of

the working class. The difference with the Mensheviks was much more fundamental.

Before the congress, Lenin had defined the political basis of unity as agreement on armed insurrection and on activity within the Soviet. And he hoped that a new rise of the revolution would pull the Mensheviks to the left. [27] But in fact on the question of armed insurrection and other questions, and on the central question of the respective roles of the working class and the bourgeoisie in the revolution, the Mensheviks began wavering during the congress itself, and this was accentuated as the revolutionary wave receded. The unification of 1906 opened a period of what could be called semi-unity until 1912, a period of unstable coexistence with public factions and constant conflicts.

The party reconstituted in 1912

In 1912 Lenin did not start from the idea of splitting from a current of ideas, neither of dividing the Marxists from the others nor of uniting all Marxists. He set out to reconstitute the illegal party around its programme. By definition, excluded from this process were all those who were against the existence of the illegal party:

It is not just a difference concerning the organisation, concerning the road to follow to build the party; it is a disagreement on the question of the existence of the party. There can therefore be no question of any conciliation, any agreement, any compromise. [35] At the same time, Lenin's more specific recommendations concerning the insurrection were made in private correspondence with the party leadership.

Subsequently all the major debates of the period from 1917 to 1921 were conducted publicly, from the debate over Brest-Litovsk in early 1918 to the trade union debate in 1920-21. Before and after the October Revolution, a

wide-ranging debate took place over the relationship between factory councils and the trade unions and between workers' control and centralised planning. This began at the conference of factory councils in June 1917 and recurred in one form or another until 1921-22.

The main protagonists were all Bolsheviks. [36] All those involved were expressing points of view that were present not just in the party but among the workers they represented. That raises the problem of the relationship between the party and mass organisations. You cannot simply settle that question by permanently invoking party discipline and the majority line. That may be necessary in life-or-death questions, and even then you have to convince. But if members of a party with mass, especially majority, influence systematically vote as a bloc in mass organisations (trade unions, factory councils, soviets) they will deform the democratic functioning of these organisations.

Breaches of discipline

Not only was debate public, but breaches of discipline were not uncommon. Lorimer gives the example of Riazanov and Lozovsky voting against the banning of bourgeois newspapers. His explanation that they were "recent recruits" is unconvincing. In the first place, Riazanov and Lozovsky were hardly new; they both had about twenty years of party membership, and Lozovsky had been a Bolshevik from 1903 to at least 1909 before becoming primarily involved in the French workers' movement. Secondly, they were far from isolated examples. The same two publicly opposed the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. Zinoviev and Kamenev's much more serious breach of discipline in October is well known.

Immediately after the conquest of power, a major debate broke out in the Bolshevik Party over the question of a "government of Soviet parties" (i.e. a coalition with the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries). The "Bolshevik right" (all longstanding

Bolsheviks) comprising Kamenev, Zinoviev and other opponents of the insurrection as well as some who had been in favour of it not only publicly opposed the majority of the leadership but resigned from their party and government posts to try to exert pressure on the party. In the spring of 1918 Bukharin and the Left Communists not only publicly opposed the majority position on the Brest-Litovsk peace but brought out fifteen issues of an opposition journal, *Kommunist*, at first daily, then less frequently.

What conclusions should we draw from these facts? Not that anything goes, that there are no limits. But that in the heat of revolution, party discipline has its limits. If you think that what you are arguing for or against is vital for the future of the revolution, you are unlikely to be held back by considerations of formal discipline. Such questions as whether to take power, the nature of the new government, the Constituent Assembly and war or peace come into that category.

And there can be little doubt that if Lenin had not won a majority in the Central Committee for taking power in October, he would himself have publicly campaigned for his position and if necessary broken party discipline. As Ernest Mandel has pointed out, during the revolution public conflicts were not limited to a few leaders. The radical Bolshevik committee of the working-class Vyborg district sent its own agitators to the sailors of the Baltic Fleet to counter the influence of the Petrograd committee, which it considered too soft on the Provisional Government. [37]

This is not to say that these public breaches of party unity were not serious, but they were dealt with politically rather than administratively. Organisational measures were not absolutely excluded (Lenin at various times demanded expulsions, and Lozovsky was expelled in 1918 and readmitted a year later). But in general the party leadership tended to avoid such measures. In their turn, those who publicly defended minority positions did not push their opposition to

breaking point but finally accepted the majority position. The various party leaders involved in these breaches of discipline continued to play important roles in the revolution.

Levi and the KPD

The comparison with the example of Paul Levi is quite instructive. As Lorimer points out, Levi was not expelled for his ideas; indeed Lenin basically agreed with him about the March Action. He was expelled for publishing a pamphlet publicly criticising what he (correctly) considered to be the grossly mistaken position of the party leadership. Now, as we have seen, this was not exactly unheard-of in the Bolshevik tradition, especially considering that what was involved was not a secondary question but a major and costly blunder. Not only did the party suffer severe repression, but it has been estimated that it lost more than half its membership. Under these circumstances, coming out publicly against the leadership was bound to create tensions, but it did not have to automatically lead to expulsion. Why did it in Levi's case?



Paul Levi

In a nutshell, the KPD was not the Bolshevik Party. It did not correspond to the description of the Bolshevik Party outlined in *Leftwing Communism*, above all as far as its leadership was concerned. That leadership was weak; the KPD never succeeded in the four or five years between its creation and its Stalinisation in forming a stable leadership team. Under Levi's influence, the "Open Letter" initiative had been adopted in fact the development of a policy towards social democracy that anticipated the united front tactic adopted at the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921. But leftist positions had gained the upper hand, encouraged by Zinoviev, Bela Kun and the ludicrous "theory of the offensive". Levi and his partisans had been put into a minority, and Levi had resigned as party president in February. Tensions within the party

leadership were running high.

The March Action was an ultra-left adventure driven forward by the party leadership, which consciously provoked government repression. At that point the membership did not know all the details. They had been in a battle, had fought bravely and had suffered and were still suffering severe repression. It was in these circumstances that Levi broke ranks and attacked the leadership publicly. The party leaders seized the occasion to get rid of him, but their action was certainly supported by many party members.

Levi was probably the most talented of the KPD leaders after the murder of Luxemburg, to whom he was very close. Unfortunately, his behaviour and judgment as a leader were not on a par with his capacity for political analysis. He made a serious error of judgment in launching his attack. Even then, had he been capable of retreating from his public opposition and accepting discipline, he could not have been kept out of the party. Lenin was in favour of him being readmitted under those circumstances. [38] Unfortunately, he chose to form his own group and ultimately rejoined the SPD.

That was not the end of the story. As its full effects sank in and as the role of the party leadership became known, the March Action provoked a major political crisis in the party. The majority KPD leadership dealt with it bureaucratically, seeking to avoid a debate, public or otherwise, on its mistakes. Levi's expulsion, while it could be technically justified, can't be seen in isolation. The wave of expulsions and resignations that followed, which cost the party a whole layer of cadres, was the result of a weak political leadership using organisational means to resolve political problems. That is not how any of the political conflicts in the Bolshevik Party were dealt with.

The Comintern

This episode ties in with the situation in the Comintern. Lorimer seems to assume that what is written in the *Theses of the Communist International*

represents Lenin's thinking on party democracy. I think it is more complicated than that.

These theses and the highly centralised regime of the international were clearly a product of a particular time and place and have to be seen as such. They were a product of a situation of virtual international civil war, though no doubt also a reaction against the uncentralised Second International. The international was being formed at a time when the Bolshevik regime itself was under siege and trying to break out of isolation. The Bolsheviks were forcing the pace to try to carve out new parties and a new revolutionary international in rupture with the Second International and to arm these parties politically.

The documents of the first four congresses of the Comintern retain much that is still enormously valuable, along with a certain amount that is out of date. But a study of the brief history of the international cannot fail to see that many mistakes were made. The statutes and the functioning of the International can be understood in their context; they are certainly not a model for all time and all places. Eighty years later, we have the right and even the duty to be critical. And finally, this model of a highly disciplined party bore very little resemblance to the actual history of Lenin's own party, where public debate was the norm and breaches of discipline were not uncommon.

The withering away of Bolshevik democracy

The material basis of the rich political life of the Bolshevik Party lay in the fact that the party was based on a strong and combative working class with solid revolutionary traditions. The withering away of democratic debate in the party from 1921 has to be seen in this light. It may seem strange that the Bolshevik Party maintained a lively democratic regime throughout the civil war and then banned factions in 1921, when the civil war was over. It is not so strange when you look at the

context. By 1921 the working class that had made the revolution had been disorganised and dispersed by the war and the paralysis of the economy. The most class-conscious workers had gone into the Red Army. Many had been killed; others had been drawn into the various arms of government.

Lenin is brutally frank about the reality in his writings of the period: "The industrial proletariat is declassed ... Given that big capitalist industry is ruined and that the factories and mines are immobilised, the proletariat has disappeared". At the Eleventh Congress of the Party in 1922, Workers' Opposition leader Shlyapnikov wryly congratulated Lenin "on constituting the vanguard of a class that no longer exists". [39] Ironical humour did not remove the concrete problem.

As the working class weakened, the party increasingly came to substitute itself for the class. At its Ninth Congress in 1920, Kamenev could say, "The Communist Party is the government of Russia. The country is ruled by the 600,000 party members". [40] This could have been a temporary phase, but that is not how it turned out. Not only did the party substitute for the soviets, but the apparatus increasingly governed the party; nominations from above to responsible posts replaced election. In 1921 Lenin was speaking of "a workers' state with a bureaucratic deformation". [41]

No doubt the party made mistakes. The ban on factions in 1921 is widely considered to have been a mistake and to have favoured the rise of the bureaucracy. No doubt it did. But it did not drop from the sky. The fact is that, under the impact of social and economic reality, democratic debate was being undermined. The debates in the period running up to the Tenth Congress were very bitter, not only with the Workers' Opposition, but between the partisans of Lenin and the supporters of Trotsky and Bukharin.

There were reasons for that. The conflicts of 1917-18 had been over conjunctural choices, however fundamental, and in an overall context where the revolution was advancing.

