



IV368 - June 2005

The most serious crisis in the Workers Party's history

30 June 2005, by **José Correa Leite**

Accused of organizing a corruption racket in the postal service, Jefferson reacted to what some say was a plot by Dirceu to incriminate him.

He stated, in an interview with the *Folha de São Paulo* on 6th June, and again in his testimony to the Ethics Committee of the Brazilian Lower House on 14th June, that the PT Treasurer, Delúbio Soares, was responsible for paying a monthly sum of R\$ 30 thousand (US\$ 12,500), through their party leaders, to MPs of the Liberal Party and the Popular Party (whose parliamentary groups make up more than a hundred of the 564 members of the lower house), as well as a "prize" of R\$ 1 million (US\$ 400,000) to any MPs who changed parties from one supporting the opposition to one supporting the government. (A number of easily-bought, right-wing parties gave their support to the government in Congress.)



Lula (center) with José Dirceu (left)

The PTB president also said he'd received R\$ 4 million from the PT for his party, as part of a series of electoral agreements worth R\$ 20 million, which directly involved the PT

president. José Genoino.

Journalist Dora Kramer, in her column in *O Estado de São Paulo* on 15th June (entitled 'No stones unturned'), said that Roberto Jefferson's testimony to the Ethics Committee had "mortally wounded the minister-chief of staff, José Dirceu, gravely injured the PT's top leadership, and raked mud over the entire Congress.

They were all tarred with the same brush. ...He pointed the finger at MPs accusing them of being accomplices in an illegal system of campaign financing. ...He showed how widespread this system of parallel campaign finances is, and how much it is taken for granted; he clearly said that parliamentary committees of inquiry do deals to condemn or absolve those they are investigating, laid bare the nature of the relationship between the presidential palace and its supporters in parliament, and showed how this is built on the buying and selling of positions of influence."

The Lula government, already smarting from various accusations of corruption, and losing popularity in recent months, has now gone into its deepest crisis so far. This in turn has unleashed the most serious crisis in the history of the Workers' Party, which has seen its political credibility

seriously compromised.

Dirceu's exit upsets the balance within the party: if on the one hand it can be sold as Lula getting rid of the "rotten elements" in the government (Dirceu was already badly damaged by the scandal a year ago involving one of his closest advisers, Waldomiro Diniz), and stripping out the corrupt sectors that were defending their own narrow interests, on the other hand it greatly strengthens the hand of those, like Palocci and Gushiken, most closely tied to big finance capital and most favourable to doing deals with the PSDB.

Government and PT weakened. The crises of the government and the PT feed into the contradictions provoked by the Lula administration's support for neo-liberalism and the PT's defence of this approach. This combined crisis is unfolding on terrain that clearly favours the right. It completely undermines the moral legacy, credibility and legitimacy of the PT as a vehicle for a different kind of politics - up until now this had been limited to the effects of continuing with the same old economic policies. Now the accusation comes in a form every ordinary citizen can understand: the bribing of MPs, corruption. It opens everyone's eyes to the character and the limitations of the Lula government.

The crisis drives the government to adhere even more closely to the 'continuation' line of Finance Minister Palocci, seen as the 'anchor' of 'stability' for the rest of the Lula administration. This is backed up by the PSDB, which is best placed to capitalize on the weakening of Lula, and which wants to keep the government as weak as possible up until the election in October 2006.

The PSDB wants to see the Lula government lose support without putting in question the legitimacy of the institutions and the 'regime'. Only the more traditional right, linked to the PFL, which doesn't have a such a clear governmental alternative, has threatened to impeach President Lula - who Jefferson and the other opponents have taken care to shield from their accusations.

What we are witnessing appears to be the beginning of a prolonged process of attrition directed at the Lula government and the PT. Whatever happens, the Lula government will be weakened and will shift to the right, with a relative strengthening of Palocci and his neoliberal course. With Dirceu out of the way, Palocci no longer has any rivals in the core leadership around the president. It is possible that Lula may become, in the final part of his presidency, a hostage to the PSDB.

From 'horsetrading' to 'payoffs'. As many analysts have underlined, it was always going to be impossible to continue the neoliberal policies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) without also continuing his methods of governing, based on alliances in Congress and in government bodies with the corrupt right.

To win support in the streets, Lula would have had to break with the anti-popular economic policies; without such support in the streets, he could not escape the embrace of those 300 wheelers and dealers - the vast majority of parliamentarians always ready to sell themselves for the best possible price to the government of the day, those who are largely responsible for the endemic corruption in Brazilian politics.

Thus, whereas the 'tucanos' (as the

PSDB is known) governed for the eight years of FHC's presidency, mainly on the basis of wholesale, legal corruption - that which openly benefitted finance capital through privatization and decisions on macro-economic regulation - the Lula government has gone back to the 'retail' tradition of buying off individual parliamentarians, on the grounds that this was now for the 'good' of securing a governmental project of the left.

Such horse-trading or 'give and take' was orchestrated within the government by José Dirceu. But it also involved sections of the PT subordinate to the presidential palace - everyone know about the role played by the PT general secretary, Silvio Pereira, in auctioning off more than 25,000 political posts in the government and state institutions.

This is precisely why the position of the government and the PT has become untenable in the eyes of public opinion. Whether or not Jefferson's accusations are true, they ARE plausible, because the buying up of parliamentarians is what the government and the PT have been doing completely openly.

All the newspapers have reported on the deals done to secure support in exchange for jobs in the government or state bodies, on the 'flexible' MPs who have swapped parties, or the way Palocci has released funds to support legislative amendments presented by particularly co-operative members of the house on the eve of some vote of strategic importance for the Lula government - all practices which the PT had always strenuously denounced as the hallmark of a corrupt elite.

The bitter fruits of pragmatism. The "monthly payoffs", if they really existed (and there are plenty of suggestions in Congress that they did) would only make this process simpler and cheaper for the government. As a way of pursuing political transformation, this is completely stupid. But it is conceivable, given the way the pro-government PT has lowered its horizons to a level of total pragmatism.

Such pragmatism, of course, already shaped the political culture of part of the Brazilian left before 2002; this helps explain why most of the PT put up no resistance to Lula. Anyone who followed the gradual loss of principles by sections of the PT's majority leadership in a number of local governments, would certainly not give them a blank cheque.

So whatever comes of Jefferson's allegations, or of the parliamentary inquiries (into the Postal Service, which has already been set up, and into the "monthly payoffs", which has been requested), the damage has largely been done. For the mass of Brazilian voters who are disenchanted with the government (and with the PT's subordination to it), the accusation focuses attention on the price paid for the way Lula has chosen to govern - and the way the PT's behaviour has sunk to that of every other party.

The aim of the PT and the government now is not to return to some previous stage when the party's image was intact, but to limit the damage and avoid it burying the Lula government for good.

This situation could easily lead to snowball of fresh accusations against the government, its awkward travelling companions and the PT. A Federal Police operation has uncovered a scheme for deforestation in Amazônia involving PT members. There have been accusations about the co-opting of opposition members in São Paulo during Marta Suplicy's time as Mayor, a system of "monthly payoffs" in the city council. Roberto Jefferson has come out with fresh accusations affecting the government - like the suggestion that Silvio Pereira was benefitting from overbilling the Night Airmail service.

Each new allegation - whether true or not - builds on the previous ones and helps to destroy the PT's left identity, tossing it into the same ditch as all the other self-serving parties. It hardly needs saying that Lula and the majority leadership of the PT are reaping what they sowed.

Managing the crisis. In handling the crisis, some sections of the

government are trying to make the PT carry the can. The party bureaucracy remains under Zé Dirceu's control. With the exception of Genoino, those accused in the PT are linked to him.

Yet, at the PT's National Executive meeting on 8 June, presented with the reasonable proposal to suspend DelÃbio while the allegations were investigated, this inept bureaucracy closed ranks in defence of the accused, re-enforcing the idea that he was merely carrying out the party's decisions. Later, in a disastrous news conference, DelÃbio, coached by Genoino, gave the impression that he was just the messenger.

Under pressure, the presidency sends signals to all involved: if Lula is weakened too much, he may have to bow out and put Palocci in to succeed him in 2006. The PT had therefore better take the blame and accept the people's scorn.

The pro-government left - the representatives of the majority of Socialist Democracy and Left Articulation - have lined up behind the party bureaucracy in defence of DelÃbio and behind Dirceu's manoeuvres, whilst again protesting, timidly, against the government's economic policies.

They seem not to grasp the scale of the crisis. Some DS members of parliament, like Tarcisio Zimmerman, Orlando Desconsi and JoÃo GrandÃo, as well as all those from Left Articulation, did not even support the first demand for a parliamentary inquiry into the Postal Service allegations, which was approved before Roberto Jefferson made his allegations.

It is clearer than ever that taking part in the government has tamed this left and prevented it from acting freely in a situation that demanded considerable political initiative.

The Left Bloc: "nothing to hide, nothing to lose". The more serious left had already, even before the crisis

erupted, decided to push for a full investigation of all the allegations. "Thos who have nothing to hide, have nothing to fear", was one of their slogans.

Twelve members of parliament from this Left Block in the PT had supported the first request for an Inquiry into the Postal Service corruption charges, and they are now linking up with a group of PT senators. Those PT members of parliament who had opposed the Inquiry, found they had to backtrack the following week because their position had become unsustainable.

In relation to the allegations of "monthly payoffs", the Block - made up of representatives of the PT left who had opposed the government's neo-liberal measures - adopted the same position. The charges should be investigated and those responsible punished, whatever damage this might inflict on the government and the PT.

This would require involving democratic forces of civil society, and so these parliamentarians have seeking the support of the National Bishops Conference and the Brazilian Lawyers Order.

But the Block has also pointed out the close connection between the corrupt practices adopted by the government and the PT and their defence of Lula and Palocci's neo-liberal economic policies. Whoever governs for the markets, cannot govern with the streets. Arguing for a change in economic policy goes hand in hand with any effective fight against corruption.

A wider recomposition. The crisis tends to demoralize a large part of the pro-government PT, committed as it is to Dirceu's style of politics, and to pragmatic behaviour which is, to say the least, difficult to defend. This creates an opportunity for the critical PT left to win wider support amongst those layers who still hold left views, and who are realising the consequences of the government's political alliances and its continuation of the old policies.

In recent weeks, figures like the senators Eduardo Suplicy and Cristovam Buarque, as well as Frei Betto, have expressed their dissatisfaction with the direction taken by the government and the party. But the struggle to redirect the left will not be carried by a well-behaved intervention within the PT, in the elections for a new party leadership, as even some taking part in the Left Block, like the Popular Socialist Action (APS) current, propose. In fact, the PT's internal leadership elections (PED), has been completely sidelined by the dispute unfolding in Congress.

On the other hand the 'cordon sanitaire' set up by the pro-government left around the P-Sol of senator Heloisa Helena, has become unsustainable. This party is on its way to obtaining its legal registration in time to stand in the 2006 election (this is not yet guaranteed, but it is very likely).

It has also reacted positively to the current crisis, seeking to link up with the PT left in non-sectarian manner - as can be seen in the recent declaration by its members of Congress. Whatever happens, it seems that Heloisa Helena will be a key figure in the 2006 contest, when she is likely to be standing for president. Lastly, the PT left needs to be discussing its future in the medium-term, given that there seems no possibility the government or the party will change course, and the damage to the PT's image may be irreversible.

Lula's orientation may be preparing the return of the PSDB to central government. It is no longer possible to speculate about a possible Plan B. In any case, it will only be possible to take advantage of the choices available through the joint action of the Left Block.

The coming weeks are therefore set to see major movements within a broad reshaping of the landscape of the Brazilian left.

SÃo Paulo, 16 June, 2005

Zapatistas: What we intend to do now (parts 5 & 6)

29 June 2005, by **EZLN**

Zapatista Army of National Liberation, Mexico.

Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona

V - What We Want To Do

We are now going to tell you what we want to do in the world and in Mexico, because we cannot watch everything that is happening on our planet and just remain quiet, as if it were only we were where we are.

What we want in the world is to tell all of those who are resisting and fighting in their own ways and in their own countries, that you are not alone, that we, the zapatistas, even though we are very small, are supporting you, and we are going to look at how to help you in your struggles and to speak to you in order to learn, because what we have, in fact, learned is to learn.

And we want to tell the Latin American peoples that we are proud to be a part of you, even if it is a small part. We remember quite well how the continent was also illuminated some years ago, and a light was called Che Guevara, as it had previously been called Bolivar, because sometimes the people take up a name in order to say they are taking up a flag.

And we want to tell the people of Cuba, who have now been on their path of resistance for many years, that you are not alone, and we do not agree with the blockade they are imposing, and we are going to see how to send you something, even if it is maize, for your resistance.

And we want to tell the North American people that we know that the bad governments which you have and which spread harm throughout the world is one thing - and those North Americans who struggle in their country, and who are in solidarity with the struggles of other countries, are a very different thing.

And we want to tell the Mapuche brothers and sisters in Chile that we are watching and learning from your struggles. And to the Venezuelans, we see how well you are defending your sovereignty, your nation's right to decide where it is going. And to the indigenous brothers and sisters of Ecuador and Bolivia, we say you are giving a good lesson in history to all of Latin America, because now you are indeed putting a halt to neoliberal globalization.

And to the piqueteros and to the young people of Argentina, we want to tell you that, that we love you. And to those in Uruguay who want a better country, we admire you. And to those who are sin tierra in Brazil, that we respect you. And to all the young people of Latin America, that what you are doing is good, and you give us great hope.

And we want to tell the brothers and sisters of Social Europe, that which is dignified and rebel, that you are not alone. That your great movements against the neoliberal wars bring us joy. That we are attentively watching your forms of organization and your methods of struggle so that we can perhaps learn something. That we are considering how we can help you in your struggles, and we are not going to send euro because then they will be devalued because of the European Union mess.

But perhaps we will send you crafts and coffee so you can market them

and help you some in the tasks of your struggle. And perhaps we might also send you some pozol, which gives much strength in the resistance, but who knows if we will send it to you, because pozol is more our way, and what if it were to hurt your bellies and weaken your struggles and the neoliberals defeat you.

And we want to tell the brothers and sisters of Africa, Asia and Oceania that we know that you are fighting also, and we want to learn more of your ideas and practices.

And we want to tell the world that we want to make you large, so large that all those worlds will fit, those worlds which are resisting because they want to destroy the neoliberals and because they simply cannot stop fighting for humanity.

Now then, what we want to do in Mexico is to make an agreement with persons and organizations just of the left, because we believe that it is in the political left where the idea of resisting neoliberal globalization is, and of making a country where there will be justice, democracy and liberty for everyone.

Not as it is right now, where there is justice only for the rich, there is liberty only for their big businesses, and there is democracy only for painting walls with election propaganda. And because we believe that it is only from the left that a plan of struggle can emerge, so that our Patria, which is Mexico, does not die.

And, then, what we think is that, with these persons and organizations of the left, we will make a plan for going to all those parts of Mexico where there are humble and simple people like ourselves.

And we are not going to tell them



what they should do or give them orders.

Nor are we going to ask them to vote for a candidate, since we already know that the ones who exist are neoliberals.

Nor are we going to tell them to be like us, nor to rise up in arms.

What we are going to do is to ask them what their lives are like, their struggle, their thoughts about our country and what we should do so they do not defeat us.

What we are going to do is to take heed of the thoughts of the simple and humble people, and perhaps we will find there the same love which we feel for our Patria.

And perhaps we will find agreement between those of us who are simple and humble and, together, we will organize all over the country and reach agreement in our struggles, which are alone right now, separated from each other, and we will find something like a program that has what we all want, and a plan for how we are going to achieve the realization of that program, which is called the "national program of struggle."

And, with the agreement of the majority of those people whom we are going to listen to, we will then engage in a struggle with everyone, with indigenous, workers, campesinos, students, teachers, employees, women, children, old ones, men, and with all of those of good heart and who want to struggle so that our Patria called Mexico does not end up being destroyed and sold, and which still exists between the Rio Grande and the Rio Suchiate and which has the Pacific Ocean on one side and the Atlantic on the other.

VI - How We Are Going To Do It

And so this is our simple word that goes out to the humble and simple people of Mexico and of the world, and we are calling our word of today:

And we are here to say, with our simple word, that...

The EZLN maintains its commitment to an offensive ceasefire, and it will not make any attack against government forces or any offensive military movements.

The EZLN still maintains its commitment to insisting on the path of political struggle through this peaceful initiative which we are now undertaking. The EZLN continues, therefore, in its resolve to not establish any kind of secret relations with either national political-military organizations or those from other countries.

The EZLN reaffirms its commitment to defend, support and obey the zapatista indigenous communities of which it is composed, and which are its supreme command, and - without interfering in their internal democratic processes - will, to the best of its abilities, contribute to the strengthening of their autonomy, good government and improvement in their living conditions.

In other words, what we are going to do in Mexico and in the world, we are going to do without arms, with a civil and peaceful movement, and without neglecting nor ceasing to support our communities.

Therefore...

In the World...

1- We will forge new relationships of mutual respect and support with persons and organizations who are resisting and struggling against neoliberalism and for humanity.

2- As far as we are able, we will send material aid such as food and handicrafts for those brothers and sisters who are struggling all over the world.

In order to begin, we are going to ask the Good Government Junta of La Realidad to loan their truck, which is called "Chompiras," and which appears to hold 8 tons, and we are going to fill it with maize and perhaps two 200 liter cans with oil or petrol, as they prefer, and we are going to deliver it to the Cuban Embassy in Mexico for them to send to the Cuban people as aid from the zapatistas for their resistance against the North American blockade.

Or perhaps there might be a place closer to here where it could be delivered, because it's always such a long distance to Mexico City, and what if "Chompiras" were to break down and we'd end up in bad shape.

And that will happen when the harvest comes in, which is turning green right now in the fields, and if they don't attack us, because if we were to send it during these next few months, it would be nothing but corncobs, and they don't turn out well even in tamales, better in November or December, it depends.

And we are also going to make an agreement with the women's crafts cooperatives in order to send a good number of bordados, embroidered pieces, to the Europes which are perhaps not yet Union, and perhaps we'll also send some organic coffee from the zapatista cooperatives, so that they can sell it and get a little money for their struggle.

And, if it isn't sold, then they can always have a little cup of coffee and talk about the anti-neoliberal struggle, and if it's a bit cold then they can cover themselves up with the zapatista bordados, which do indeed resist quite well being laundered by hand and by rocks, and, besides, they don't run in the wash.

And we are also going to send the indigenous brothers and sisters of Bolivia and Ecuador some non-transgenic maize, and we just don't know where to send them so they arrive complete, but we are indeed willing to give this little bit of aid.

3- And to all of those who are resisting throughout the world, we say there must be other intercontinental encuentros held, even if just one other. Perhaps December of this year or next January, we'll have to think about it. We don't want to say just when, because this is about our agreeing equally on everything, on where, on when, on how, on who.

But not with a stage where just a few speak and all the rest listen, but without a stage, just level and everyone speaking, but orderly, otherwise it will just be a hubbub and the words won't be understood, and

with good organization everyone will hear and jot down in their notebooks the words of resistance from others, so then everyone can go and talk with their compañeros and compañeras in their worlds.

And we think it might be in a place that has a very large jail, because what if they were to repress us and incarcerate us, and so that way we wouldn't be all piled up, prisoners, yes, but well organized, and there in the jail we could continue the intercontinental encuentros for humanity and against neoliberalism. Later on we'll tell you what we shall do in order to reach agreement as to how we're going to come to agreement. Now that is how we're thinking of doing what we want to do in the world. Now follows...

In Mexico...

1- We are going to continue fighting for the Indian peoples of Mexico, but now not just for them and not with only them, but for all the exploited and dispossessed of Mexico, with all of them and all over the country. And when we say all the exploited of Mexico, we are also talking about the brothers and sisters who have had to go to the United States in search of work in order to survive.

2- We are going to go to listen to, and talk directly with, without intermediaries or mediation, the simple and humble of the Mexican people, and, according to what we hear and learn, we are going to go about building, along with those people who, like us, are humble and simple, a national program of struggle, but a program which will be clearly of the left, or anti-capitalist, or anti-neoliberal, or for justice, democracy and liberty for the Mexican people.

3- We are going to try to build, or rebuild, another way of doing politics, one which once again has the spirit of serving others, without material interests, with sacrifice, with dedication, with honesty, which keeps its word, whose only payment is the satisfaction of duty performed, or like the militants of the left did before, when they were not stopped by blows,

jail or death, let alone by dollar bills.

4- We are also going to go about raising a struggle in order to demand that we make a new Constitution, new laws which take into account the demands of the Mexican people, which are: housing, land, work, food, health, education, information, culture, independence, democracy, justice, liberty and peace. A new Constitution which recognizes the rights and liberties of the people, and which defends the weak in the face of the powerful.

TO THESE ENDS...

The EZLN will send a delegation of its leadership in order to do this work throughout the national territory and for an indefinite period of time. This zapatista delegation, along with those organizations and persons of the left who join in this Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona, will go to those places where they are expressly invited.

We are also letting you know that the EZLN will establish a policy of alliances with non-electoral organizations and movements which define themselves, in theory and practice, as being of the left, in accordance with the following conditions:

Not to make agreements from above to be imposed below, but to make accords to go together to listen and to organize outrage. Not to raise movements which are later negotiated behind the backs of those who made them, but to always take into account the opinions of those participating. Not to seek gifts, positions, advantages, public positions, from the Power or those who aspire to it, but to go beyond the election calendar.

Not to try to resolve from above the problems of our Nation, but to build FROM BELOW AND FOR BELOW an alternative to neoliberal destruction, an alternative of the left for Mexico.

Yes to reciprocal respect for the autonomy and independence of organizations, for their methods of struggle, for their ways of organizing, for their internal decision making

processes, for their legitimate representations. And yes to a clear commitment for joint and coordinated defense of national sovereignty, with intransigent opposition to privatization attempts of electricity, oil, water and natural resources.

In other words, we are inviting the unregistered political and social organizations of the left, and those persons who lay claim to the left and who do not belong to registered political parties, to meet with us, at the time, place and manner in which we shall propose at the proper time, to organize a national campaign, visiting all possible corners of our Patria, in order to listen to and organize the word of our people. It is like a campaign, then, but very otherly, because it is not electoral.

Brothers and sisters:

This is our word which we declare:

In the world, we are going to join together more with the resistance struggles against neoliberalism and for humanity.

And we are going to support, even if it's but little, those struggles.

And we are going to exchange, with mutual respect, experiences, histories, ideas, dreams.

In Mexico, we are going to travel all over the country, through the ruins left by the neoliberal wars and through those resistances which, entrenched, are flourishing in those ruins.

We are going to seek, and to find, those who love these lands and these skies even as much as we do.

We are going to seek, from La Realidad to Tijuana, those who want to organize, struggle and build what may perhaps be the last hope this Nation - which has been going on at least since the time when an eagle alighted on a nopal in order to devour a snake - has of not dying.

We are going for democracy, liberty and justice for those of us who have been denied it.

We are going with another politics, for

a program of the left and for a new Constitution.

We are inviting all indigenous, workers, campesinos, teachers, students, housewives, neighbors, small businesspersons, small shop owners, micro-businesspersons, pensioners, handicapped persons, religious men and women, scientists, artists, intellectuals, young persons, women, old persons, homosexuals and lesbians, boys and girls - to participate, whether individually or collectively, directly with the zapatistas in this NATIONAL CAMPAIGN for building another way of doing politics, for a program of national struggle of the left, and for a new Constitution.

And so this is our word as to what we are going to do and how we are going to do it. You will see whether you want

to join.

And we are telling those men and women who are of good heart and intent, who are in agreement with this word we are bringing out, and who are not afraid, or who are afraid but who control it, to then state publicly whether they are in agreement with this idea we are presenting, and in that way we will see once and for all who and how and where and when this new step in the struggle is to be made.

While you are thinking about it, we say to you that today, in the sixth month of the year 2005, the men, women, children and old ones of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation have now decided, and we have now subscribed to, this Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona, and those who know how to sign, signed, and those

who did not left their mark, but there are fewer now who do not know how, because education has advanced here in this territory in rebellion for humanity and against neoliberalism, that is in zapatista skies and land.

And this was our simple word sent out to the noble hearts of those simple and humble people who resist and rebel against injustices all over the world.

Democracy!

Liberty!

Justice!

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.

Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee - General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

Mexico, in the sixth month, or June, of the year 2005.

Denmark: The Case for a Red 'No'

25 June 2005, by Bjarke Friborg

With the setback for the traditional Danish "no"-movements in the 2004 EU-parliamentary elections serving as background, the past six months has been characterised by the appearance of a range of clearly left wing initiatives - notably related to the break-up of the "June Movement", the political struggle within the Socialist People's Party (SF) and finally the rise of the Red-Green Alliance and its wish to confront the equally self-confident Dansk Folkeparti on the far right.