In 1920-21 the debates were taking place in the context of a receding revolutionary wave, of the international isolation of the revolution and of the accumulating material effects of three years of civil war-economic disorganisation, penury, famine, epidemics. In that context the debates were not about conjunctural choices but about fundamental questions of the relation between the party, the working class and the peasantry, about the unions, about how to organise the economy. A split was a real danger. At the Tenth Congress, Lenin asked: "Was there in previous congresses, even when the differences were sharpest, situations close in one of their aspects to a split? No. Is there at present? Yes." [42] The tendency to close ranks and curtail discussion was very strong.

We have to repeat unceasingly that, all the same, the character of the assemblies, congresses, conferences and meetings in the Communist Party and in Soviet Russia can no longer be what it was previously and what it still sometimes is with us, when we exchange speeches, like a parliamentary opposition, and afterwards edit a resolution ... We must work usefully, and not edit resolutions. [43]

It is arguable that the debate at the Tenth Congress, sharp though it was, was the last truly democratic debate in the Bolshevik Party. The debates at the eleventh and twelfth congresses and the October 1923-January 1924 debate were increasingly dominated by the bureaucratic apparatus. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, new material has come to light on the consolidation of the bureaucracy in this period. It is now easier than before to see how far this had already gone in 1922-23. [44]

By way of conclusion

The Bolshevik Party is not some kind of a model to be copied mechanically. But it should certainly be an inspiration for us, to study and learn lessons from. Not the least of those lessons concerns its democratic functioning. In my opinion, the idea

that discussions take place within the party and that only the decisions are made public can work only in the early stages in the development of a party, when it has weak links with the working class. In fact, as we have seen, there never really was such a stage in Russia; even in the early stages the key debates were public.

But in the far-left groups that developed from the opposition to

Stalinism, this tradition definitely developed. Why? Probably as a result of a long period of being on the defensive and of relative isolation. This produced at worst regimes in which there was no democracy, or heavily controlled discussions, at best regimes where there was democratic internal discussion. But this was accompanied by extreme reticence in the public expression of differences. This has begun to change, and I think

that is likely to continue. To the degree that parties start to gain an audience among sectors of the working class, then those sectors will be interested in its debates. This is reinforced by the experience of Stalinism. Organisations that try to pretend there are no differences in their ranks evoke suspicion. Workers want to know what's going on, especially if they are thinking of joining a party.

A battle won, a struggle that must continue

14 May 2005, by **Jose Bazin**

Having been launched on February 24th by the student organizations that make up the CASSEE coalition [45], the strike ended with a growing radicalisation of Quebec youth and with the government backing down on some points. Since coming to power, on April 14th 2003, the government of Jean Charest [46] has sought to lower taxes to levels comparable with those pertaining in the United States and in English-speaking Canada.



This obsession for tax cuts delights the Quebec Employers' Council, but it can only be implemented by cuts in the budgets of several ministries. The Ministry of Education doesn't escape this logic of tax cuts. So, in order to make economies in education the government imposed a reform, the Financial Aid to Studies (AFE) involving, among other things, a reduction of 103 million Canadian dollars [47] a year of the budget devoted to student grants, a programme of linking student debt rebates to performance, a programme of repayment proportional to income and a long-term project of abolishing student grants. On top of all that there is a reform that seeks to link the college network to private enterprise and to decentralise it [48].

It is the whole of this reform that

provoked the opposition of the ASSE [49]. On the side of the FEUQ and the FECQ [50] the student demands were pretty much focused around a single partial and defensive demand: the withdrawal of the government measure that would transform grants into loans and allow the government to save 103 million dollars.

So, autumn was the time for the three student regroupments to prepare their strategy with a view to making the government back down. Whereas the FEUQ and the FECQ were preparing their members to defend the 103 million dollars, the ASSE was developing a strategy that was broad and political, and that was capable of leading to a debate in Quebec society. An important stage on the road to the strike was passed in January when the ASSE and independent student organizations founded the CASSEE. That was a qualitative leap that enabled the new coalition to double its forces.

In the beginning the CASSEE was conceived of as a temporary structure, articulated around ASSE, with the aim of having a democratic coordination of the strike. Qualitatively, the CASSEE took the debate forward by proposing a platform of demands in three points:

1) complete abolition of the reform of the AFE (and not only of the 103 million dollar cut in the budget);

2) The scrapping of all projects of decentralizing the college network or of linking it to the market;

3) All this within a perspective of free education and of the elimination of student debt.

Thanks to this platform, the debate was launched on the place and the function of education in Quebec society.

The eighth student strike

The first student associations, for the most part members of the CASSEE, held general strike assemblies in the second and third weeks of February. And that's how on 24th February 2005 the eighth unlimited student general strike was launched. It is worth remembering that the student strikes of 1968, 1974, 1978, 1986 and 1996 were real victories that resulted among other things in the creation of a network of public universities [51], the introduction of improvements in the system of student loans and grants, the freezing of education fees at college and university level.

The 1988 strike was characterized as a partial victory for the student movement that succeeded in stopping a reform of the AFE, but didn't make the government back down on all points. As for the student strike of 1990, it was the worst defeat in the

history of the Quebec student movement, the government succeeding in increasing education fees by 140 per cent [52]

When the unlimited strike was launched on 24th February 2005 nothing indicated that it would become not only the longest, but also the biggest student strike in Quebec history, surpassing even 1974 [53] In reality, on February 24th it was the associations that were members of the CASSEE that launched the unlimited strike on the basis of the coalition's demands and without consulting the FEUQ and the FECQ.

Already, at the end of January the Student Assembly of Quebec (AEQ) had shown that it was impossible to create a national strike coordination that could regroup the members of the FEUQ, the FECQ the CASSEE and the associations that remained independent. In spite of the fact that since the AEQ assembly in January the various student regroupments were no longer speaking to each other, the FECQ fell into step by also launching a strike at the beginning of March. Seeing that the government wasn't budging, on March 8th, for the first time in its history, the FEUQ also launched a strike call, around the demand for the return of the 103 million dollars. So in spite of the division of the movement, the strike grew in strength.

The red square

From the end of February the CASSEE drew the attention of the population to student debt by popularising the red square, to signify that the students were "squarely in the red". The red square quickly became the symbol of support for the students' demands and of opposition to the policies of the Liberal Party government. The spring of 2005 will go down in history as the spring of the red square! The symbol in question was worn by hundreds of thousands of people. In the form of cloth, paper, paint, etc., it spread like wildfire throughout Quebec. It became the symbol that brought together the discontent that was growing among Quebec's people towards their government, which was maintaining its course of neo-liberal reforms. With

this symbol the CASSEE carried off a masterstroke, by letting everyone show that the student movement had attracted a broad capital of sympathy among the population. The red square succeeded in transcending differences, so much so that the FECQ and the FEUQ also adopted it as the symbol of the student struggle. From now on the demonstrations against the neo-liberal policies of the government of Jean Charest will take place under the sign of the red square, whatever unions people may be members of. The symbol succeeded in creating some unity in the movement, even though the different regroupments had fundamental disagreements.

One of the first negative effects of the division of the student movement lay in the fact that the FEUQ and the FECQ negotiated alone with the government. The CASSEE was excluded from the negotiating table by Jean-Marc Fournier, the new Minister of Education, who didn't want the coalition, which he considered too radical and too "violent". Since the contacts between the CASSEE and the FEUQ and the FECQ were at a standstill, the two federations decided from the start of the strike to take part in the negotiations in spite of the coalition being excluded from the negotiating table. Fournier took full advantage of this division, which allowed him not to concede too much to the student movement.

It was by playing the card of the moderation of the two federations that on March 15th Fournier made his first offer, in which he promised to restore 41 million Canadian dollars [54] of the 103 millions that he had cut from student grants. This offer was considered as completely ridiculous, both by the FEUQ and the FECQ and by the CASSEE.

The arrogance of the Liberal government acted as a spur to the movement. The following day, 250,000 students were on strike. The same day, nearly 100,000 people demonstrated in Montreal, denouncing Fournier's proposal. The discontent was so strong that it was no longer only the most militant student organizations that took to the streets. Although it didn't launch an unlimited strike, the School of

Management Sciences of the University of Quebec in Montreal went on strike for a week, opening the way to one-day strikes at the School of Higher Commercial Studies, the National School of Public Administration, the Polytechnic and McGill University.

When Fournier made his second offer on April 1st, the student associations who had started the movement had already been on strike for five weeks. This time the government had to retreat on several points. While not totally abolishing the reform of the AFE, the government abandoned debt repayment proportional to income, the programme of rebates on student debt linked to performance and also had to abandon its long-term project of abolishing student grants. All that, plus the fact that the programme of student grants would get its 103 million dollars back from the year 2006-2007 onwards. To do this the Quebec government went looking for money from the federal government.

A struggle that has to continue

This offer was not unanimously approved by the student movement. The FEUQ and the FECQ agreed both to end the strike and to accept the offer, whereas the CASSEE, while deciding to end the strike, didn't accept the offer. In reality, Fournier's offer was problematic on several levels. In order to reach an agreement the student movement has lost 103 million dollars for the school year 2004-2005, plus 33 million for 2005-2006. That means that students have fought so that those who will study between 2006 and 2010 can have 103 million dollars in student grants. Another problem with this agreement is that the article of the reform of the AFE which concerns the sums allocated to loans and grants will have to be renegotiated each year to take account of inflation. Finally, the money coming from the federal government is welcome, but it allows the Quebec government to maintain its tax cuts and its neo-liberal policies. The fact that the CASSEE wasn't present at the negotiating table explains why the FEUQ and the FECQ

didn't push to get the whole 103 million dollars for the years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006. So the struggle is far from over.

The student movement has forced the government to retreat. Now it must take advantage of that to build links with the other dynamic forces in society in order to continue the struggle against neo-liberalism. This student strike has led to a radicalisation of young people. In the days following the end of the strike, the FEUQ was faced with sharp criticism from its rank and file. Several student associations have

called assemblies to disaffiliate from the FEUQ. The FEUQ tail-ended this strike movement, only taking part in it because it was forced to and not engaging in a political debate, remaining simply at the economic level. Following the strike, the student left can only be built outside the FEUQ, in order to be able to take the debate further, towards the organization of a broad-based conference on education, and to continue the fight against neo-liberalism.

The CASSEE will have to open up

more widely to the associations that have been radicalised in the course of this strike. It must not fall back on the hard core that ASSE was at the beginning of 2005. The CASSEE has a political platform and a platform of demands that can enable the student left to face the future with hope. Will it have the will to develop a patient long-term strategy so that this platform can be implemented? That is the question that is posed before the student left from now on. The ASSE will have to structure itself in order to become a mass, democratic student organization, firmly anchored on the left.