The June Movement

After more than 12 years of existence, the traditional split between the June Movement ("pro-European, anti-European Union") and the Popular Movement ("Denmark out of the EU"), seems to have given way to new and more complex relations.

Whereas the Popular Movement has

been a member of the left wing GUE/NGL group in the European Parliament for years, the June Movement - under the chairmanship of veteran MEP Jens Peter Bonde - gradually has been trying to position itself as a more centre-oriented political group, even allying itself with the far right United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP).



Supporters of the Red-Green Alliance

In the end, this became intolerable for the left wing in the June Movement, counting among others the veteran members Drude Dahlerup and Niels I. Meyer. With the loss of two MEPS and more than half of their votes in the 2004 elections, the dynamic was set for split on the congress in April 2005.

In the weeks and months after the congress, former members of the June

Movement formed two parallel organisations - the "think tank" Ny Agenda ("New Agenda") and a political association called Udfordring Europa (a name which is hard to translate into English, but basically referring to Europe as a "challenge", underlining the case for a positive and socialist answer to the European integration).

The two new groups has quickly attracted members and activists from other groups fighting against international neo-liberalism, such as Attac, the Red-Green Alliance and SF, and made their voices heard in the national debate.

The Socialist People's Party

On February 8th 2005, the Danish parliamentary elections resulted in yet another blow to the Socialist People's Party. With only 6% of the votes and 11 MPs, SF is now only half the size

they were at their peak in the 1980'es. During the 1990'es - under the chairmanship of Holger K. Nielsen - the party has gradually (and not without heavy infighting) been transforming itself into a "pro-European" party, or more correctly as an EU-reformist party.

In January 2005, a vote among all party members resulted in a 63,8% victory for the Yes-side, confirming this tendency. On April 28th, however, a new vote among the party members resulted in 59% for Villy S  ndal (52) as new party chairman and successor to Holger K. Nielsen. The tricky thing is that S  ndal only recently converted to the Yes-side and is a respected and well-known left winger in the party.

Now S  ndal has to balance between the two wings - and at the same time he has to woo the youth wing of the party, which (after some flip-flops during the 1990'es) is now back on the No-side. The young SF'ers follow their own agenda, however, having allied themselves to SMOT (the official No-faction within SF, called "Socialists Against the Treaty"). Now both these groups are teaming up with the more radical members of the Red-Green Alliance and other activists in the new Udfordring Europa.

The Red-Greens vs. DF

For the Red-Green Alliance (RGA), the February elections meant two more MPs (up from four) and the best results ever with 3,4% of the vote. Since then, the party has gained more than 1.000 new members, an effective increase of more than 40% in only a few months.

Having rounded 3.600 members and booming with self-confidence, the RGA had ambitious plans for its intervention in the EU-debate. One year ago, the party ran an independent campaign for its eight socialist candidates, standing on the lists of either the June Movement or the Popular Movement.



This time the plan was to set its own agenda - arguing for a 'no from the left' with a marked internationalist perspective. In the end, the party had a series of effective interventions and happenings, with a clear focus on left wing solidarity with the French and Dutch 'no'-voters.

In part, the motivation for this

increased focus on the 'no from the left' is the wish to confront the far right populist Dansk Folkeparti (DF). With SF having planted itself in the Yes-camp, there are only two political parties in the parliament with a No-agenda; namely the RGA to the left and the DF to the right.

With the DF posing as a socially oriented, but basically xenophobic and rightist party, the RGA has found it increasingly imperative to develop its own argumentation and to present a clearly socialist and anti-nationalistic alternative. In addition, there is a growing understanding that there is a need for more coordinated internationalist answers, debates and campaigns across the borders in order to make way for a radically different Europe, ie. more social and democratic.

LINKS:

[The Red-Green Alliance](#)

[SAP \(4th Internationalists\)](#)

[New Agenda \(think tank\)](#)

[Udfordring Europa](#)

[Socialists against the Treaty \(SMOT\)](#)

[Socialist People's Party - youth wing \(SFU\)](#)

China - capitalist superpower?

25 June 2005, by **Gilbert Achcar**

What do you think of predictions that in a few decades China will be a superpower challenging the US on a global scale?

These predictions are usually based on projections of the current Chinese rates of growth, whereas it is far from certain that China will be able to sustain such rates for decades, not to mention that no one could bet on the social stability of the Chinese state at a time when increasing inequalities are producing increasing tensions.



Besides, the gap in military expenditure between the US and China is increasing year after year, not decreasing. The US outspends now the rest of the world, and keeps a close eye on all its potential rivals, including China, with the objective of maintaining its "full-spectrum dominance". Predictions like those you mentioned are actually useful only to Washington and the Pentagon as they

are used in order to justify the huge US military budget.

But the truth of the matter is that there is only one "hyperpower" nowadays (with many vassal states), and that is the US, which is on an aggressive imperialist course, harmful to the whole of humankind.

What are the implications of China's integration into the global capitalist economy for its geopolitical importance?

There are several implications. Let's just mention a few crucial ones: on the one hand, the more China plays a key role in the world capitalist market the more this market becomes dependent on the state of the Chinese economy and the more global capitalism will have a stake in the stability of China.

China has become a huge market as well as a huge exporter: it thus belongs to a completely different category than Iran, for instance. Washington would be quite happy with a destabilization of Iran, which would not necessarily affect Iranian oil exports, whereas a seriously destabilized China would usher into a very dangerous crisis for the global capitalist economy.

On the other hand, China is increasingly dependent not only on the US market, but also on the good standing of the US economy, as it holds already considerable amounts of US dollars, bonds and obligations, and is starting to move into the US stock market.

This means also that the Chinese government will act more and more in solidarity with the global capitalist system — contrarily to the illusions of those who believe that China will be the next USSR in a renewed global bipolarity. In reality, China deserves much more than Russia to be on the G summit of rich countries.

What are the implications of the

increased US presence in the Caspian Sea area and Central Asia for US-China relations?

Actually, the prospect that I have just described is jeopardized only by the very behaviour of the US: the Chinese have a very acute sense of national pride and resent continuous US encroachments on what they regard as their sovereign rights, including the issue of Taiwan.

They resent Washington's behaviour as "hegemonist", and rightly so. They have the feeling — very much warranted — that the US is in the business of encircling them: US military presence in Central Asia since the Afghanistan war, on the northwestern flank of China looks very much, seen from Beijing, as the western jaw of a vice around China, with US forces in Japan and South Korea representing the eastern jaw.

Moreover, US military presence in Central Asia stands in the center of the landmass connecting the European heart of Russia to China, and is clearly intended to deter the military cooperation between Beijing and Moscow that has been established since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Last but not least, US presence in the Caspian Sea area adds to US direct control of Arab-Persian Gulf oil in securing Washington's grasp over China's key sources of hydrocarbons, thus increasing China's vulnerability

with regard to US dominance.

If China is making a transition to a capitalist power with (at least regional) imperial ambitions, what difference should it make to internationalist socialists what the outcome is of US-Chinese rivalry?

For the time being, it would be very wrong to put China in the same "imperial" category where the US stands dominant, even if this "imperialism" is reduced to the regional scale. China's territorial claims are essentially — at least in Chinese eyes — matters of national sovereignty: China has a bitter history of oppression at the hand of Western powers in the 19th and 20th centuries, and still sees itself in the process of redeeming that past.

Whatever one thinks of Taiwan, and the right of its population to self-determination, it should be obvious to every socialist that, whereas the legitimacy of China's claim on the island could be discussed, this issue is definitely none of Washington's business.

In a US-Chinese confrontation over Taiwan, Beijing would be convinced of acting to recover sovereignty over its usurped territory whereas Washington would be upholding its claim to global imperial hegemony. Anti-imperialists cannot be neutral in such a case, but should act to stop the US as their major priority.

What the Western media doesn't tell you

23 June 2005, by Gilbert Achcar

Thus, the huge demonstration called for on April 9 by Muqtada al-Sadr - whose Current plays a prominent role in the organization of the political resistance - was very much and very blatantly underrated in most Western media. What is even less known to the Western public opinion is the political fight waged by Iraqi MPs against the occupation.

The following facts, reported in articles on the front pages of the most prestigious Arab daily, are almost unknown in the West. They are all the more important that the shift in US public opinion against the occupation of Iraq has begun to find an echo in the US Congress itself.

For this reason, I felt that it was necessary to translate the following

two articles from Al-Hayat. They deserve to be widely read in the West.

June 22, 2005

83 MPs Ask al-Jaafari to Put a Timetable for the Withdrawal of Foreign Troops

Baghdad - Abdel-Wahed Tohmeh - Al-Hayat, June 20, 2005

One-third of the members of the National Assembly (83 MPs) [out of 275] have asked for a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq, accusing the Assembly itself of not caring "about the demands of millions of Iraqis."

During a press conference that they organized, Falah Hassan Shneishel MP, a member of the "Independent National Bloc," said that "the presence of the occupation forces gives a pretext for the continuation of violence and terrorism that have taken the lives of thousands of Iraqis."



Supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr

In reply to a question from Al-Hayat about the attitude that he would take with his colleagues if the Assembly did not comply with their requests, he said that "they would take a stand" without giving further details.

Jawad Bulani MP told Al-Hayat that the demand for the withdrawal of occupation forces "have begun as soon as the National Assembly was formed, and it is a legitimate right of the Iraqis to get their sovereignty in conformity with UN Security Council resolutions, which gave the National Assembly and the Iraqi Government the right to impose an agreement on foreign troops if they were to remain on Iraqi territory."

He asked Ibrahim al-Jaafari's Government to act in order to negotiate such an agreement "in compliance with our request and with the administrative law, when extending the presence of these troops on our territory." Bulani accused the

National Assembly and the Government of "being careless and of compromising the cause," affirming that the people "demands sovereignty and we are conveying the demands of the masses that the Assembly ought to adopt."

Karim Najati MP, a member of the [majority] Shia "United Iraqi Alliance," described the government's request of the extension of the presence of multinational forces in Iraq as "shameful and disgraceful." He pointed to the fact that "there are members in the US Congress opposed to the occupation of Iraq whereas we ask for the troops to stay," adding that "no Arab or Muslim can accept" what al-Jaafari's Government did.

Another member of the UIA, Abdul-Rahman al-Neeimi (Sunni), said that the presence of these troops "confused the security issues." He accused the multinational forces of standing behind attempts at igniting a civil strife, asserting that "they have used all possible means in order to provoke a sectarian strife in Iraq, but have failed thanks to God." He concluded saying "We tell the occupation forces: Hands off the Iraqi people and let us heal our wounds by our own means."

Baha' al-Aaraji MP, of the "Independent National Bloc," said that "the presence of these forces creates a lot of problems and hinders the political process."

He maintained that "Iraqi security and military apparatuses are able to take care of the security issue whereas the continuing deployment of foreign troops in Iraq, in a situation where there is a honourable national resistance ("honourable" is the label designating in Iraq resistance forces that attack only foreign troops), is a threat to stability." Muhammad Saadun Hatem MP considered the decision by al-Jaafari's Government to extend the presence of multinational forces without referring to the national Assembly a "dangerous precedent."

Saad Jawad Qandil MP said: "the occupation should not be legalized." Feriad Ammar MP asked the Government "to include a timetable

for the withdrawal of foreign troops in its decision to extend their presence," while Sheima' Zein al-Abedein [a woman] MP asked the Government to "give a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops."

The 83 MPs signed a petition, of which Al-Hayat obtained a copy, accusing the National Assembly of "blatantly ignoring the demands of the MPs." "The most serious fact," the petition maintained, "is that the Government asked UN Security Council to extend the duration of the presence of occupation forces without consulting the people's representatives in the National Assembly, who have the right to vote on such decisive issues."

The petition also stated: "From the standpoint of our historical responsibility, we refuse that the occupation be legalized and repeat our demand that its forces get out." It added: "Our national forces were able to break the back of terrorism, extend their influence markedly in Iraqi streets and give authority back to the State and confidence in their security forces back to the citizens."

The "Commission for Detainees" Accuses the Multinational Force of Stalling the Release of Prisoners of Opinion

Baghdad - Su'dad al-Salehi - Al-Hayat, May 29, 2005

The four-member commission formed by the [majority] "United Iraqi Alliance" for the release of Iraqi detainees said that the multinational forces "stall their release and refuse to refer their cases to [Iraqi] justice, under the

pretext that it is not competent.'