General Election - New Labour punished over the war

14 May 2005, by **Terry Conway**

They received the smallest share of the vote ever for a governing party - just 36%. Their majority was slashed by almost 100 seats, from 160 to 66.

Blair damaged



Reg Keys denounces Blair

Blair himself was damaged beyond repair. He was seen holding himself rigid with embarrassment at his own constituency count in Sedgfield, while anti-war candidate and father of British soldier killed in Iraq Reg Keys, who won 10% of the vote, denounced Blair's own wretched refusal to apologise or admit to having waged an illegal war on the basis of lies.

It was particularly heavy blow for Blair and his cronies to see the new left-wing party Respect win an apparently safe Labour seat in the heart of London's east end.

The war in Iraq was the issue that refused to go away. Prior to the

election campaign, the government had always refused to release the legal advice given to it by the Attorney General on the lawfulness of war against Iraq. During the campaign there was a partial leak of that advice which finally forced the government to make the whole thing public. Despite strong briefings to the contrary, this incident further confirmed the view that the Attorney had been put under pressure to change his opinion to suit Blair. The Prime Minister's reputation was damaged still more.

The response of new Labour was to promote Finance Minister Gordon Brown into the heart of the election campaign - he and Blair appeared together so much that commentators referred to them as being joined at the hip.

Until recently Brown had played it clever and stayed relatively silent on Iraq - though he ensured that there was ample funding for the war, whatever the implications for public services. As a result his reputation has not suffered in the same way as Blair's. But the more Brown was brought in as human shield for Blair

the clearer it became that the leadership transition was under way. Brown's statements during the campaign made it obvious that there is not a cigarette paper's difference between the two in terms of policies.

Both Blair and Brown claimed on election night that the electorate had got the result they wanted - Labour returned with a smaller majority and that they would respond by listening to their concerns. However they subsequently went on to contradict that by making it clear that they will press ahead with all the anti-working class measures that were in the pipeline before the election.

Much of the electorate rejected both the Tories and New Labour. Millions of Labour voters either stayed at home or voted for those they saw as anti-war parties - predominantly the Liberal Democrats who stole most of the anti-war votes. Important anti-war activists such as Tariq Ali contributed to this by calling for a vote for them in his own London constituency as the best way of punishing Bomber Blair, as well as supporting Respect where they were standing.

This second-string party of British imperialism also talked left on a number of other questions such as withdrawing the tuition fees that students have to pay to attend university and raising the top rate of income tax. This rhetoric stands in contradiction with what they do in practice in the local councils they control and in the Scottish Parliament where they are in coalition with New Labour. They have been as strong advocates as the other mainstream parties of cuts and privatisations, for example in Scotland they voted against the introduction of free school meals.

But in this media-dominated election, perception was all and the majority of those who voted Liberal Democrat for the first time in this election did so from the left. As a result, they won 11 extra seats though they failed to capitalise on this unique opportunity for a major breakthrough.

The Tories, who had brought in Lynton Crossby who ran Australian PM John Howard's last two successful election campaigns, focused to a large extent on the issue of immigration. This deeply racist campaign did not seem to do them very much good at the polls and persuaded some traditional Labour supporters to vote for Blair despite the war in order to keep the Conservatives out. This not only let New Labour off the hook on the war but also covers up the fact that the government's own record on immigration and asylum is profoundly reactionary.

The result was that they won 33 extra seats, but failed to increase their share of the vote from the 2001 election. They also failed to resolve the crisis created by New Labour's occupation of their traditional territory and thus leader Michael Howard has tendered his resignation. There is no obvious successor waiting in the wings and further disarray is likely to follow.

Britain's grotesquely undemocratic first-past-the-post electoral system [55] was displayed in all its glory. It took an average of 26,000 votes to elect a Labour MP, 46,000 to elect a Tory MP, and a massive 100,000 votes to elect a Liberal

Democrat. Smaller parties suffer even more because votes for them are often seen as wasted. The need to fight for a system of proportional representation is brought to the forefront yet again.

The smaller parties were placed at an even greater disadvantage than usual. This was compound by the undemocratic approach of the media that blanked them out whilst giving wall-to-wall coverage to the main party leaders in a presidential-style campaign.

These violations of basic democracy make the breakthrough results won by Respect even more remarkable.

RESPECT breaks the mould

Respect was able to break the mould of the election campaign and build dynamic campaigns in key inner city constituencies, which won a mass resonance on the streets, in a way which no other left party has been able to achieve. Respect contested 26 seats, won 68,071 votes, averaged 6.9%, and won one seat.

The most sensational Respect result was George Galloway's victory in Bethnal Green and Bow in East London. He is the first MP to be elected for a party standing to the left of Labour since the Communist Party's finest hour in 1945. [56]

Galloway overturned a 10,000 majority held by the Blairite pro-war MP Oona King. Labour fought hard and dirty to keep the seat. Respect activists were accused of anti-Semitism, beating up a pensioner, slashing King's tyres and throwing eggs at a memorial service attended by King. It goes without saying that no one connected with Respect had anything to do with these incidents.

In a campaign that went to the heart of the large Bengali community in the constituency and beyond, young Bengalis, in particular, flocked to Respect in droves. But it also attracted other anti-war votes in the area as was apparent from the people who we spoke to when out campaigning.

Three other results in East London

were also of breakthrough proportions. In West Ham Lindsey German won 20.7%, coming second to Labour. In East Ham Abdul Khaliq Mian won 19.5%, also coming second. Oliur Rahman won 17.2% in Poplar and Canning Town, coming third.

Salma Yaqoob's result in the Birmingham constituency of Sparkbrook and Small Heath was no less spectacular. She won a huge 27.5% of the vote, coming second to Labour and only 3000 votes short of winning. Five other Respect candidates broke the 5% barrier to save their deposits, not easy for left of Labour candidates.

Respect also came under attack from the fundamentalists. Galloway was targeted by a small group from a relatively unknown organisation called al-Ghuraaba. The group invaded a local public meeting and locked the doors behind them, proceeding to issue serious threats against Galloway. Another less serious disruption from the same organisation took place at a subsequent Respect public meeting in the town of Luton. Salma Yaqoob also faced harassment and death threats from similar sources. Others concentrated on arguing that it is un-Islamic to vote at all.

These attacks demonstrate that Respect does not only pose a challenge to the warmongers of New Labour. Fundamentalist groups are increasingly recognising that if young people from the Muslim communities become involved in radical politics through Respect they will radicalise on a whole series of questions. This will undercut the ability of these reactionary organisations to recruit and to appear as the unchallenged voice of these communities.

The anti-war sentiment in the electorate, however, did not spell automatic gains for the left. Respect also received some poor results and in Scotland the SSP lost ground against its 2001 performance. The plethora of candidacies to the left of Respect made no impact. The Socialist Party (a current from the former Militant Tendency), the most serious of them, got fewer votes than in 2001 including for their best-known candidates Dave Nellist and Ian Page.

The Greens also had a disappointing election. They improved on their 2001 result but not in line with the opportunities open to them. In their target seat of Brighton Pavilion they managed only third place. They suffered from the scandalous lack of profile the environment received in this election as well as the media's attitude to small parties.

Of the small right-wing parties the only one to make an advance was the BNP. They capitalised dangerously on the race card played by the Tories and on years of state racism against asylum seekers and migrants by New Labour and the Tories. Their best vote was 17% in Barking in East London where they came third. But they also got votes between 9% and 13% in at least five other seats. They came fourth in eighty-three seats. These developments have to be confronted by the left.

The vote for the right-wing anti-European UK Independence Party (UKIP) collapsed from their successes

at the European elections, however, and the splinter from it, Veritas led by former TV personality, and MEP, Robert Kilroy-Silk failed to get off the ground. This was in part due to the fact that Howard ran a right-wing, demagogic campaign and the EU was kept off the agenda by the main parties.

The Respect results, in particular the election of George Galloway, represent an important challenge and a major opportunity for rebuilding the left. Respect is here to stay and the conditions for building it are good.

In his acceptance speech George Galloway promised to lead militant local protests such as the defence of the local fire service. He also said that the campaign for the local elections starts the day after the general election.

This is the right approach. Respect has to broaden its support from its current strongholds to wider sections of the working class. It has to become

the natural home for those who want to resist the forthcoming attacks by New Labour - which will come despite the smaller majority.

Respect has to become a campaigning organisation between elections, at both the national and local level. It has to strengthen its democratic structures and build local branches that have an attractive political life in their own right. It has to use its new authority to build stronger links with the trade union left, in particular those union leaders who continue to challenge the employers. The day after the election, left-winger Matt Wrack decisively won the General Secretary position of the fire-fighters union. This is a sign of the preparedness of some sections of the organised working class to fight the neo-liberal offensive.

Respect also needs to make new approaches to those sections of the left who are not yet part of it. If such an open approach is adopted Respect has the opportunity to become a major force on the left.

What can we learn from Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder"?

13 May 2005, by **Pierre Rousset**



Fidel Agcaoili

Early March, I wrote a factual "preliminary report" on the scope of the CPP policy of assassination. [57] A month later, Fidel Agcaoili, one of the highest-ranking officers of the CPP-NDF based in Europe, issued in his official capacity a violent "rejoinder to the slanderous article of French Trotskyite Pierre Rousset". [58] As Chairperson of the NDF Human Rights Committee (!!!), he justifies the killing of many former members of his party, of cadres of other components of the Filipino Left. Agcaoili also accuses me of many evils. Nevertheless, before

responding, I have to thank him, and to thank him twice.

First for helping me correct my "preliminary report". I wrongly spelt the name of Lito Bayudan, and I presented Leopoldo Mabilangan as former head of the NPA Banahaw Command while he has been its spokesperson (I was told so before, but forgot). These two corrections will be introduced in the later, more complete, version of my report.

Second for confirming in such a striking way most of what I explained in my previous writings on the CPP-NPA-NDF assassination policy. Agcaoili's "Rejoinder" expresses very clearly the present political outlook of

the CPP; we can learn a lot from his contribution.