They refuse to charge the majority of the detainees who are prisoners of opinion, arrested for their patriotic stance, which means that their practice does not differ from that of the previous [Baathist] regime."

Falah Hassan Shneishel MP, a member of the commission, said that "the political representative of the US embassy in Baghdad promised repeatedly to contact his superiors in order to settle the issue of the detainees, without any result." He explained that the commission demanded that the cases of the detainees be referred to Iraqi justice and that they be charged so that they could be tried, but "the multinational forces rejected the demand."

He added that "the commission has also demanded the release of women and children detained in the occupation's prisons, but its demand was also rejected." He made it clear that the demands concern the release of prisoners of opinion and patriotic

stances, and do not include those who are involved in violent actions against civilians.

The MP maintained that "the stalling and temporizing that US forces have practiced went as far as refusing to allow the prisoners' relatives, or the judicial committee formed to follow the matter, to visit the detainees to check their situation and their cases." He added: "The way US forces behave has become the continuation of the way the [Baathist] previous regime used to deal with political prisoners, a fact that increases the hatred toward these forces."

The MP said that the number of detainees belonging to [Muqtada] al-Sadr's Current reached 350 and that their names were given to the Iraqi Government, affirming that the majority of them were arrested "preventively and they have not been charged with any accusation until now."

He added that the four-member commission have asked the Government, in a memorandum given

to the National Assembly, to apply article 15 of the Transitional Administrative Law which stipulates that "nobody can be arrested for more than 24 hours without being charged" and that "no one can be arrested for their religious or political opinions."

He asserted that the detainees belonging to [al-Sadr's] Current are "prisoners of opinion and patriotic stances" and fall therefore under the article referred to, adding that they are presently detained in the prisons of "Buka" in Basra, "Badush" in Mosul and "Abu-Ghraib" in Baghdad, and that the conditions of their detention are "very bad and harsh," and that the Government should order their release.

Sheikh Muhammad Taqi al-Mawla, a member of the commission and a leader of the "Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq," told Al-Hayat that the multinational forces detain in their prisons thousands of Iraqis, including many women and children, without charging them, and that the Government and the National Assembly are acting for their release.

Zapatistas: What we intend to do now (parts 3 & 4)

20 June 2005, by EZLN



III - How We See the World

Now we are going to explain to you how we, the zapatistas, see what is going on in the world. We see that capitalism is the strongest right now. Capitalism is a social system, a way in which a society goes about organizing things and people, and who has and who has not, and who gives orders and who obeys. In capitalism, there

are some people who have money, or capital, and factories and stores and fields and many things, and there are others who have nothing but their strength and knowledge in order to work. In capitalism, those who have money and things give the orders, and those who only have their ability to work obey.

Then capitalism means that there a few who have great wealth, but they did not win a prize, or find a treasure, or inherited from a parent. They obtained that wealth, rather, by exploiting the work of the many. So capitalism is based on the exploitation of the workers, which means they

exploit the workers and take out all the profits they can. This is done unjustly, because they do not pay the worker what his work is worth. Instead they give him a salary that barely allows him to eat a little and to rest for a bit, and the next day he goes back to work in exploitation, whether in the countryside or in the city.

And capitalism also makes its wealth from plunder, or theft, because they take what they want from others, land, for example, and natural resources. So capitalism is a system where the robbers are free and they are admired and used as examples.

And, in addition to exploiting and plundering, capitalism represses because it imprisons and kills those who rebel against injustice.

Capitalism is most interested in merchandise, because when it is bought or sold, profits are made. And then capitalism turns everything into merchandise, it makes merchandise of people, of nature, of culture, of history, of conscience. According to capitalism, everything must be able to be bought and sold. And it hides everything behind the merchandise, so we don't see the exploitation that exists. And then the merchandise is bought and sold in a market. And the market, in addition to being used for buying and selling, is also used to hide the exploitation of the workers. In the market, for example, we see coffee in its little package or its pretty little jar, but we do not see the campesino who suffered in order to harvest the coffee, and we do not see the coyote who paid him so cheaply for his work, and we do not see the workers in the large company working their hearts out to package the coffee.

Or we see an appliance for listening to music like cumbias, rancheras or corridos, or whatever, and we see that it is very good because it has a good sound, but we do not see the worker in the maquiladora who struggled for many hours, putting the cables and the parts of the appliance together, and they barely paid her a pittance of money, and she lives far away from work and spends a lot on the trip, and, in addition, she runs the risk of being kidnapped, raped and killed as happens in Ciudad Juárez in Mexico.

So we see merchandise in the market, but we do not see the exploitation with which it was made. And then capitalism needs many markets...or a very large market, a world market.

And so the capitalism of today is not the same as before, when the rich were content with exploiting the workers in their own countries, but now they are on a path which is called Neoliberal Globalization. This globalization means that they no longer control the workers in one or several countries, but the capitalists are trying to dominate everything all over the world. And the world, or

Planet Earth, is also called the "globe", and that is why they say "globalization," or the entire world.

And neoliberalism is the idea that capitalism is free to dominate the entire world, and so tough, you have to resign yourself and conform and not make a fuss, in other words, not rebel. So neoliberalism is like the theory, the plan, of capitalist globalization. And neoliberalism has its economic, political, military and cultural plans. All of those plans have to do with dominating everyone, and they repress or separate anyone who doesn't obey so that his rebellious ideas aren't passed on to others.

Then, in neoliberal globalization, the great capitalists who live in the countries which are powerful, like the United States, want the entire world to be made into a big business where merchandise is produced like a great market. A world market for buying and selling the entire world and for hiding all the exploitation from the world. Then the global capitalists insert themselves everywhere, in all the countries, in order to do their big business, their great exploitation.

Then they respect nothing, and they meddle wherever they wish. As if they were conquering other countries. That is why we zapatistas say that neoliberal globalization is a war of conquest of the entire world, a world war, a war being waged by capitalism for global domination. Sometimes that conquest is by armies who invade a country and conquer it by force. But sometimes it is with the economy, in other words, the big capitalists put their money into another country or they lend it money, but on the condition that they obey what they tell them to do. And they also insert their ideas, with the capitalist culture which is the culture of merchandise, of profits, of the market.

Then the one which wages the conquest, capitalism, does as it wants, it destroys and changes what it does not like and eliminates what gets in its way. For example, those who do not produce nor buy nor sell modern merchandise get in their way, or those who rebel against that order. And they despise those who are of no use to them. That is why the indigenous get

in the way of neoliberal capitalism, and that is why they despise them and want to eliminate them. And neoliberal capitalism also gets rid of the laws which do not allow them to exploit and to have a lot of profit.

They demand that everything can be bought and sold, and, since capitalism has all the money, it buys everything. Capitalism destroys the countries it conquers with neoliberal globalization, but it also wants to adapt everything, to make it over again, but in its own way, a way which benefits capitalism and which doesn't allow anything to get in its way. Then neoliberal globalization, capitalism, destroys what exists in these countries, it destroys their culture, their language, their economic system, their political system, and it also destroys the ways in which those who live in that country relate to each other. So everything that makes a country a country is left destroyed.

Then neoliberal globalization wants to destroy the nations of the world so that only one Nation or country remains, the country of money, of capital. And capitalism wants everything to be as it wants, in its own way, and it doesn't like what is different, and it persecutes it and attacks it, or puts it off in a corner and acts as if it doesn't exist.

Then, in short, the capitalism of global neoliberalism is based on exploitation, plunder, contempt and repression of those who refuse. The same as before, but now globalized, worldwide.

But it is not so easy for neoliberal globalization, because the exploited of each country become discontented, and they will not say well, too bad, instead they rebel. And those who remain and who are in the way resist, and they don't allow themselves to be eliminated. And that is why we see, all over the world, those who are being screwed over making resistances, not putting up with it, in other words, they rebel, and not just in one country but wherever they abound. And so, as there is a neoliberal globalization, there is a globalization of rebellion.

And it is not just the workers of the countryside and of the city who appear in this globalization of

rebellion, but others also appear who are much persecuted and despised for the same reason, for not letting themselves be dominated, like women, young people, the indigenous, homosexuals, lesbians, transsexual persons, migrants and many other groups who exist all over the world but who we do not see until they shout *ya basta* of being despised, and they raise up, and then we see them, we hear them, and we learn from them.

And then we see that all those groups of people are fighting against neoliberalism, against the capitalist globalization plan, and they are struggling for humanity.

And we are astonished when we see the stupidity of the neoliberals who want to destroy all humanity with their wars and exploitations, but it also makes us quite happy to see resistances and rebellions appearing everywhere, such as ours, which is a bit small, but here we are. And we see this all over the world, and now our heart learns that we are not alone.

IV - How We See Our Country Which is Mexico

Now we will talk to you about how we see what is going on in our Mexico. What we see is our country being governed by neoliberals. So, as we already explained, our leaders are destroying our nation, our Mexican Patria. And the work of these bad leaders is not to look after the well-being of the people, instead they are only concerned with the well-being of the capitalists. For example, they make laws like the Free Trade Agreement, which end up leaving many Mexicans destitute, like campesinos and small producers, because they are "gobbled up" by the big agro-industrial companies. As well as workers and small businesspeople, because they cannot compete with the large transnationals who come in without anybody saying anything to them and even thanking them, and they set their low salaries and their high prices. So some of the economic foundations of our Mexico, which were the countryside and industry and

national commerce, are being quite destroyed, and just a bit of rubble - which they are certainly going to sell off - remains.

And these are great disgraces for our Patria. Because food is no longer being produced in our countryside, just what the big capitalists sell, and the good lands are being stolen through trickery and with the help of the politicians. What is happening in the countryside is the same as Porfirismo, but, instead of hacendados, now there are a few foreign businesses which have well and truly screwed the campesino. And, where before there were credits and price protections, now there is just charity...and sometimes not even that.

As for the worker in the city, the factories close, and they are left without work, or they open what are called *maquiladoras*, which are foreign and which pay a pittance for many hours of work. And then the price of the goods the people need doesn't matter, whether they are expensive or cheap, since there is no money. And if someone was working in a small or midsize business, now they are not, because it was closed, and it was bought by a big transnational. And if someone had a small business, it disappeared as well, or they went to work clandestinely for big businesses which exploit them terribly, and which even put boys and girls to work.

And if the worker belonged to his union in order to demand his legal rights, then no, now the same union tells him he will have to put up with his salary being lowered or his hours or his benefits being taken away, because, if not, the business will close and move to another country. And then there is the "microchango," which is the government's economic program for putting all the city's workers on street corners selling gum or telephone cards. In other words, absolute economic destruction in the cities as well.

And then what happens is that, with the people's economy being totally screwed in the countryside as well as in the city, then many Mexican men and women have to leave their Patria, Mexican lands, and go to seek work in

another country, the United States. And they do not treat them well there, instead they exploit them, persecute them and treat them with contempt and even kill them. Under neoliberalism which is being imposed by the bad governments, the economy has not improved. Quite the opposite, the countryside is in great need, and there is no work in the cities. What is happening is that Mexico is being turned into a place where people are working for the wealth of foreigners, mostly rich gringos, a place you are just born into for a little while, and in another little while you die. That is why we say that Mexico is dominated by the United States.

Now, it is not just that. Neoliberalism has also changed the Mexican political class, the politicians, because they made them into something like employees in a store, who have to do everything possible to sell everything and to sell it very cheap. You have already seen that they changed the laws in order to remove Article 27 from the Constitution so that *ejidal* and communal lands could be sold. That was Salinas de Gortari, and he and his gangs said that it was for the good of the countryside and the campesino, and that was how they would prosper and live better. Has it been like that?

The Mexican countryside is worse than ever and the campesinos more screwed than under Porfirio Diaz. And they also say they are going to privatize - sell to foreigners - the companies held by the State to help the well-being of the people. Because the companies don't work well and they need to be modernized, and it would be better to sell them. But, instead of improving, the social rights which were won in the revolution of 1910 now make one sad...and courageous. And they also said that the borders must be opened so all the foreign capital can enter, that way all the Mexican businesses will be fixed, and things will be made better. But now we see that there are not any national businesses, the foreigners gobbled them all up, and the things that are sold are worse than the those that were made in Mexico.

And now the Mexican politicians also want to sell PEMEX, the oil which

belongs to all Mexicans, and the only difference is that some say everything should be sold and others that only a part of it should be sold. And they also want to privatize social security, and electricity and water and the forests and everything, until nothing of Mexico is left, and our country will be a wasteland or a place of entertainment for rich people from all over the world, and we Mexican men and women will be their servants, dependent on what they offer, bad housing, without roots, without culture, without even a Patria.