Answering Agcaoili could be very brief. Reading his "Rejoinder", anyone with a minimum of experience can see how much his outlook is ultra-sectarian. Anyone can see that the CPP-NPA-NDF has killed activists from other Left movements and intends to kill more of them. Nevertheless, today's CPP benefits, among progressives, of the prestige and moral high-ground gained at the time of the struggle against the Marcos dictatorship; and the deep changes which occurred in this party the past twenty years are not always understood. The CPP leadership's words are still taken for granted in

parts of the international solidarity movement. It then seems necessary to analyze Agcaoili's contribution and to present additional references and historical data to those already given in my previous writings.

The existence of a plural progressive and revolutionary movement in the Philippines is the result of a political history, not of an "imperialist plot". Many in the present non-CPP Left are coming from the CPP-led National Democratic tradition of the 1970-1980s; they can legitimately claim part of its legacy. Today's Sison-Tiamzon CPP leadership does not have a monopoly over this tradition. I would rather think that it betrayed the best of it.

We are confronted with a very specific problem. The CPP leadership degenerated to the point of threatening militarily the Philippine independent Left and people's movements. But the NPAs have not become landlords' goons (even if they can tactically ally with them against another Left organization) or traditional bandits in the same way that it happened to some armed groups before. I'll try to address this unusual issue at the end of my contribution.

Difficult then to be short. My aim is not only to answer Agcaoili's "Rejoinder". I also hope to make some political sense of a polemic which could otherwise become terribly destructive.

FROM A SOLIDARITY STANDPOINT

According to Agcaoili, I have "made a career out of attacking and trying to discredit the Philippine revolutionary movement". With his paper reaching many persons who know nothing of my past and present involvements, I feel compelled to first make my standpoint clear. For forty years, I have been engaged in solidarity activities toward Asian people's struggles -and for the last three decades, it has especially been the case in relation to the Philippines. Something Fidel Agcaoili

surely remembers: when I was campaigning for the release of CPP-NDF political detainees, he was one of them. It is true that once released, Agcaoili forgot to acknowledge the solidarity work done from France. But contrary to him, Jose Maria Sison did recognize it, after I mobilized all my networks for his right to political asylum in the Netherlands. Sison even offered me his book "The Philippine Revolution" [59] with a handwritten dedication. To quote: "To Pierre, in friendship and with best wishes! Joema, Utrecht, Sept. 13, 1990".

Sure, at that time already, the International Department of the CPP was labeling me a "counter-revolutionary". But Sison was not used to offer friendship to CIA agents... Indeed, there must be something wrong with the tale Agcaoili tells us.

It is precisely because I have been for so long active in the international solidarity movement that I am today fighting for the right of a plural progressive and revolutionary Left to exist in the Philippines.

TO DEFEND THE WHOLE LEFT

This fight includes the rights of the CPP and CPP-NDF allied forces.

Agcaoili reminds us that the Philippine state has assassinated "leaders and activists of open mass organizations and political parties tagged by the Philippine military as "CPP fronts". True. He adds that none of the Filipino Left organizations I "anointed" has "raised even a squeak against the latest spate of state-sponsored killings". False. This is one of the many straight lies in Agcaoili's papers -by straight lie I mean that documentation proving the contrary is easy to find and that Agcaoili knows that he is not telling the truth.

Let's give two examples here. Walden Bello has published a strong protest after the recent assassinations referred to by Agcaoili and ends his article by an offer of unity: "To the CPP and its friends, let's get beyond political partisanship and work together to stop the killings". [60]

Akbayan as well repeatedly denounced the assassination of legal activists "aligned with the Lower House's national-democratic bloc —Bayan Muna, Anakpawis, Gabriela—as well as with Bayan". [61]

I myself never stopped denouncing the role of Washington in the Philippines and the responsibility of the Philippine state in the repression of members of these organizations. [62] In recent years, I have participated in two international peace missions in the Philippines. The first one was in the southern island of Basilan which exposed the motives and implications of US military intervention in the archipelago. [63] The second took place in May 2005 to record and combat election-related violence. The issue of the CPP-NPA-NDF "Permit to Campaign" policy was of course addressed. But we duly recorded as well the assassination of activists of Bayan Muna and other organizations "tagged by the Philippine military as "CPP fronts" (to quote Agcaoili) by death squads, goons, etc. [64]

Fidel Agcaoili also pretends that "none" (none!) "of the groups anointed by Pierre Rousset as "independent revolutionary Left parties' have been attacked by the Philippine military". False again. For example, the government is not very eager for peace talks with the Revolutionary Workers Party-Mindanao and its Revolutionary People's Army (RPM-M/RPA) to progress. The Revolutionary People's Army camp in Lanao was even attacked and bombed by the military under the Fourth Division in 2002. Harassment remains a permanent feature of the situation in Central Mindanao. Unfortunately, the RPM-M/RPA is simultaneously targetted by the NPA.

The whole Left has to be defended against the state, the Military, the paramilitary and the goons. Unfortunately, part of the Left has also to be defended against the CPP-NPA-NDF. Quite symbolically, some of the CPP-NDF detainees I campaigned for in the 1970-1980s are now threatened by their former comrades, and their lives are in danger. They are the very same ones! The international solidarity movement cannot but face

this reality.

The fact that activists who are members of or ideologically close to the CPP are threatened by death squads cannot justify the assassination by the CPP-NPA-NDF of members of other Left organizations!

A FIRST CONFIRMATION: THE RANGE OF THE THREATS AND KILLINGS

As mentioned above, in his "Rejoinder", Fidel Agcaoili confirms many things I previously wrote.

The killings. This is true for the range of assassinations committed by the CPP-NPA-NDF. For sure, Agcaoili and I sharply disagree on why people I named in my "preliminary report" have been killed. But he officially recognizes that they have been killed by the NPA and that they did belong to the various organizations I mentioned. Thus, there is no dispute on the range of the killings.

Lagman. There is only one exception, concerning the case of Popoy Lagman. Agcaoili wrote in his "Rejoinder" that "despite all evidence, Pierre Rousset insists that the CPP is responsible for Lagman's murder". This is another straight lie. In my "preliminary report", I wrote: "some suspect the NPA of this murder but the CPP denies any responsibility". There are several hypotheses concerning the assassination of Filemon "Popoy" Lagman, and I am not in a position to know the truth.

In 2001, I wrote in a mission report: "The CPP is not the only source of deadly factional violence. After the overthrow of Estrada, Popoy Lagman was assassinated. (...) Nobody seems to hold the CPP responsible for this murder. But it will be very important for this crime to be cleared up because suspicion poisons the atmosphere in the left." [65] In July 2003, I wrote: "Popoy Lagman was killed two years ago and it is not sure who did it, unlike the other cases

mentioned here". [66] In October 2003, I wrote: "As far as I am concerned, I never claimed that the assassination of Popoy Lagman was done by the NPA. I even thought it was probably not the case, but I was of course -and I am still- unable to conclude on who masterminded it". [67]

Fidel Agcaoili has in his possession at least three of the four papers here quoted. He nevertheless "insists" to pretend that I "insist" to blame the CPP-NPA-NDF for Lagman's murder. I took the pain to quote my writings because it shows that I do try to get at the truth -and when I do not know who is the culprit, I say so. It also shows that Agcaoili does not give a damn about the truth.

The threats. Agcaoili explains that with regard to "other groups like Siglaya, Alab Katipunan, Bisig, BMP, IPD, Pandayan, Sanlakas, etc., the CPP wages ideological and political struggle in the nature of struggle of ideas vis-À-vis these groups". These are mass organizations, coalitions and mass fronts or, in the case of Bisig, a political current which never was in the CPP.

Stating so, Agcaoili openly admits that against other political parties of the independent Left (especially those of communist reference) and some mass movements, the confrontation is not limited to a "struggle of ideas" and can take a military character. The threat is directed here against Akbayan, the CPLA, the MLPP, Padayan, the PMP, the RPM-M, the RPM-P, the Peace Foundation and the Task Force Bondoc Peninsula (and the peasant movement), as well as many former leaders of the CPP... Mass leaders can be targetted because they are identified by the CPP with one of these organizations. Nobody can feel safe after reading Fidel Agcaoili.

Freedom From Debt Coalition (FDC), one of the main progressive coalitions in the Philippines, published a strong letter in reaction to the publication of Ang Bayan's diagram of counter-revolutionary organizations in the Philippines: [68] "Among those named in the CPP's recent 'list' are officers, long-time activists and partners of FDC, namely our Vice-

President, Ricardo Reyes; Secretary-General Lidy Nacpil; leaders of organizations who are members of the FDC Board: Manjette Lopez and Sonny Melencio; past FDC board members Isagani Serrano, Joel Rocamora and Etta Rosales who is now a parliamentarian; and Walden Bello with whom FDC has worked closely at the national and international arena. The charges of the CPP against them are unfounded. (...) The leadership of the CPP and its allied organizations should immediately withdraw their recent issuances and desist from further attacks against political activists and groups in the progressive movement. We call on them to stop the killings and end its policy of violence to settle differences with other left and progressive groups. We urge all other democratic and progressive organizations to take a stand against this policy of intolerance and violence, and to join efforts to foster unity in advancing the people's struggles towards a better world for all". [69]

A SECOND CONFIRMATION: PLURALISM IN THE LEFT IS THE ISSUE

As in other countries, the Filipino Left and people's movements are politically plural. It is quite normal, but pluralism in the Left is precisely what the CPP-NDF cannot admit; which is confirmed once more in Agcaoili's "Rejoinder".

For Agcaoili, pluralism in the Left is an object of contempt. I am defending the right of a pluralist progressive and revolutionary Left to exist in the Philippines. "Here, we have the real agenda of Trotskyite Pierre Rousset" responds Fidel Agcaoili. I agree. But he then identifies pluralism with "instigated splits" (which I don't agree): "The new Trotskys advocate 'pluralism' to instigate splits in the Left. What Pierre Rousset actually wants is a fragmented and collaborationist 'Left'". Never (never!), Fidel Agcaoili recognizes that other political trends in the Left than

the one led by the CPP can be genuinely progressive and revolutionary. All the other groups are denounced as “counter-revolutionary” and “pseudo-progressive”.

I have already offered a thorough analysis of the threatening meaning of the “diagram” of “counter-revolutionary groups” in the Philippines and their supposed “links with Trotskyites and Social Democrats”, published in December 2004 by the CPP. [70] Agcaoili tells us that this publication “is part of an effort to explain to the members of the Party and allied organizations and to the Filipino people about the nature of these groups”. So, such is the way the CPP “educates” its members and the Filipino people: pretending that ALL other political currents in the Filipino Left are “counter-revolutionary” and are linked internationally to “counter-revolutionary” movements.