So the neoliberals want to kill Mexico, our Mexican Patria. And the political parties not only do not defend it, they are the first to put themselves at the service of foreigners, especially those from the United States, and they are the ones who are in charge of deceiving us, making us look the other way while everything is sold, and they are left with the money. All the political parties that exist right now, not just some of them. Think about whether anything has been done well, and you will see that no, nothing but theft and scams. And look how all the politicians always have their nice houses and their nice cars and luxuries. And they still want us to thank them and to vote for them again. And it is obvious, as they say, that they are without shame. And they are without it because they do not, in fact, have a Patria, they only have bank accounts.

And we also see that drug trafficking and crime has been increasing a lot. And sometimes we think that criminals are like they show them in the songs or movies, and maybe some are like that, but not the real chiefs. The real chiefs go around very well dressed, they study outside the country, they are elegant, they do not go around in hiding, they eat in good restaurants and they appear in the papers, very pretty and well dressed at their parties. They are, as they say, "good people", and some are even officials, deputies, senators, secretaries of state, prosperous businessmen, police chiefs, generals.

Are we saying that politics serves no purpose? No, what we mean is that THAT politics serves no purpose. And it is useless because it does not take

the people into account. It does not listen to them, it does not pay any attention to them, it just approaches them when there are elections. And they do not even want votes anymore, the polls are enough to say who wins. And then just promises about what this one is going to do and what the other one is going to do, then it's bye, I'll see you, but you don't see them again, except when they appear in the news when they've just stolen a lot of money and nothing is going to be done to them because the law - which those same politicians made - protects them.

Because that's another problem, the Constitution is all warped and changed now. It's no longer the one that had the rights and liberties of working people. Now there are the rights and liberties of the neoliberals so they can have their huge profits. And the judges exist to serve those neoliberals, because they always rule in favor of them, and those who are not rich get injustice, jails and cemeteries.

Well, even with all this mess the neoliberals are making, there are Mexican men and women who are organizing and making a resistance struggle.

And so we found out that there are indigenous, that their lands are far away from us here in Chiapas, and they are making their autonomy and defending their culture and caring for their land, forests and water.

And there are workers in the countryside, campesinos, who are organizing and holding their marches and mobilizations in order to demand credits and aid for the countryside.

And there are workers in the city who do not let their rights be taken away or their jobs privatized. They protest and demonstrate so the little they have isn't taken away from them and so they don't take away from the country what is, in fact, its own, like electricity, oil, social security, education.

And there are students who don't let education be privatized and who are fighting for it to be free and popular and scientific, so they don't charge, so everyone can learn, and so they don't

teach stupid things in schools.

And there are women who do not let themselves be treated as an ornament or be humiliated and despised just for being women, but who are organizing and fighting for the respect they deserve as the women they are.

And there are young people who don't accept their stultifying them with drugs or persecuting them for their way of being, but who make themselves aware with their music and their culture, their rebellion.

And there are homosexuals, lesbians, transsexuals and many ways who do not put up with being ridiculed, despised, mistreated and even killed for having another way which is different, with being treated like they are abnormal or criminals, but who make their own organizations in order to defend their right to be different.

And there are priests and nuns and those they call laypeople who are not with the rich and who are not resigned, but who are organizing to accompany the struggles of the people.

And there are those who are called social activists, who are men and women who have been fighting all their lives for exploited people, and they are the same ones who participated in the great strikes and workers' actions, in the great citizens' mobilizations, in the great campesino movements, and who suffer great repression, and who, even though some are old now, continue on without surrendering, and they go everywhere, looking for the struggle, seeking justice, and making leftist organizations, non-governmental organizations, human rights organizations, organizations in defense of political prisoners and for the disappeared, leftist publications, organizations of teachers or students, social struggle, and even political-military organizations, and they are just not quiet and they know a lot because they have seen a lot and lived and struggled.

And so we see in general that in our country, which is called Mexico, there are many people who do not put up with things, who do not surrender,

who do not sell out. Who are dignified. And that makes us very pleased and happy, because with all those people

it's not going to be so easy for the neoliberals to win, and perhaps it will be possible to save our Patria from the

great thefts and destruction they are doing. And we think that perhaps our "we" will include all those rebellions...

Zapatistas: What we intend to do now (parts 1 & 2 of the 6th Declaration of the Selva Lacandona)

19 June 2005, by **EZLN**



This is our simple word which seeks to touch the hearts of humble and simple people like ourselves, but people who are also, like ourselves, dignified and rebel. This is our simple word for recounting what our path has been and where we are now, in order to explain how we see the world and our country, in order to say what we are thinking of doing and how we are thinking of doing it, and in order to invite other persons to walk with us in something very great which is called Mexico and something greater which is called the world.

This is our simple word in order to inform all honest and noble hearts what it is we want in Mexico and the world. This is our simple word, because it is our idea to call on those who are like us and to join together with them, everywhere they are living and struggling.

I - What We Are

We are the zapatistas of the EZLN, although we are also called "neo-zapatistas." Now, we, the zapatistas of the EZLN, rose up in arms in January of 1994 because we saw how widespread had become the evil wrought by the powerful who only humiliated us, stole from us, imprisoned us and killed us, and no one was saying anything or doing anything. That is why we said "Ya Basta!," that no longer were we going

to allow them to make us inferior or to treat us worse than animals.

And then we also said we wanted democracy, liberty and justice for all Mexicans although we were concentrated on the Indian peoples. Because it so happened that we, the EZLN, were almost all only indigenous from here in Chiapas, but we did not want to struggle just for own good, or just for the good of the indigenous of Chiapas, or just for the good of the Indian peoples of Mexico.

We wanted to fight along with everyone who was humble and simple like ourselves and who was in great need and who suffered from exploitation and thievery by the rich and their bad governments here, in our Mexico, and in other countries in the world.

And then our small history was that we grew tired of exploitation by the powerful, and then we organized in order to defend ourselves and to fight for justice. In the beginning there were not many of us, just a few, going this way and that, talking with and listening to other people like us.

We did that for many years, and we did it in secret, without making a stir. In other words, we joined forces in silence. We remained like that for about 10 years, and then we had grown, and then we were many thousands. We trained ourselves quite well in politics and weapons, and, suddenly, when the rich were throwing their New Year's Eve parties, we fell upon their cities and just took

them over.

And we left a message to everyone that here we are, that they have to take notice of us. And then the rich took off and sent their great armies to do away with us, just like they always do when the exploited rebel - they order them all to be done away with. But we were not done away with at all, because we had prepared ourselves quite well prior to the war, and we made ourselves strong in our mountains.

And there were the armies, looking for us and throwing their bombs and bullets at us, and then they were making plans to kill off all the indigenous at one time, because they did not know who was a zapatista and who was not. And we were running and fighting, fighting and running, just like our ancestors had done. Without giving up, without surrendering, without being defeated.

And then the people from the cities went out into the streets and began shouting for an end to the war. And then we stopped our war, and we listened to those brothers and sisters from the city who were telling us to try to reach an arrangement or an accord with the bad governments, so that the problem could be resolved without a massacre. And so we paid attention to them, because they were what we call "the people," or the Mexican people. And so we set aside the fire and took up the word.

And it so happened that the governments said they would indeed

be well-behaved, and they would engage in dialogue, and they would make accords, and they would fulfill them. And we said that was good, but we also thought it was good that we knew those people who went out into the streets in order to stop the war.

Then, while we were engaging in dialogue with the bad governments, we were also talking with those persons, and we saw that most of them were humble and simple people like us, and both, they and we, understood quite well why we were fighting. And we called those people "civil society" because most of them did not belong to political parties, rather they were common, everyday people, like us, simple and humble people.

But it so happened that the bad governments did not want a good agreement, rather it was just their underhanded way of saying they were going to talk and to reach accords, while they were preparing their attacks in order to eliminate us once and for all. And so then they attacked us several times, but they did not defeat us, because we resisted quite well, and many people throughout the world mobilized. And then the bad governments thought that the problem was that many people saw what was happening with the EZLN, and they started their plan of acting as if nothing were going on.

Meanwhile they were quick to surround us, they laid siege to us in hopes that, since our mountains are indeed remote, the people would then forget, since zapatista lands were so far away. And every so often the bad governments tested us and tried to deceive us or to attack us, like in February of 1995 when they threw a huge number of armies at us, but they did not defeat us. Because, as they said then, we were not alone, and many people helped us, and we resisted well.

And then the bad governments had to make accords with the EZLN, and those accords were called the "San Andrés Accords" because the municipality where those accords were signed was called "San Andrés." And we were not all alone in those dialogues, speaking with people from

the bad governments.

We invited many people and organizations who were, or are, engaged in the struggle for the Indian peoples of Mexico, and everyone spoke their word, and everyone reached agreement as to how we were going to speak with the bad governments. And that is how that dialogue was, not just the zapatistas on one side and the governments on the other. Instead, the Indian peoples of Mexico, and those who supported them, were with the zapatistas. And then the bad governments said in those accords that they were indeed going to recognize the rights of the Indian peoples of Mexico, and they were going to respect their culture, and they were going to make everything law in the Constitution.

But then, once they had signed, the bad governments acted as if they had forgotten about them, and many years passed, and the accords were not fulfilled at all. Quite the opposite, the government attacked the indigenous, in order to make them back out of the struggle, as they did on December 22, 1997, the date on which Zedillo ordered the killing of 45 men, women, old ones and children in the town in Chiapas called ACTEAL.

This immense crime was not so easily forgotten, and it was a demonstration of how the bad governments color their hearts in order to attack and assassinate those who rebel against injustices. And, while all of that was going on, we zapatistas were putting our all into the fulfillment of the accords and resisting in the mountains of the Mexican southeast.

And then we began speaking with other Indian peoples of Mexico and their organizations, and we made an agreement with them that we were going to struggle together for the same thing, for the recognition of indigenous rights and culture.

Now we were also being helped by many people from all over the world and by persons who were well respected and whose word was quite great because they were great intellectuals, artists and scientists from Mexico and from all over the world. And we also held international

encuentros. In other words, we joined together to talk with persons from America and from Asia and from Europe and from Africa and from Oceania, and we learned of their struggles and their ways, and we said they were "intergalactic" encuentros, just to be silly and because we had also invited those from other planets, but it appeared as if they had not come, or perhaps they did come, but they did not make it clear.

But the bad governments did not keep their word anyway, and then we made a plan to talk with many Mexicans so they would help us. And then, first in 1997, we held a march to Mexico City which was called "of the 1,111" because a *compañero* or *compañera* was going to go from each zapatista town, but the bad government did not pay any attention.

And then, in 1999, we held a consulta throughout the country, and there it was seen that the majority were indeed in agreement with the demands of the Indian peoples, but again the bad governments did not pay any attention.

And then, lastly, in 2001, we held what was called the "march for indigenous dignity" which had much support from millions of Mexicans and people from other countries, and it went to where the deputies and senators were, the Congress of the Union, in order to demand the recognition of the Mexican indigenous.

But it happened that no, the politicians from the PRI, the PAN and the PRD reached an agreement among themselves, and they simply did not recognize indigenous rights and culture. That was in April of 2001, and the politicians demonstrated quite clearly there that they had no decency whatsoever, and they were swine who thought only about making their good money as the bad politicians they were.

This must be remembered, because you will now be seeing that they are going to say they will indeed recognize indigenous rights, but it is a lie they are telling so we will vote for them. But they already had their chance, and they did not keep their word.

And then we saw quite clearly that there was no point to dialogue and negotiation with the bad governments of Mexico. That it was a waste of time for us to be talking with the politicians, because neither their hearts nor their words were honest. They were crooked, and they told lies that they would keep their word, but they did not. In other words, on that day, when the politicians from the PRI, PAN and PRD approved a law that was no good, they killed dialogue once and for all, and they clearly stated that it did not matter what they had agreed to and signed, because they did not keep their word.

And then we did not make any contacts with the federal branches. Because we understood that dialogue and negotiation had failed as a result of those political parties. We saw that blood did not matter to them, nor did death, suffering, mobilizations, consultas, efforts, national and international statements, encuentros, accords, signatures, commitments. And so the political class not only closed, one more time, the door to the Indian peoples, they also delivered a mortal blow to the peaceful resolution - through dialogue and negotiation - of the war. It can also no longer be believed that the accords will be fulfilled by someone who comes along with something or other. They should see that there so that they can learn from experience what happened to us.

And then we saw all of that, and we wondered in our hearts what we were going to do.

And the first thing we saw was that our heart was not the same as before, when we began our struggle. It was larger, because now we had touched the hearts of many good people. And we also saw that our heart was more hurt, it was more wounded. And it was not wounded by the deceits of the bad governments, but because, when we touched the hearts of others, we also touched their sorrows. It was as if we were seeing ourselves in a mirror.

II. - Where We Are

Now

Then, like the zapatistas we are, we thought that it was not enough to stop engaging in dialogue with the government, but it was necessary to continue on ahead in the struggle, in spite of those lazy parasites of politicians. The EZLN then decided to carry out, alone and on their side ("unilateral", in other words, because just one side), the San Andrés Accords regarding indigenous rights and culture. For 4 years, since the middle of 2001 until the middle of 2005, we have devoted ourselves to this and to other things which we are going to tell you about.

Fine, we then began encouraging the autonomous rebel zapatista municipalities - which is how the peoples are organized in order to govern and to govern themselves - in order to make themselves stronger. This method of autonomous government was not simply invented by the EZLN, but rather it comes from several centuries of indigenous resistance and from the zapatistas' own experience.

It is the self-governance of the communities. In other words, no one from outside comes to govern, but the peoples themselves decide, among themselves, who governs and how, and, if they do not obey, they are removed. If the one who governs does not obey the people, they pursue them, they are removed from authority, and another comes in.

But then we saw that the Autonomous Municipalities were not level. There were some that were more advanced and which had more support from civil society, and others were more neglected. The organization was lacking to make them more on a par with each other. And we also saw that the EZLN, with its political-military component, was involving itself in decisions which belonged to the democratic authorities, "civilians" as they say. And here the problem is that the political-military component of the EZLN is not democratic, because it is an army. And we saw that the military being above, and the democratic below, was not good, because what is democratic should not be decided

militarily, it should be the reverse: the democratic-political governing above, and the military obeying below.

Or, perhaps, it would be better with nothing below, just completely level, without any military, and that is why the zapatistas are soldiers so that there will not be any soldiers. Fine, what we then did about this problem was to begin separating the political-military from the autonomous and democratic aspects of organization in the zapatista communities. And so, actions and decisions which had previously been made and taken by the EZLN were being passed, little by little, to the democratically elected authorities in the villages.

It is easy to say, of course, but it was very difficult in practice, because many years have passed - first in the preparation for the war and then the war itself - and the political-military aspects have become customary. But, regardless, we did so because it is our way to do what we say, because, if not, why should we go around saying things if we do not then do them.

That was how the Good Government Juntas were born, in August of 2003, and, through them, self-learning and the exercise of "govern obeying" has continued.

From that time and until the middle of 2005, the EZLN leadership has no longer involved itself in giving orders in civil matters, but it has accompanied and helped the authorities who are democratically elected by the peoples. It has also kept watch that the peoples and national and international civil society are kept well informed concerning the aid that is received and how it is used.

And now we are passing the work of safeguarding good government to the zapatista support bases, with temporary positions which are rotated, so that everyone learns and carries out this work. Because we believe that a people which does not watch over its leaders is condemned to be enslaved, and we fought to be free, not to change masters every six years.

The EZLN, during these 4 years, also handed over to the Good Government

Juntas and the Autonomous Municipalities the aid and contacts which they had attained throughout Mexico and the world during these years of war and resistance. The EZLN had also, during that time, been building economic and political support which allowed the zapatista communities to make progress with fewer difficulties in the building of their autonomy and in improving their living conditions. It is not much, but it is far better than what they had prior to the beginning of the uprising in January of 1994.

If you look at one of those studies the governments make, you will see that the only indigenous communities which have improved their living conditions - whether in health, education, food or housing - were those which are in zapatista territory, which is what we call where our villages are. And all of that has been possible because of the progress made by the zapatista villages and because of the very large support which has been received from good and noble persons, whom we call "civil societies," and from their organizations throughout the world. As if all of these people have made "another world is possible" a reality, but through actions, not just words.

And the villages have made good progress. Now there are more *compañeros* and *compañeras* who are learning to govern. And - even though little by little - there are more women going into this work, but there is still a lack of respect for the *compañeras*, and they need to participate more in the work of the struggle. And, also through the Good Government Juntas, coordination has been improved between the Autonomous Municipalities and the resolution of problems with other organizations and with the official authorities.

There has also been much improvement in the projects in the communities, and the distribution of projects and aid given by civil society from all over the world has become more level. Health and education have improved, although there is still a good deal lacking for it to be what it should be. The same is true for housing and food, and in some areas

there has been much improvement with the problem of land, because the lands recovered from the *finqueros* are being distributed.

But there are areas which continue to suffer from a lack of lands to cultivate. And there has been great improvement in the support from national and international civil society, because previously everyone went wherever they wanted, and now the Good Government Juntas are directing them to where the greatest need exists. And, similarly, everywhere there are more *compañeros* and *compañeras* who are learning to relate to persons from other parts of Mexico and of the world.

They are learning to respect and to demand respect. They are learning that there are many worlds, and that everyone has their place, their time and their way, and therefore there must be mutual respect between everyone.

We, the zapatistas of the EZLN, have devoted this time to our primary force, to the peoples who support us. And the situation has indeed improved some. No one can say that the zapatista organization and struggle has been without point, but rather, even if they were to do away with us completely, our struggle has indeed been of some use.

But it is not just the zapatista villages which have grown - the EZLN has also grown. Because what has happened during this time is that new generations have renewed our entire organization. They have added new strength. The *comandantes* and *comandantas* who were in their maturity at the beginning of the uprising in 1994 now have the wisdom they gained in the war and in the 12 years of dialogue with thousands of men and women from throughout the world.

The members of the CCRI, the zapatista political-organizational leadership, is now counseling and directing the new ones who are entering our struggle, as well as those who are holding leadership positions. For some time now the "committees" (which is what we call them) have been preparing an entire new

generation of *comandantes* and *comandantas* who, following a period of instruction and testing, are beginning to learn the work of organizational leadership and to discharge their duties.

And it also so happens that our insurgents, *insurgentas*, militants, local and regional responsables, as well as support bases, who were youngsters at the beginning of the uprising, are now mature men and women, combat veterans and natural leaders in their units and communities. And those who were children in that January of '94 are now young people who have grown up in the resistance, and they have been trained in the rebel dignity lifted up by their elders throughout these 12 years of war.

These young people have a political, technical and cultural training that we who began the zapatista movement did not have. This youth is now, more and more, sustaining our troops as well as leadership positions in the organization. And, indeed, all of us have seen the deceptions by the Mexican political class and the destruction which their actions have caused in our patria. And we have seen the great injustices and massacres that neoliberal globalization causes throughout the world. But we will speak to you of that later.

And so the EZLN has resisted 12 years of war, of military, political, ideological and economic attacks, of siege, of harassment, of persecution, and they have not vanquished us. We have not sold out nor surrendered, and we have made progress. More *compañeros* from many places have entered into the struggle so that, instead of making us weaker after so many years, we have become stronger. Of course there are problems which can be resolved by more separation of the political-military from the civil-democratic. But there are things, the most important ones, such as our demands for which we struggle, which have not been fully achieved.

To our way of thinking, and what we see in our heart, we have reached a point where we cannot go any further, and, in addition, it is possible that we

could lose everything we have if we remain as we are and do nothing more in order to move forward. The hour has come to take a risk once again and to take a step which is dangerous but which is worthwhile. Because, perhaps united with other social sectors who suffer from the same wants as we do, it will be possible to achieve what we

need and what we deserve. A new step forward in the indigenous struggle is only possible if the indigenous join together with workers, campesinos, students, teachers, employees...the workers of the city and the countryside.

(To be continued...)

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.

Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee - General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Mexico, in the sixth month of the year 2005.

translated by irlandesa

Battles for peace

16 June 2005, by Pierre Rousset

The Revolutionary Workers' Party of Mindanao (RPM-M) is the section of the Fourth International in the Philippines. It is particularly well established on this southern island, the second biggest in the archipelago, having come from a regional split in the Mao-Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

Mindanao is an "economic frontier": the multinationals have their sights on its agricultural, forestry and mining wealth. In the name of antiterrorism, this is where the United States has chosen to intervene in order to justify the return of its troops to the archipelago: they have made a convenient target of the Muslim organizations.



Philippines president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo salutes the military

Our comrades of the RPM-M are well established in the centre, west and southwest of the island, where there live together the "three peoples": the Moros ("Muslims"), Lumad ("indigenous peoples") and the descendants of the Christian settlers who came from other regions of the Philippines. That is also the area where the militarization of the country is most serious.

The army and the paramilitaries, under the aegis of the United States,

confront the units of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Lumad self-defence forces and the communist guerrillas. The RPM-M is intervening at the heart of a zone of conflict, where the question of war and peace is permanently posed.

Philippine society is welcoming and Filipinos are kind people. But the relations of power can be extremely violent. In some places, the very Christian son of a landowner can assassinate a peasant leader, emasculate him and then feed his brains to the pigs. But you will still find in his hacienda a reproduction of the grotto of Lourdes!

To go from the town of Iligan to Cotabato City is to take a curious tourist route. Military checkpoints are omnipresent. As we go round a bend in the road, my guide, a clandestine comrade of the RPM-M, tells me that the head of an administrative department died here, victim of an ambush. Everyone suspects his deputy, who had designs on his job. Further on the tree trunks are riddled with bullet marks: there was a fierce battle between the army and the troops of the MILF.

On the outskirts of an urban area an Irish priest was killed while resisting a gang of kidnappers. In the town, a bus shelter also has traces of bullets: drug traffickers and soldiers had a shoot-out here. Armed violence is present in all its forms.

Peace negotiations

The RPM-M is engaged in peace negotiations with the government. But the negotiations are bogged down. In 2002, one of the camps of the Revolutionary People's Army (RPA) was even bombed and occupied by the army. There is not agreement on the content of the negotiations.

The RPM-M demands that the protection of the environment be dealt with. The government refuses. This question concerns the rights of the Lumad: their entire cultural and social life is bound up with the forests. But in the region of Upi, forestry and mining companies, as well as agro-industry, are encroaching on their ancestral domains.

The RPM-M cannot accept that the rights of indigenous peoples are ignored by the negotiators. To deal with the situation, it organized a conference in mid-May with representatives of non-governmental and popular organizations. It explained what was at stake in the negotiations, the reasons why they were blocked, and called for people to mobilize.

The fact is that for the RPM-M, the negotiations cannot be reduced to a closed discussion between politico-military organizations, governments and general staffs. The population, which is directly concerned, must put forward its demands. It is, for

example, out of the question to decide in the place of the Lumad what would be the conditions of an acceptable peace in their ancestral territories.

This approach does not only concern the negotiations that have been engaged in by the RPM-M. Our comrades are deeply involved in the organization of a broad, united front peace movement in the whole island. This involves in particular building a consensus between communities on the right of self-determination for the Moros.

The negotiations between the MILF and Manila are entering into a very political phase. Banners hung across the streets of Cotabato City called on the population, in the name of the Central Committee of the MILF, to take part in a massive rally at the end of May to show their support for the armed organization. Other banners denounced the US presence.

Solidarities

One of the risks at present is that the negotiations between the government and the MILF will not take into account the existence within the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) of Lumad communities. The Philippine regime is applying the old doctrine of "divide and rule".

Our comrades, on the contrary, are constantly seeking to build solidarities, to put forward proposals that are capable of responding simultaneously to the rights of the "three peoples" of the island. This objective structures their entire intervention. Wherever possible, the mass organizations must include members of the various communities.

To bring aid to victims of military conflicts or of natural disasters, Christians will be sent to the Moros and Moros to the Lumad. Work among

women in the Muslim communities is difficult, but the Moros who join the RPM-M must have assimilated this dimension (in addition, a large part of the political work of our comrades is led by women members).

As a mark of solidarity, young people from all over the island will soon be taking part, in the region of Upi, in a summer camp (inspired by the European experience, in which Filipinos regularly participate).

We come here to one of the most interesting features of the activity of the RPM-M: how to build, in a zone of armed conflicts, links of solidarity between different communities, in order to avoid a situation where the rights of each of them would be expressed independently of the others, so that the popular struggles converge instead of being in competition with each other.



Hopes and Limitations of the Popular Forces

13 June 2005, by Jeffery R Webber

Jeffery R Webber's article published below was written on the eve of the resignation of President Carlos Mesa and the promise to call new elections. Since May 23 the popular movement spearheaded by indigenous people from the Alto Plano and especially the vast shanty town of El Alto, had blockaded La Paz and other major cities, in protest at the new gas law. While many of the rank and file demanded nothing less than the nationalization of the gas industry, Evo Morales - indigenous leader and the leader of the MAS (Movement towards Socialism) - called instead for royalties and taxes to be substantially raised to 50%.