The only distinction Agcaoili makes is that some of the organizations and the individuals listed in the “diagram” are the object of ideological and political struggles, while others are also military targets. This distinction is very shallow and subject to changes depending on the CPP leadership’s sense of opportunity. Walden Bello, for example, is supposed to be the target of ideological and political struggle only. But he has been denounced as an active agent of the US and Philippine secret services (see the documentation in my January 18, 2005 paper). He is now officially accused to have “assisted the Arroyo regime’s fascist minions in its campaign to vilify Philippine mass-based movements against imperialist globalization in order to set them up as targets of the regime’s campaign of political suppression and assassination”. [71] These accusations are ludicrous, but it is precisely on such charges (spy, blood-debts...) that a kangaroo “people’s court” is asked to sentence to death an activist, when the CPP leadership finds it convenient. How can we trust the CPP-NDF claim that most activists listed in Ang Bayan are safe from physical threats, when they are denounced in exactly the same fallacious terms as those who were killed?

Walden Bello is Chair Emeritus of

Akbayan; and several officers of this legal party have already been murdered. One can then understand that Akbayan has issued a new urgent appeal, underlining that the “threats against Walden Bello reaches danger point”. [72]

Very significantly also, Agcaoili tells us that the CPP’s “allied organizations” (its own words) are actively engaged in the political campaign against the other left organizations: “The CPP and its allied organizations go to the people to explain to them the dangers of reformism and “left” revolutionism advocated by some of these groups that can derail or hinder the further advance of the people’s struggle”. The problem is that this “educational” campaign against “counter-revolutionaries” is used by the CPP to justify its assassination policy. We then have both the right and duty to ask the CPP “allied organizations” to clarify their stand regarding these assassinations.

THIRD CONFIRMATION: POLITICAL DIVERGENCES AT THE ORIGIN

In his “Rejoinder”, Fidel Agcaoili confirms what I explained about the origins of the present situation. Political divergences grew within the CPP at the end of the 1980s. From his point of view, “errors” committed during the 1980s needed to be “rectified”, but then the “main proponents behind these errors” decided to “sneak out of the CPP” (what a vocabulary!).

New debates. The emergence of political divergences within the CPP at that time was unavoidable, normal. The world had changed. The situation in the Philippines had changed. The party had been politically destabilized at the time of the Marcos Dictatorship’s downfall in 1986. It had lived through a deeply traumatic experience (the 1980s’ paranoid purges). [73] Political practice was

more and more diverse, depending on the regions. The CPP members never had the occasion to assess collectively their experience: one peculiarity of the CPP’s history is that in nearly thirty years, it never held a congress (the first and founding congress, where only a handful of activists met, remained the only one). [74]

During the 1980s, a rich debate emerged within the ranks of the CPP. It concerned many issues: the balance sheet of the 1986 policy of electoral boycott; the program of the NDF; internal party democracy; people’s democracy; lessons from international revolutionary experiences (Vietnam, Nicaragua, El Salvador...); Leninism, Stalinism and Maoism... [75] It was at first tolerated by the core leadership, but this did not last long. The debate did not stop but, because of the unwillingness of the Executive Committee to have it organized, it could not reach many regions and members.

The 1992-1993 crisis. In the early 1990s, a congress was badly needed to sum-up the situation and discuss the orientation. The Sison-Tiamzon faction decided to do without and to impose, top-to-bottom, its own line. Instead of an internal debate, it launched a “rectification movement”. The initial 1968 line was “reaffirmed” and opposition views were disciplined. [76] It proved impossible even for the Central Committee to meet with all its members. Until the end, those calling for a re-evaluation of their party’s orientation asked for a congress to be organized. [77] But splits became unavoidable due to the Sison-Tiamzon’s refusal to see the “Reaffirm” document discussed within the party, as stated in the “Joint Statement” of the “Democratic Opposition”. [78]

Political divergences, lack of democratic process within the party and disciplinary onslaught from the Sison-Tiamzon faction opened the 1992-1993 crisis of the CPP. The same degree of intolerance from the CPP leadership led to a later split within the ranks of the “Reaffirms” themselves, in Central Luzon, giving birth to the Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines (MLPP).

Both Agcaoili's presentation and mine underline the political background of the conflicts within the Philippine communist movement in the 1990s. We disagree however insofar as I consider these divergences legitimate and he does not; insofar as Agcaoili upholds the Sison-Tiamzon faction's decision not to organize a party congress while I consider that by doing so it carries the main responsibility in the 1992-1993 party crisis.

The agrarian issue. Agcaoili also mentions that the "Peace Foundation/Task Force Bondoc Peninsula has been trying to organize peasants in the Bondoc Peninsula in Southern Quezon around the promise of 'land' transfer through the CARL" (the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law). The CPP does not want landless peasants to fight for the implementation of the land reform law; a move it judges "reformist". It subordinates the development of a mass peasant movement to the needs of the armed struggle, which he considers, whatever be the political situation, as the "primary form of struggle". The end result is that in the name of revolution, the CPP-NPA often limits present peasant demands to minimum ones (i.e. lowering of the rents), postponing the fight for land ownership to an undated future.

Many other Left organizations, including among those who came out of the CPP, project another line, where the fight for land reform begins here and now; where the expansion of a mass legal peasant movement is not limited in the name of revolution; where "reforms" and "revolution" are not systematically counterposed to one another. This is for example the case of Padayon, which is among the political movements presently most targetted by the CPP. [79]

This is what is debated upon in the Philippine Left: the changing relationships between armed struggle and other forms of struggles; the relationships between underground and above-ground activities as well as between parties and people's mass organizations; the dialectics between reform and revolution -or between rural and urban struggles; the building of political and social alliances in the fight for socialism; the

plural character of the "people's camp" and a people's conception of democracy; etc. There are many different answers to such questions. Positions are still evolving and the debate is far from being closed. Old and new conceptions are confronted and combined. In that respect, the Philippine Left is very much alive and living through a decisive period of political re-evaluation and refoundation - except for the CPP-NDF-NPA which considers that nothing meaningful has changed since 1968 and that it alone possesses the Truth.

A FOURTH CONFIRMATION: THE "CRIMINALIZATION" OF POLITICAL DIVERGENCES

Things were already bad enough in 1992-1993, when the CPP crisis led to expulsions and splits. But the Sison-Tiamzon leadership faction decided to take another step with far-reaching consequences. Political divergences were transformed into so-called "criminal cases". Agcaoili names in his "Rejoinder" five "main proponents" of erroneous lines: Arturo Tabara, Romulo Kintanar, Filemon Lagman, Ricardo Reyes and Benjamin de Vera. They were top leaders of the CPP: Politburo members, head of the NPA or of key territorial Party Committees... What Agcaoili forgets to recall is that they were all sentenced to death by the CPP leadership already in 1993. Some less well-known activists were also sentenced to death, like Joel Rocamora, a fellow of the Transnational Institute (who held no significant position within the CPP). Leopoldo Mabilangan was killed to show the others how real the threat was.

Assassinations progressively spread and threats extended. Nevertheless, for ten years, many of us hoped reason would come back to the CPP leadership. These hopes were eventually dashed in January 2003:

the killing of Romulo Kintanar meant that the policy of assassination was becoming nation-scale. Activists who have been sentenced to death, killed and threatened spent years of their lives building the revolutionary movement in the Philippines. They often played key roles in the CPP at national or regional levels. It may be time to ask some first and hard questions to those, in the international solidarity movement, who presently back the claims of the CPP.

Do you really think that ALL the most well-known figures defending "dissenting" views within the CPP were ALREADY "criminals" in 1992-1993, when they were first sentenced to death?

Do you really think that ALL the Left organizations in the Philippines, which do not belong to the "Reaffirm bloc" (and defend the same ideological line as the CPP), are "counter-revolutionary"?

THE LACK OF CREDIBILITY OF THE CPP'S CHARGES

Agcaoili presents in his "Rejoinder" long lists of crimes people killed by the CPP-NPA-NDF were supposed to have committed. But, too often, the accusations lack credibility. I'll show it through some examples.

I wrote on the Romulo Kintanar assassination in my previous 2003 writings and I shall not come back on it here. Except to add one remark. The CPP published the list of "criminal charges" against him only after he was killed. Among them, there were decisions which were in fact taken by the CPP Politburo itself, or by the Utrecht-based CPP leadership - something we all knew at the time. If the charges had been published when he was still alive, Kintanar could have answered. One of the reasons for his murder was surely to shut his mouth, forever.

The CPP-NDF always presents the list of "crimes" supposedly committed by activists as a matter-of-fact, giving

often dates, names, etc., to back its accusations. One should not be fooled by the way charges are presented. Assertions can be plain inventions. Let's recall the cases of Filipinos who happen to be well-known internationally. Anyone familiar with Lidy Nacpil from Jubilee South and FDC knows she is not a counter-revolutionary. Anyone familiar with Walden Bello knows that he is not a rabid defender of the WTO world-order, an agent of US or Philippine government, and a collaborator helping the Military to target Left activists for assassination. Anyone familiar with Joel Rocamora knows that he surely did not deserve to be sentenced to death in 1993 (hoping that he is not going to be sentenced again in the coming future).

Even if I am less well-known, I would like to present one case I know fairly well: mine.

The Case of The French Trotskyite Embedded In Attac. The CPP-NDF considers that the World Social Forum has a "reformist and counter-revolutionary character"; some others do too. Sison pretends that the WSF was notably conceived "as a reaction to the announced process of forming the International League of People's Struggles", which is rather... surprising: I guess that none of us -we were many— who were involved in the launching of the World Social Forum knew about the Coming Arrival of the ILPS. A more serious matter is the way Sison introduces the "plot" in the midst of the political polemics: "in 2000 US intelligence operatives under the cover of the Ford Foundation prodded some French Trotskyites embedded in Attac and Le Monde diplomatique and some crypto-Trotskyite academics and journalists to engage the collaboration of social democrats in France and Brazil and bigwigs of NGOs in order to form WSF". [80]

There are many ongoing polemics on the World Social Forum process, and it is perfectly normal: it is a new and complex phenomenon comprising different types of movements and visions. But Sison's message to "Mumbai Resistance 2004" offers a typical example of how the CPP-NDF invents stories in order to

"criminalize" political disagreements, transforming activists into agents under the orders of "US operatives". Sison is not interested in the real history of the social forums; neither Agcaoili in Attac. Far from being limited to the taxation of currency transactions as he pretends (by the way, it seems that Agcaoili is against imposing a new tax on Capital!), Attac activities embody a wide range of issues: in defense of public services, of pensions and workers' rights; against neoliberal counter-reforms, etc. Presently, Attac is engaged in the campaign for a "Left no" to the European Constitution because of its capitalist, neoliberal and militarist content. Again, truth does not matter for the CPP-NDF leadership.

Another aspect of the CPP-NDF leadership's methods is that it often adds a touch of "character killings" to its attempts at a political kill. Thus, according to Agcaoili I cannot be anything else than an "arm-chair activist long ensconced as a staffer in a cozy office at the European parliament". It is true that I worked five years for the European United Left / Nordic Green Left Group in the EP. Nothing shameful about it, nor especially "cozy": as it is usual for activists, I retained from my salary only the equivalent of a party full-timer's wage and utilized the rest to finance political and solidarity activities. My job with the EP is now over. What is interesting is that Agcaoili had phoned himself to the EUL/NGL Group in the European Parliament to verify that I was no longer employed there. He knew perfectly well my situation when he wrote his "Rejoinder". But on small (and petty) things as well as on bigger ones, he really never renounces a useful lie.

I wish to take one last example of the CPP-NDF leadership's methods, drawn from my own experience. In the 1980s two internal CPP papers have been written against "Trotskyism" and myself. They were both utterly slanderous and were given to me by an NDF member: "You have the right to know what is said about you" he told me (many party and front members did not agree with the sectarianism of their leadership at that time). I happened to meet years

later the one who had written these two papers. He happily explained that he never tried to know what my organization was, or what I was actually doing. He had to make a kill, so he did. "I was a good soldier of the party", he explained joyfully.

In the Bondoc Peninsula. The situation in the Bondoc Peninsula being especially grave, I wish to give here more data than in my previous papers.

Both Sison and Agcaoili violently denounce as "gangs" the peasant movements which are active in the Task Force Bondoc Peninsula. To quote Sison: "Akbayan has organized local armed gangs acting as the barangay intelligence network (BIN) and paramilitary units of the armed forces of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP)". [81] As I mentioned in my "preliminary report", one of their leaders was assassinated by the NPA (Reymundo Tejino killed on 4 February 2002) - and three others by the landlords: Edwin Vender killed on 8 June 1998, Rodolfo Romero killed on 3 October 2003 and Felizardo Benitez killed on 20 March 2004. These murders have been committed in especially atrocious ways, as an act of terror: Edwin Vender's genitals were mutilated with a jungle bolo and his brain was fed to the pigs.... [82]

The Bondoc Peninsula peasant movement is continuously harassed by the landlord's goons; its leaders are killed. The human rights abuses committed there have been documented already in September 2003, by a fact-finding mission. The team included, among others, Joy G. Acheron from the National Anti-Poverty Commission and several members of Foodfirst Information Action Network-Philippines (FIAN-Philippines). [83] Later, FIAN sent an international team and stated its concern on the security situation of the peasants and the slow implementation of the land reform program. [84]

The Bondoc Peninsula case illustrates the nature of the existing divergences on the agrarian issue between the CPP-NPA-NDF and peasant federations as Makammasa, which are fighting for land to be given to the tiller now. In a recent declaration, the

local Maria Theresa De Leon Command of the NPA states that “at present, the level of implementation of the revolutionary agrarian program is to achieve minimum objective. These are the lowering of land rent and interest rates, increase in the wages of the farm workers, increase in the prices of agricultural produce, and in the reduction of production expenses. (...) The maximum objective of taking control and distribution of lands to poor farmers who are landless or those who do not have enough land to farm would be realized on a national scale on the eve of the success of national-democratic revolution, with the pronouncement of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines”. [85] So, the peasants have to await the “eve of the success” and the pronouncement of the CC of the CPP before being allowed to fight for land ownership.

The Philippine Ecumenical Action for Community Empowerment (PEACE) titled its response to the NPA Maria Theresa de Leon Command: “Respect the Farmers’ Lives and their Right to Choose”. It compares point-by-point the agrarian program projected by the landless and land-poor peasants’ autonomous associations it works with to the one of the NPA: “For the CPP-NPA, giving lands to the farmers in the absence of the overthrow of the state’ is taboo. (...) PEACE disagrees. The right to land is a human right; it is the most basic and essential of the integrated bundle of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights that especially the rural poor should have the right to. (...) This is why it is important for peasants to own the lands they till, to protect them from the dictates and oppression of landlords who would deny their right to have rights”. [86]

Several of the political parties, which are projecting a different line than the CPP leadership’s one, are themselves coming from the Communist Party. If they changed their orientation on the agrarian issue, it is because of experience. But the CPP-NDF leadership presents any divergence on this matter as a confrontation between “revolution and counter-revolution”, and denounces the proponents of other lines as “agents” of the military. The CPP-NDF is still looking for

Dioscoro Tejino to kill him, regardless of his past support to the NPA. [87] Faced with this situation, the Association of Major Religious Superiors of Women in the Philippines (AMRSWP) issued a strong statement in solidarity with Dioscoro Tejino. [88]

It is time to ask more questions to those who, in the international solidarity movement, endorse blindly all CPP-NDF claims:

Do you really think that there is no room, in the Philippines, for genuine political differences among revolutionaries and progressives on issues of line, orientation and strategy (as on the agrarian program)? And if there is room for such divergences, how is it that the CPP-NDF treats all of them as if they were the expression of counter-revolutionary forces?

How can you endorse and spread accusations against Filipino activists, members of various Left organizations, when you know that the CPP-NDF is using such accusations to justify their assassinations? Don’t you think that you are taking a very grave responsibility doing so?

The non-CPP aligned Left organizations in the Philippines are urgently asking for solidarity from the international progressive movement, to urge the CPP-NDF to stop its policy of assassination. Do you really think that we should turn a deaf ear to their call?

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE NDF

One of the most revealing aspects of Agcaoili’s “Rejoinder” is that he signed it as Chairperson of the Human Rights Committee of the National Democratic Front. It tells a lot on the CPP’s conception of human rights and on the very nature of the NDF.

The National Democratic Front was established in 1973. From the origin, the NDF member-organizations were the CPP, its NPA and its underground sectoral fronts. No other political party or organized political current could be part of it. For very long, the NDF was only represented by a

“preparatory commission” and had little life of its own. Nevertheless, discussions developed during the 1980s to give the NDF more substance, to update its program and to envisage the possibility to integrate other political trends. The first NDF Congress was prepared by the CPP leadership organs during a long period of time. In the early 1980s, the concept of the NDF as a united front of different political forces was raised in the discussion; but in 1985, the CPP leadership disregarded this option.

Lost opportunity. The NDF’s First Congress took place in 1990. It introduced in its program notions like the principles of democratic pluralism and mixed economy (within the framework of a dominant and controlling state sector and other forms of collective ownership). There was no formal endorsement of working class leadership, through the CPP, over the NDF. The NDF was presented as a federation and political center. For the first time, the NDF was formally organized, with processes and rules governing its conduct. It was not a united front opened to several political trends (all the member-organizations were lead by CPP members), but it was beginning to have a political function and (potentially) a life of its own.

That was already too much for Jose Maria Sison. The CPP leadership declared in 1992 that decisions of the First NDF Congress were null and void. Without any democratic process, elected leadership members of the NDF were disfranchised by the Sison-Tiamzon faction. These organizational moves raised many reactions within the NDF. Five members of the NDF National Executive Committee and fourteen members of its National Council issued a common statement to “reaffirm the validity and integrity of the 1990 NDF Congress and its decisions”. [89] But to no avail. From then on, the NDF is little more than a name.

In the EP. I have had recently a first-hand experience of what it means. In my January 18, 2005 “New Letter of Concern”, I explained that the European United Left/Nordic Green Left Group in the European Parliament had to cut off its relations

with Bayan Muna (at that time the only “Reaffirm” electoral Party in the Philippines) after it refused to condemn the assassination of Romulo Kintanar. It was a very serious matter for the CPP-NDF, which sent a delegation of two to meet our Parliamentary Group: Fidel Agcaoili and Grace Punongbayan. The meeting took place in Brussels, March 31, 2003, with Stellan Hermansson (Deputy Secretary General of the EUL/NGL Group, from the Swedish Left Party) and myself.

During the whole meeting, Agcaoili and Punongbayan defended the CPP-NDF system of “people’s courts” and “revolutionary justice”. At the end of the meeting, Stellan Hermansson asked Fidel Agcaoili to guarantee that the NPA will not kill Ric Reyes. He first refused to answer but finally said that if his case was presented to a “people’s court”, the NPA would have to arrest him. If he did not “resist” arrest, he would not be killed on the spot but brought to court, judged, sentenced and then... (in reality, no one is given the chance “not to resist”: targets are gunned down right away). [90] What was most frightening in this encounter is that Agcaoili and Punongbayan came to the Parliament to convince Parliamentarians to resume solidarity activities. They have been living in Europe for many years. And yet, they did not seem to understand that any normal European Left Parliamentarian would be scared away by their discourse.

Ric Reyes is accused by the Sison-Tiamzon leadership to be the main culprit in the 1980s’ paranoid purges within the CPP. [91] In fact, many leadership bodies and members, including top ones from Sison’s faction, share responsibility in this dark side of their party’s history. Ric Reyes has proposed to Sison to “have an impartial body to deal with this issue, not your kangaroo court. And of course, not one coming from this government which has not done justice to the thousands of victims of human rights violations under the Marcos, Aquino and Ramos regimes. Let the process be fair and thoroughgoing, no matter who gets hurt. This we owe to the victims [of the internal purges] and their families, to everyone who joined the movement

and to the younger generation of activists who deserve to be freed from the moral burden of this injustice”. [92]

There was no answer to this offer. Ric Reyes is still actively looked for by the NPA and could be killed anytime. Meanwhile, the CPP-NDF present leadership is freely vilifying activists and sentencing to death cadres of other Left organizations. Too bad for human rights.