With the country paralysed, a decisive move had to be made by the political representatives of the bourgeoisie in

Congress.

For a short time, between the resignation of Carlos Mesa on 8 June and the Congress meeting in Sucre on the evening of 9 June, it seemed that the Senators around the right wing parties, in particularly the now spectacularly mis-named MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) and MNR (National Revolutionary Movement) might choose Congress president and right-wing businessman Hormando Vaca Diez as the new state President.

Since this would have been totally unacceptable to the insurgent popular movement, it would probably have signified an attempt to use generalised repression to smash the popular forces off the streets. In the event the much more intelligent

choice (from the view of the ruling class) of Eduardo Sanchez, president of the Supreme Court and apparently a political "neutral."



Photo: Bolivia Indymedia

The reaction of the El Alto militant leaders was to say that only nationalization of the gas and oil would be sufficient. However this line was impossible to hold. Within 24 hours there was a recognition that after two and a half weeks of constant mobilization, the first round of the second gas war was over.

Attention will probably now shift to the electoral front, and the MAS will attempt a final push to elect Evo

Morales as president - something that they failed to do by only 1.5% in 2002.

For the Bolivian ruling class, hopelessly wedded to the multinationals and neoliberalism, the election of Evo Morales would pose great dangers. Would he become another Hugo Chavez, or perhaps another Lula?

In any case it seems likely that the Bolivian right wing will try to find a credible candidate around whom they can unite against Morales. The foreign policy and security professionals in Washington are certainly debating such concerns.

At the same time it should be remembered that relations between Evo Morales and the most militant sections of the popular movement are strained over the nationalization question - Morales was booed at some of the popular assemblies in la Paz at the height of the movement.

The first phase of this second gas war is part of a rising curve of struggle, which has seen movements of the coca farmers rising up against the violence of the American-backed 'war on drugs' in the late 1990s; the spectacular mobilisation in 2001-2 over the attempt to privatise the water supply in Cochabamba into the hands of the multinational corporations; the bringing down of Sánchez de Lozada during the first gas war; and now this tremendous mobilization which has brought down a second president.

In the past seven years the poor coca farmers, the ultra-exploited workers and above all the poverty-stricken indigenous people of the freezing Alto Plano have stood up, found their voice and fought back against neoliberalism in one of the most unequal countries in the most unequal of continents. They will not be easily defeated, nor give up their basic demands that the natural wealth of the country should be in the hands of the people, not in the hands of wealthy foreign corporations and their collaborators in the ultra-wealthy Bolivian elite.

Hopes and Limitations of the Popular Forces

By Jeffery R Webber

In what has become near ritualistic behavior, President Carlos Mesa Gisbert appeared on television at 9:30pm Monday, June 6, 2005 to address the nation with his latest dramatic gesture. He is apparently resigning.

On March 6, 2005 he announced his first revocable "resignation" on television, denouncing various social movements that were blockading the country, and citing the necessity of following every dictate of imperial power, from the World Bank, to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to the United States Embassy, among many others. There was no other choice according to Mesa's logic. His role as President was to take their orders, and if some crazy Indians had different notions about how Bolivia ought to be run, well they didn't understand the way "democracy" works these days.

A few weeks later, faced with further mobilizations by popular forces and demands from the far Right to crush heads, Mesa called for moving the presidential elections forward, then set for 2007. In both cases, the necessary approval of Congress was not forthcoming, as Mesa predicted. "The Colonial President," as Luis Tapia recently referred to him as, was able to continue in power, increasingly governing from the Right.

However, popular forces wouldn't let their agenda slide from the face of politics after over seventy were killed in the "Gas War" of October 2003. In that struggle Gonzalo ("Goni") Sánchez de Lozada was removed from power, leaving Mesa - then vice-president - in his place.



Evo Morales

Mesa's mandate derived from his promise to carry through the "October Agenda," understood by the mobilized masses to mean (i) the nationalization of hydrocarbons (especially natural gas), (ii) the convocation of a Constituent Assembly to remake the Bolivian state in the interests of the poor indigenous majority, and (iii) a trial of responsibilities for Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada for the crimes he and his closest cronies committed during October 2003.

Mesa failed to carry through the October Agenda, and 2005 has thus far been a year of steadily increasing popular mobilization. Most recently, the "Second Gas War" began on May 16, 2005 with a large march of organizations descending from El Alto to La Paz, led by the Federation of United Neighbors of El Alto (FEJUVE-El Alto). On the same day, a number of peasant-indigenous organizations joined a four-day march from Caracollo to La Paz under the banner of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party, led by Evo Morales.

The demands from El Alto were clearly more radical: nationalization of gas; closing of the Parliament; and the resignation of Carlos Mesa for selling out the October Agenda. The MAS-led march demanded fifty percent well-head royalties to be paid by the transnational petroleum companies to the Bolivian state, instead of the law that passed on March 17 with Mesa's de facto approval, which stipulates only eighteen percent royalties and a thirty-two percent direct hydrocarbons tax. The latter will be easily manipulated by the transnationals, according to critics.

The MAS-led marchers, the various popular organizations from El Alto, the Aymara peasants from the twenty provinces of the department of La Paz, and the miners all began to converge on the capital by May 23, 2005. Since then, the capital has been the scene of dynamite clashes with the states police, and eventually military, forces, and the continual dosing of downtown with copious amounts of tear gas and

rubber bullets. In the final days leading up to Mesa's latest "resignation," that capital was crippled by gas shortages, inflationary prices on basic food products, and water shortages in some neighborhoods.

On June 5, 2005 between four and five hundred thousand protesters took to the streets in La Paz. Standing in the Plaza of Heroes, one could not see the end of the masses in any direction, in any of the surrounding streets. La Paz was occupied, and Mesa was forced to make his televised appearance that evening.

According to the Constitution, because Mesa did not explicitly state that his resignation was "irrevocable," it needs to be approved by Congress, which unlike in March is likely to happen. The hated Right-wing President of Congress, Hormando Vaca D  ez, is next in line constitutionally to assume

the presidency. If he were to refuse, the President of Deputies, Mario Coss  o (a member of Goni's old party the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, MNR) could accept the position. Finally, the President of the Supreme Court of Justice, Eduardo Rodr  guez Veltz   would be the third option if the first two refused.



Funeral of the miner assassinated by the army in Sucre, 9 June. Photo: Bolivia Indymedia.

The latter scenario is that favoured by both the MAS and many of the social movement organizations at the heart of the Second Gas War. An emerging demand is that both Vaca D  ez and Coss  o decline the presidency, allowing for Rodr  guez to assume power and push forward elections.

Still, the field of contention remains unclear, the demands of nationalization and the convening of a Constituent Assembly remain aflame, and the protests continue in the face of Mesa's "resignation."

It is far too early to determine what will transpire. The movement bases are mobilized in incredibly impressive numbers, but lack a coherent political project for state power. The neoliberal state is in crisis, but has persisted against the odds thus far. How the military will respond to each development is also unclear. If the popular-bloc manages to articulate a unified political project beyond mobilization, the consequences will be of massive significance both for Bolivia and Latin America as a whole.

An earlier version of this article appeared in [Against the Current](#)

Find dozens of photos of the movement at [Bolivia Indymedia](#)

Netherlands: A vote against neo-liberalism

10 June 2005, by **Willem Bos**

With turnout at 63%, almost 62% of eligible voters voted against the European constitution. Turnout for this first national referendum in the Netherlands was half again as high as in the last elections for the European parliament in 2004 (when less than 40% of Dutch voters went to the polls). It was higher than in the 2002 municipal elections or the 2003 provincial elections. There were only twenty-odd smaller municipalities with wealthy inhabitants in the country's centre and south where the yes won. Everywhere else no voters were in the majority.

A class vote

The class basis of the no was clear. The less educated voters were, the likelier they were to vote no. Of voters with higher education 51% voted no; of voters with only primary education,

82%; of voters with only secondary education, 72%. The lower voters income as well the likelier they were to vote no. At the highest income levels the no had a narrow majority, while two-thirds of median- and below-median-income voters voted no. Women were also significantly more likely than men to vote no.



Dutch premier Jan Peter Balkenende

In the country's poorest municipality, Reinderland in eastern Groningen, 84.6% voted no. Only one other municipality was more solidly against: the hard-core Protestant fishing village Urk, where 91.6% voted no. The only yes majorities were in a few of the very wealthiest municipalities in the central and southern Netherlands.

The greatest yes majority was in Rozendaal, with 62.7%. In the cities as well the trend was evident: the more prosperous a neighbourhood or borough, the more people voted yes; the poorer it was, the more people voted no.

Among supporters of the social-democratic Labour party, 55% voted against the constitution. Among supporters of the Green Left party, a narrow 52% majority voted yes. Even among voters of the very pro-EU liberal D66 party, 45% voted against. Only among supporters of the ruling Christian Democrats was there a big yes majority: 80%. Among supporters of the right-wing liberal VVD party, almost 40% voted against.

Among parties that called for a no vote, by contrast, the number of yes voters was very limited. Only among supporters of the orthodox Protestant

Christian Union did slightly more than 10% vote yes.

Anti-establishment

The result is all the more remarkable when one bears in mind that the traditional political parties that called for a yes vote - the governing Christian Democrats and liberal VVD and D66, plus the opposition Labour Party and Green Left - between them occupy 85% of the seats in parliament. The only MPs to oppose the constitution represent the Socialist Party (a party of Maoist origin that has grown in recent years to become the biggest political force left of social democracy, with 8 of the 150 seats in parliament), the two small orthodox Protestant parties, the remains of right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn's party, and one maverick right-wing MP who has split from the VVD, Geert Wilders.

In addition virtually the whole of civil society supported the constitution: in any event the leaderships of the trade unions, the biggest environmental organisations, the small and medium employers' association, Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and even the automobile owners' association and development NGOs. Only a very limited number of smaller environmental and animal rights' groups were against.

The outcome reveals not only a looming gap between citizens and politicians, but also a vertical divide in virtually all large social organisations. Their leaderships supported the constitution, while a high proportion of their members rejected it.

The culture of the polder

Understanding this situation requires looking back at political developments in the Netherlands over the past several years. Since the Second World War, Dutch governments have traditionally been coalitions formed around the Christian Democrats, in alliance either with the liberals of the VVD or with the Labour party. The Christian Democrats' hold on power

ended in 1994 when they suffered a spectacular defeat in that year's elections, whereupon a coalition government of liberals and Labour took office.

Under the leadership of former trade-union leader Wim Kok, this coalition carried out major neo-liberal reforms over the course of eight years. One consequence of this 'purple' period (so-called after the mixture of social-democratic red and liberal blue) was a far-reaching de-politicisation.

Political differences among the major parties, particularly between the traditional adversaries of Labour and the VVD, became almost invisible. The culture of consultation and consensus (the 'polder model'), always strong in the Netherlands, covered the political landscape like a suffocating blanket.

With the rise of right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn, this blanket was suddenly snatched off. Fortuyn's crusade against multiculturalism and tolerance for Islam (which he described as a backward religion) rallied middle-class layers who had improved their economic position considerably over the years, and were now ready to lay claim to political influence.

But Fortuyn's breakthrough was due to the fact that he also appealed to many less-educated white Dutch people, whose sense of security had been undermined by the dismantling of the welfare state and liberalisation of the economy. Traditionally these groups had been Labour's property, but now they had completely lost faith in the left.

After Fortuyn's dramatic assassination just before the 2002 elections, Fortuyn's revolt found expression partly in an increased vote for the Christian Democrats led by Jan Peter Balkenende. Balkenende formed a new cabinet with the liberal VVD and initially the remnants of Fortuyn's LPF party, but after a few months of the LPF's inevitable blunders and scandals traded it in for the slightly less right-wing liberals of D66.

This Balkenende cabinet, still in power today, is without a doubt the most

right-wing Dutch cabinet in living memory. Each of the parties taking part in it has moved further to the right - and this is true of the opposition parties as well. The general assumption has been that Fortuyn left behind a political landscape in which all the available political ground to be fought over lay to the right.

Last year however massive protests against the cabinet's pension reform plans showed that reality is not so simple. The trade unions, much weakened in recent years, were forced to mobilise.

To everyone's surprise this led to the biggest trade-union demonstration in Dutch history, which set an estimated half-million people in motion. The political impact of the mobilisation was largely cancelled out when a Muslim extremist murdered filmmaker Theo van Gogh a month later. Once more fears of an Islamic danger determined the face of Dutch politics.