CONTRADICTIONARY EVOLUTIONS IN THE PHILIPPINE LEFT

One of the many bizarre assertions repeated time and again by Agcaoili is that everything is clear in the Philippines and confusion exists only abroad. In his “Rejoinder”, he wrote that my “lies have no effect in the Philippines”. In a sense, it is true: Filipinos certainly do not need me to know what is at stake. But many organizations from the Left and people’s movements, many progressive individuals, reject the pretension of the CPP to have the monopoly of Truth; and the so-called “facts” Agcaoili refers to are hotly disputed. Polemics are raging.

The Philippine Left has changed tremendously these last twenty years. Two main trends are at work.

What has the CPP become? In the mid-1980s, the CPP could have evolved in several ways. The proof of it is that various components of it actually did evolve quite differently. There are many reasons for which the majority of the party leadership apparatus changed for the worst (the main one may be the deeply demoralizing effect of the 1980s’ paranoid purges). In my own understanding, a qualitative degeneration occurred at the turn of the 1990s, which needs to be understood in depth. How did it happen? I am far from having all the answers to such a question, but I feel that it is more than time to address the issue. I shall briefly present here

some first and very personal elements of analysis.

From a revolutionary Marxist point of view, we have had to understand in the past the transformation of the social-democratic labor movement (leading to the betrayal of 1914) and, later, Stalinism. The first process of degeneration is in essence easy to address, even if there were many debates on its mechanisms and scope: bureaucratization of the labor movement’s top apparatuses and their cooptation into the social elite. The second process (Stalinization) was much more difficult to approach because it occurred in a historically new situation: a non-capitalist transitional society. It took time to understand how bureaucratization could grow from within the state to the point of giving birth to a new and very specific type of bureaucracy, of social elite.

We are now confronted with a third, different, process. It does not lead to the cooptation in the bourgeois social elite. It does not occur in the framework of a transitional society state. It gives birth to a totalitarian power structure to which traditional class definitions are not easy to apply. The first time I was confronted with this question was in 1975: Pol Pot’s Khmers Rouges. This faction shaped and took control of the Cambodian CP (killing all cadres supposedly linked to the Vietnamese) before the seizure of power. Can we say it was “proletarian” while its first act once in power was to disintegrate the existing proletariat and semi-proletariat? Can we say it was “peasant” when it soon submitted the peasantry to forced labor? Can we say it was “bourgeois” when it destroyed all elements of capitalist economy, including money?

In the 1970s, we could have thought that the Khmers Rouges phenomenon was unique, because of specific historical circumstances related to the way Cambodia was brought into the Indochina wars by US intervention. But there is a larger trend, probably incarnated by Shining Path in Peru or today’s CPP. With the violence of class domination (national and international) and its consequences (militarization) as background. With armed struggle as framework (control

of arms and money allowing the emergence of a new power structure). And, like in previous processes, with social uprooting as one key mechanism changing the very fabric of an organization. But we need to go much deeper in the analysis if we want to understand what happens. Armed struggle is, most of the time, not a “free choice” but an act of self-defense faced with the violence of the dominant classes (this is what gives it legitimacy). Many armed groups did not degenerate in the same way as Shining Path or the CPP and when they did, they usually turned to banditry — while ideology is still an essential element of cohesion for the CPP.

Activists who joined the CPP gave away everything (career, family...) to “serve the people”. The very same ones (or, to be precise, some of them: the majority of the early 1980s CPP members are no more in it and many evolved quite differently) now impose their own power over people’s organizations. Much beyond simple “vanguardism”, such parties build themselves as a leading faction of society. How did such transformation happen? Why did it occur in some parties and not in others -or in some sectors of a given party and not in others? What are the elements of continuity and the qualitative changes in this process? The answer needs a very concrete analysis of the trajectory of each party, combining its ideology, politics, organization, social roots, etc. It also calls for a theoretical framework of understanding.

“Classical” Marxism and “class analysis” constitute an essential part

of this theoretical framework: the revolutionary transformation of societies is first of all a process of self-emancipation, which implies people’s self-organization and self-initiatives. To limit the danger of internal degeneration of the revolutionary movement, this process of self-emancipation has to be put back at the center stage of conceptions, politics, strategies and struggles. But to get into the fabric of the phenomenon, I feel that we have to add other elements of analysis like finer social analysis (evolution of layers of the radical intelligentsia...), as well as elements borrowed from psychosociology (transformation of uprooted individuals...) or from gender-based studies on power relationships. Surely, much can be discussed on such a matter. But it is an urgent task to grasp this issue in depth, to find the appropriate response to this new form of totalitarianism growing from within our own ranks and struggles.

The CPP rose above the people. At the same time, for many, it continues to represent a class-based revolutionary party. Mass organizations it leads are part of people’s movements. They should be included in a progressive united front policy. This must not be forgotten. But such a “complexity” is nothing new. We already had to address it with social-democracy and Stalinism.

The plural Left. There is another face of the Philippine Left. One can study step by step the process leading to the degeneration of the CPP (Sison-Tiamzon faction) during the last twenty years. One can also study step by step the growth of a plural progressive and revolutionary Left.

The two trends developed side by side.

The emergence of a broad plural Left in the Philippines is conflicting and certainly not linear. There have been ups and downs, missed opportunities and bad failures. The CPP’s threats make it much more arduous: they tend to militarize the Left itself and some groups may never assimilate a people’s democratic culture. Differences in lines are sharp and will remain so. But tremendous steps forward have nevertheless been made. New debates have now begun, on strategies and program, which will probably go beyond the point reached during the 1985-1998 years. A precious experiment is at work, under harsh conditions. It needs our solidarity.

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We, in the international progressive and solidarity movement, do not need to agree on the elements of political analysis presented here to act together in defense of the whole Philippine Left. But it would be good to discuss the lessons of the history of the revolutionary movement in the Philippines, and to learn from it.

We, in the international movement, are not a tribunal. We do not have to judge which, if any, of the CPP’s accusations against Filipino activists may be true. This is not our task and we do not have the means to do so. But we have to face reality. The CPP extends a threat over the whole independent Left. In his own words, Fidel Agcaoili’s “Rejoinder” illustrates it.

Scottish Socialists Face Up to Disappointing Result

10 May 2005, by **Alan McCombes**



Of these, only the SSP refused to put a gloss on a gloomy result. Convenor Colin Fox expressed our disappointment in colourful language by quoting the words of former Manchester United manager, Tommy Docherty: "We got beat four nil and were lucky to get the nil."

We had no illusions that this election would be anything but difficult. In the Scottish elections of 2003, and in the European election of 2004, every vote potentially counted towards the election of a Scottish Socialist MSP or MEP. But in this election we had no possibility of winning any seats - and made that clear to our supporters from day one. Nonetheless, the slippage in our share of the vote from 3 per cent in the last first-past-the-post general election in 2001 to 2 per cent in 2005 was disappointing. The result illustrates the magnitude of the task we face of building a mass socialist party capable of creating an independent socialist Scotland. It underlines the fact that we cannot expect linear progress forward and upward; reverses along the way are inevitable.

Difficult Period for SSP

There is no single explanation for this setback; it is the product of a complex combination of circumstances. The party itself has come through the most difficult period in its seven-year history. Following the resignation of Tommy Sheridan, we were subjected to a sustained media onslaught, mainly based on ignorance and misinformation. Nor has the party had time to fully establish the public profile of the new convenor, Colin Fox. But we also have to acknowledge that there were other, more powerful forces, working against us in this election.



Since the creation of the Holyrood

parliament, Westminster elections have become increasingly hostile terrain for the three Scottish-based parties, the SNP, the Greens and the SSP. In 2001, that was partly disguised by the fact that the general election was a foregone conclusion from day one, with Labour's eventual landslide victory never in any serious doubt. In this election, Labour were able to whip up fear among working class voters of a Michael Howard victory. The Daily Record, for example, set out to scare the living daylights out of voters who might have been tempted to abandon Labour. "Today your house is in danger. So is your home, your pension and your kid's school," screeched the paper on Election Day, its front page depicting Michael Howard morphing into Margaret Thatcher.

An even bigger problem for the SSP, the SNP and the Greens was the emergence of the Liberal Democrats in the guise of a left opposition. They promised to tax the rich and scrap the Council Tax while portraying themselves as a progressive anti-war and anti-racist party, in stark contrast to the Tories and New Labour. In practice, the Lib Dems are a right-of-centre party. In Holyrood, they have opposed the abolition of warrant sales, voted down free school meals, supported privatisation and PFI, and failed, even after five years in coalition government, to move one millimetre towards scrapping the Council Tax. They oppose public ownership of the railways, support nuclear weapons on the Clyde and refuse to call for troops to be brought home from Iraq.

Perception is Everything

But in politics perception is everything. In a grand hoax that would have turned Darren Brown and David Blaine green with envy, the Lib Dems managed to create an illusion of an Old Labour-style reformist party. In this, they were assisted by uncritical blanket coverage in the UK media and by the inability of the big parties to tear away the mask.

Like the spectacular vote for the UK Independence Party in the 2004

European election, this Lib Dem breakthrough is unlikely to be consolidated into a permanent revival, especially in Scotland. In 2007, they will be fighting the Holyrood election, not as a critical opposition party, but as a governing party defending a dismal track record.

All other parties had a disappointing night in Scotland. As part of its UK-wide slump, Labour lost five seats and saw its vote fall by 4.5 per cent. The Tories - who won a majority of votes in England - failed to make any advance in Scotland and are stuck on 15 per cent with just one MP, even after eight years of Labour in power. After winning two seats, the SNP has projected an air of jubilation. But although the party has made local advances, it has suffered a further seeping away of support at national level. Despite the return of Alex Salmond, widely acknowledged as a strong, charismatic leader, the party received less than 18 per cent of the vote, 2.5 points down compared to the 2001 general election under John Swinney.

Voters' Priority: Stop the Tories

It would be a mistake to draw the conclusion that this represents a weakening of support for independence, any more than the losses suffered by the SSP signifies a backlash against the idea of socialism and wealth redistribution. Four polls conducted during the election running far higher than during the 2001 general election (ICM: 29 per cent; BBC: 33 per cent; YouGov: 34 per cent; System Three/TNS: 46 per cent). These polls also confirmed a long-standing pattern which shows support for independence by far the strongest among younger voters under 45, and among semi-skilled and unskilled workers. These figures underline the paradox that sympathy for independence is running way ahead of the combined support for Scotland's three pro-independence political parties.

But for all except the hard-core pro-independence voters, this was not seen as an election that could strike a

blow at the future of the United Kingdom. Nor was it seen as an election that could deliver socialist change. Instead, most Scottish voters saw this as an election in which the main priority was to stop the Tories by voting Labour. Others, especially younger voters, saw it as an election in which the priority was to weaken New Labour's supremacy in Westminster by voting Lib Dem.

Scottish-based parties were marginalised by the British broadcast media, including the BBC, ITN, Channel Four and Radio One and Two, the smaller Scottish parties were doubly marginalised. The Scottish Greens and the SSP received virtually zero coverage, even from most of the Scottish media. At the start of the election campaign, the Greens talked of the possibility of Scotland's first Green MP, based on the strong vote they had received in Glasgow Kelvin and Edinburgh Central in last year's Euro elections. Instead their vote declined sharply, especially in their Edinburgh stronghold, where it fell from over 14,351 to 8,619. Across Scotland, the Green share of the vote was around 1 per cent, though they only stood in one third of Scotland. Taking into account the fact that the 19 seats targeted by the Greens were their strongest potential constituencies, it is likely that if they had stood across Scotland, they would have won around 2.5 per cent of the total vote.

Just as the poor result for the SNP does not signify a shift towards British unionism, neither does the vote for the Greens reflect a diminishing concern for the environment. Nor does the vote for the SSP reflect a shift to the right, away from socialism and wealth redistribution. Based on this general election result, both the SSP and the Greens would be obliterated in the next Holyrood elections. But the 2007 elections will be fought on far more favourable terrain. In this election, all Scottish parties were reduced to their hard-core, bedrock support. Many people decided that, for this election only, they would transfer their vote to

one of the big parties rather than "waste their vote" on their first choice party.

Differential turnout based on class

The SSP is also suffering from the continuing trend towards 'differential turnout' based on class. While middle class constituencies such as East Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire had turnouts of over 72 per cent, the turnout in some working class seats in Glasgow slumped well below 50 per cent. Within these seats, some wards had turnouts no higher than 25 per cent. With the next national elections two years away, the SSP has time to assess its future electoral and campaigning strategy. For example, in the 2003 Scottish election, the SSP was the only party campaigning to scrap the Council Tax. Now the Lib Dems and SNP have jumped onto that bandwagon, after remaining silent on the issue for five years.

In the run up to 2007, the SSP will face the task of delineating itself more clearly from the other parties, not just in an abstract way, but on concrete policies that we can actively fight for. There is also an argument for at least discussing a more focussed, targeted approach in future first-past-the-post elections, including the constituency elections for Holyrood.

In Scotland the SNP were able to defy the national trend in their six target seats by concentrating all of their firepower on these constituencies. The dramatic victory of George Galloway in Bethnal Green and Bow would not have been possible, even in this highly politicised constituency containing the largest Muslim population in the UK, without Respect pouring in big resources, canvassing every household and waging an intensive propaganda campaign on the ground.

In contrast, both the Greens, and especially the SSP spread our meagre

resources thinly - across 58 seats, in the case of the SSP. This effectively prevented us from seriously countering the BBC, the ITN and the daily media. While the big three parties enjoyed saturation exposure in the media, the SSP was forced in most of Scotland to make do with our single A5 leaflet and a four-minute election broadcast. This was like trying to drown out the cacophony of a chanting football crowd with a tin whistle.

"SSP lives to fight another day"

Although this was a difficult election, the SSP lives to fight another day. Despite the fact that we have just come through the most difficult period in our seven-year existence, we were able to mount a national challenge in 58 seats from the Borders to the Northern Isles - where Orkney & Shetland candidate, John Aberdein, managed to increase the SSP vote to an impressive 5.6 per cent, our highest share of the vote nationally.

We distributed 3.2 million election addresses plus hundreds of thousands of street leaflets - and during the campaign received hundreds of applications to join the party. We now move onto new challenges, most immediately the G8 summit in Perthshire in July, which will provide the opportunity of taking our vision for Scotland and for the planet to a new generation of young people. Electorally, we now have a welcome two-year breathing space. And as convenor Colin Fox, pointed out after the count: "This Westminster election was an away game for us. Holyrood will be a home game, where we're playing to home fans."



- This article will be published in the May 12th issue of the party's weekly newspaper, *Scottish Socialist Voice*.

The fall of Saigon

7 May 2005, by **Murray Smith**


Already in 1954, the forces of the Viet Minh under Vo Nguyen Giap had inflicted a crushing military defeat on the French colonial army at Dien Bien Phu. This victory was not only important for Indochina: it reverberated around the world, providing formidable encouragement to other colonial peoples fighting for independence.



North Vietnamese tank breaks down gates of US embassy

In 1954, Vietnam was left divided: in the North, in Hanoi, the regime of the Vietnamese Communist Party, in the South a pro-Western regime based in Saigon. It rapidly became clear that the unification evoked in the Geneva Accords of 1954 was not going to happen peacefully. Furthermore the Saigon regime was ruthlessly hunting down those it defined as communists. In 1959, the Communist Party leadership in Hanoi decided to launch an armed struggle to unify the country and in 1960 the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam was formed.

The main backer of the Saigon regime was now no longer France, but the United States. US involvement rapidly escalated, from a few hundred advisers in 1961 to 500,000 combat troops by 1965. The Vietnamese fought the army of the most powerful imperialist power to a standstill. The Tet offensive in 1968 convinced the Americans that they could not win militarily, and the movement against the war was shaking America itself. Following the Paris Peace Accords, the last American troops left Vietnam in March 1973. That was the second major defeat inflicted on imperialism by the Vietnamese.

 Desperate pro-American Vietnamese try to climb into US embassy compound

The Saigon regime was now on its own. The decision was taken in Hanoi at the end of 1974 to launch a military offensive to conclude the final stages in the unification of the country. The Vietnamese leaders thought it would take up to two years. In the event it took four months, as the South Vietnamese Army unraveled. By the end of March the old imperial capital, Hue, and the former massive US base at Da Nang had fallen. The fall of Saigon on April 30th was the final act. The debacle of Washington and its Vietnamese clients was symbolized by the disorderly flight from the US embassy.

Three elements explain the victory of the Vietnamese. The first was the struggle on the ground in Vietnam, which was not only military. The military struggle was the expression of a revolutionary process of national and social liberation that had mass support. Of course the North Vietnamese regular army played a decisive role. But for example, the NVA never penetrated into the key region of the Mekong delta. There the fighting was always done by local NLF units, and by the time Saigon fell, the delta had basically liberated itself [93].

The second element was the demoralization and disintegration of the US army. This was a result not only of the casualties suffered but of the realization by soldiers of the mainly conscript army that they were up against a whole people. The disaffection of the US forces was helped by, and in its turn reinforced,

the international campaign in solidarity with Vietnam, and above all the mass movement in the USA to bring the troops home. The combination of the quagmire in Vietnam and the effects of Vietnam on American society convinced Nixon that it was time to get out.



Helicopter on roof of US embassy evacuates US personnel and South Vietnamese employees

Thirty years later it is important to remember how and why the Vietnamese won. It is important whatever one thinks of the Vietnamese regime before and after 1975, and whatever one's opinion of the processes at work in Vietnam today [94] America has still not recovered from the "Vietnam syndrome".

In spite of the aggressiveness of Bush and the neo-conservatives, the American ruling class remains haunted by the memory of Vietnam - not just of the 57,000 US soldiers who died there, but of the radicalization and destabilization of US society as a result of the war. As Bush struggles to extricate himself from Iraq, while continuing to threaten Iran, Syria, North Korea, Cuba, Venezuela...it is worth remembering that for all its military might, US imperialism is no more invincible today than it was thirty years ago.



Final indignity: with no room to house them on carriers, US sailors threw dozens of helicopters from Saigon into the sea

Changes to International Viewpoint

2 May 2005

Making an overall balance sheet, the meeting noted major advances through becoming an e-magazine, which are widely recognised by IV supporters and readers.

By becoming an e-magazine the journal has managed a much more rapid delivery of articles than it did in its printed form. Production and postal problems with the printed magazine meant severe delays in getting out IV's message, especially to important areas outside Europe - notably North America, Asia and Africa.

Today's e-magazine means that we can get articles out as soon as they are ready, and its has also meant that we can much more easily make available the "news" articles and online documents. The many hundreds of hits we are getting daily shows the success of this project. To take it forward we have decided on the following measures:

- We will produce, at the end of each month, a **pdf file** containing all the articles from that "issue". This will have minimum design features, and will enable readers to easily print out the whole issue. Sections of the FI and sympathetic organisations can use this pdf file for the production of local bulletins, for internal or public use. Of course, it will be possible to print out individual or several articles from this file, according to the reader's needs. **The pdfs for the March and April**

issues have already been posted. Go to the online magazine section to find them.

- We will add new sections including links to useful and important articles and documents from other sites, as well as linking to useful non-Fourth International Marxist, workers movement and global justice sites. Through these measures we hope to make International Viewpoint not only an interesting and useful website in its own right, but also a portal through which its readers can easily surf to other sites of related interest. Recognising that many IV readers are not native English speakers, we decided to include links to articles, documents and sites in other major languages.

- We intend to add email links to the site which will allow readers to directly contact the IV team with comments and suggestions, but also to contact the Fourth International.

- In due course we are going to add a section for book reviews and notices to the site in order to alert readers to relevant books they may not have noticed.

- We decided that newly published documents and debate items will go first, for a limited period, into the 'this month's issue' section so that readers are immediately alerted to their inclusion.

How you can help

IV still needs money. A big majority of our articles are not written in English and therefore need to be translated. We do not have translators who can put in many hours each month free of charge, nor should they have to. We don't pay what translators would get at the UN or the EU or working for banks; but we try to pay a reasonable amount which can compensate for the lost working time that our translators contribute. This costs hundreds of dollars every month; without this expenditure, the website would not exist.

Access to our website is free, and so it should be, all the more so in that we know that it is accessed by hundreds of comrades from poorer countries. That means we don't have a revenue stream to finance the site from; we rely on readers' contributions and donations. Help us to continue this work and make the site even more successful.

We have made giving very easy by the inclusion of the 'Make a Donation' button on the front page, in the left-hand red column. This uses the *PayPal* system. Just click the link and follow the on-line instructions. We won't waste a penny.



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