Now however the referendum has shown that there are other issues and a different political approach that can put the Dutch on the move.

The course of the campaign

Before the campaign got under way, approval of the constitution seemed a foregone conclusion. In the first polls roughly 20% was ready to vote yes and only 10% no. Given the overwhelming support from political and social organisations, getting the constitution adopted seemed no problem.

The proposal for a referendum came from three centre-left MPs, who submitted a bill calling for a one-time, non-binding referendum. The government was against, but the bill passed with the support of the ruling right-wing liberal VVD. Support for the referendum was in part an expression of discontent over the adoption of the euro. Although there were calls for a referendum then, at the time there was no parliamentary majority for it.

Frustration about the switch to the

euro and its consequents is still running high and still having an impact. Various politicians reasoned that it was better to hold a referendum in which people could make their voices heard rather than bottling up still more frustrations.

The big miscalculation made by the constitution's supporters was their assumption that overwhelming support from political and social organisations would also win over the population.

In fact the yes campaign derailed early on. Supporters hesitated for a long time before actually beginning to campaign. This had everything to do with divisions within the yes camp and the Balkenende government's unprecedentedly low popularity. Only when the no camp began coming out ahead in the polls did the cabinet feel compelled to play an active role.

They did so in an unusually crude, intimidating way. They dug deep in the treasury in order to finance their own campaign, and their statements seemed designed to browbeat the Dutch into voting yes.

One minister declared that rejecting this constitution would jeopardise peace in Europe. Without any subtlety Auschwitz and Srebrenica were deployed as arguments for a yes. The Dutch were told they would be the laughingstock of Europe if they voted no. Coming from a government with an approval rating of 18%, these arguments only helped the no campaign.

The no camp consisted of four components. The most extreme and dangerous standpoint came from maverick liberal Geert Wilders. As an independent MP he is working hard to establish a new far right political formation and position himself as Pim Fortuyn's successor. His campaign focussed on the dangers of Turkish EU membership and a consequent Muslim takeover of Europe.

The small Protestant parties waged a very different sort of campaign. Except for objecting to the constitution's failure to mention Europe's Judeo-Christian tradition, they had a relatively clean campaign in which they argued that further

European integration makes no sense at this moment and that in any event this constitution is not necessary for it.

The strongest political force in the no camp was undoubtedly the Socialist party, which waged a very active campaign both in the media and on the streets. Their campaign stressed the need to save the Netherlands. This constitution would turn Europe into a superstate and Holland into a province, they argued. They illustrated the concern that the Netherlands might disappear from the map with a map of Europe in which the country literally disappeared into the sea.

Finally there was Comité Grondwet Nee (Constitution No Committee), a small ad hoc alliance of left-wing activists who waged a clear progressive no campaign. Grondwet Nee argued that a different Europe is possible and necessary as an alternative to this, undemocratic, neo-liberal and militarist Europe.

Despite its small size and very limited resources, Grondwet Nee played a considerable role in the campaign and clearly contributed to the visibility of a left no, preventing the no camp from being dominated by right-wing nationalism.

Which no won?

Of course all sorts of motives, intermixed with each other, played a role in the victory for no: widely shared aversion to government policy, and to politicians in general; opposition to constant interference from Brussels; fears of loss of national identity; Christian and nationalist motives; and intense irritation at the arrogance of the yes camp. It is difficult to judge which elements were decisive and which no won.

It is clear in any event that Wilders and his anti-Turkish, anti-Muslim campaign did not play a predominant role. There is also a quite broad consensus that this was not an anti-European campaign, but rather a campaign against the way the existing European functions.

A fair picture can be distilled from a

survey done barely a week after the vote. The survey showed that a week later the no majority would have been even bigger, 64%. The shifts in support for different political parties in the campaign's wake give a pretty good picture of its impact. The big loser is apparently not the right but Labour, which declined in the polls from 50 MPs before the campaign to 41 now.

Today 70% of Labour voters would vote against the constitution. The biggest winner is the SP, rising in the polls from 13 to 21 seats. The Christian Union grows from 6 seats to 9, while Wilders' party loses a seat. Questions about the popularity of different politicians confirm the overall picture.

In general the outcome can be interpreted as an unambiguous rejection of the neo-liberal project, and that the left in particular has made its mark with the campaign.

Consequences of the no victory

The referendum's outcome will have far-reaching consequences. First, after the double no in France and Holland this constitution is clearly as dead as a doornail. Second, the outcome will have major consequences for Dutch politics. The left has a chance now to take new initiatives in the discussion on Europe. Grondwet Nee's proposal to convene a national convention, which would hold a democratic discussion about the future of Europe and the place of the Netherlands in it, has not evoked an immediate response.

The parliament has however passed an SP motion for a broad social discussion on Europe. It is not yet clear what form the discussion will take, but in any case we will have to fight to ensure that it does not become a pointless talking-shop, and that the proposals that come out of it are submitted to the people for approval in a referendum.

It is also important that initiatives be taken on a European level to hold discussions and arrive at common positions on Europe's future.

Lack of synchronicity among the debates and the press of time made the referendum campaigns very much national campaigns. In the coming months there are possibilities for deciding on joint international initiatives, with rejection of this constitution as the starting point. The European Social Forum is one place where this could happen.

After the experience of this first

national referendum, it seems likely that the referendum tool will be used on other occasions. This obviously makes it very important to fight for genuinely democratic referenda, in which advocates and opponents are given an equal chance and the government cannot make unrestricted use of public revenues for its own campaign.

Third, the legitimacy and

representativeness of many political parties and social organisations in the yes camp is now subject to question. Calling for a vote for the constitution, unembarrassedly avoiding any internal discussion, and then finding out that your own base is against should be a problem for any serious organisation. The discussions that will doubtless break out in many organisations should create more space for critical left-wing ideas.

Caravan in solidarity with Tamassint inhabitants

7 June 2005, by **Our Correspondent**

The march they organised on 19 May 2005 was violently put down and the town of Tamassint was surrounded by repressive forces. This is why an emergency mobilisation was set up to break the inhabitants' isolation.

A solidarity caravan organised by the El Hoceima section of the AMDH [1] alongside democratic, trade union and political associations coming from Casablanca, Agadir, Tata, Tetouan, Tanger, Nador, Targuiste and Al Hoceima journeyed to Tamassint on 28 and 29 May, 2005.

Tamassint

Tamassint is 30 km from Al Hoceima; its 15,000 inhabitants of Tamassint and douars scattered in the mountains (Zaouiat Sidi Issa, Aghlide, Idadouchen, AÃ't Aziz, AÃ't El Cadi,) have eked out a living from subsistence farming on small family plots and a few almond trees.

The region suffers droughts and water shortages. Infrastructures such as roads and hospitals are inadequate.



Tamassint is the village of Haddou

Akchich, a combatant of the North African Liberation Army under the leadership of Mohamed Abdelkrim Khatabi. Refusing the Aix-les-Bains accords signed in 1956, viewing them as merely formal independence of Morocco, Haddou Akchich and his companions continued the struggle for the independence of all North Africa.

Tamassint remained a stronghold of resistance for the continuation of this struggle. In 1957, the village was circled by the army and its population massacred. Haddou Akchich was carried off in 1957 and disappeared.

This region was hard-hit by the Rif events in 1957-58. The army stepped in and many local people were killed, kidnapped and arrested. Terror and violence remain in the forefront of the inhabitants' memory...

After the earthquake

After the earthquake that shook the Rif region on 24 February 2004, Tamassint and the surrounding villages were particularly hard-hit. The lack of infrastructures, such as roads, water and electricity made this region a difficult to reach enclave. The population did not benefit from the

emergency assistance that was hard to transport.

Young people in the region, many of them unemployed, organised in an association to demand state aid and reconstruction of decent housing. They refused the aid grant of 30000 dirhams, seeing the sum as inadequate for reconstruction. They also demanded a census of all damaged dwellings.

Throughout the entire year, they organised sit-ins on the weekly market day, to demand their rights and voice their protest. The authorities proposed no dialogue. The association was outlawed and the sit-ins subjected to strong police surveillance.

Repression - the authorities' only response

After a protest march to Ajdir on 14 April 2005, the co-ordinator of the association and two other people, accused of insults to civil servants and elected officials and of inciting riot and rebellion among the population, were arrested at Tamassint.

Their trial was set for 26 May in Nador. The population organised a

march to protest this outrageous judgement on 19 May, towards Al Hoceima.

From 7am on Thursday 19 May, the inhabitants of Tamassint and the surrounding villages, including women and children, gathered for a march to the town of Al Hoceima.

An impressive police deployment prevented them from continuing their march. The population decided to hold a siege all night if need be. Around 4 p.m., the people took up a collection and sent out for water, bread and milk to continue their sit-in. The police blocked this action.

Faced with the gendarmes' insults and provocations, the inhabitants answered. Tension grew. The police shot blank bullets, the inhabitants responded by volleys of stones.

There were many wounded on both sides and the police squadron's cars and vans were damaged. The state police launched tear gas bombs by helicopter. Two members of the El Hoceima Human Rights Association (Omar Lamalem and Saâd Aachir) were severely beaten, taken off in police cars and let go in the wilderness. They later confirmed that they saw at least 30 injured people and as many arrests among the demonstrators. The gendarmes also insulted the people of the region and their history.

Until 10pm, the rumours grew. The roads were cut off, nobody could get near Tamassint. The only means of communication were cell phones. The population was totally isolated with no reporters or doctors on location.

The police went after the people who had taken shelter in the mountains, searched houses and launched searches for the wanted members of the association.

On Friday 10 May: the police reinforced the ring surrounding the region, cutting the people off with no supplies. Transports to Tamassint were cut off, and schools, shops and cafés were closed.

A sit-in was organised in solidarity with the people of Tamassint by the AMDH at Al Hoceima, despite a strong

contingent of police forces.

Saturday 21 May. Tamassint remained surrounded.

AMDH called for another sit-in at Al Hoceima. Omar Lamalem and Saâd Aachir, who had just been released from hospital, explained to a large and angry crowd what they had seen and been subjected to. They accused the authorities of serious human rights violations, including beatings in police cars...

Moreover, the Wali of Al Hoceima put pressure on the elected representatives to sign a petition breaking with the people's demands and supporting the Tamassint officials. On Sunday 22 May the police cleared out of the mountains but remained in Tamassint

According to the AMDH, the number of casualties and arrests after the events remains unknown. The toll of injured is unknown, and among the 35 people arrested, 9 remain in custody.

The democratic associations support the Tamassint townspeople's demands, namely:

- The right to government reconstruction of decent housing
- A census of all damaged dwellings that had received no state assistance
- Free all people in custody
- An end to prosecutions of 19 May 2005 demonstrators.

Solidarity caravan to break their isolation

On Monday 23 May there was support march in Tangier, and on.

Tuesday 24 May a similar march in Tetouan.

Thursday 26 May was meant to be the day of the sentencing of members of the association in Nador. A rally was called by human rights associations, political and trade union organisations, brought out more than 300 people in front of the Nador courthouse. The sentencing was put off.

On Saturday 28 May, the support demonstration called by the Al Hoceima AMDH was forbidden. The rally outside the AMDH office was closely watched by the police and the demonstrators were blocked in a narrow lane, during the sit in. Representatives of the caravan from Tanger and Tetouan spoke to the crowd and everyone took up the slogans.

Sunday, 29 May, was market day in Tamassint. From 9 am, the members of the caravan were welcomed in the AMDH office at El Hoceima and small groups organised to set off for Tamassint.

Twelve kilometers from Imzouren, we crossed a semi-desert region. There were a few scattered dwellings, unfinished buildings that were concrete proof that the 30,000 dirhams in assistance granted by the State to rebuild houses destroyed by the earthquake were not enough to enable the people to rebuild their dwellings, which remained merely building sites.

One year and a half years after the earthquake, the tents provided are still up, in shreds after the summer heat and last winter's snow and cold wave. All the way along the narrow, bumpy road leading to Tamassint, we encounter the same landscape in ruins.

Gendarmes are still present outside the only grocery shop, the exact spot where the 19 May confrontations broke out, when the police drew back and blocked supplies for the Tamassint people on sit-in.

We arrived in the damaged village of Tamassint, on the town's only dusty square. The members of the caravan were welcomed by the townspeople who had already gathered. "Tamassint resists, long live solidarity" was the first slogan shouted out. It was taken up by activists who had come from Tanger, Tetouan, Nador, Targuist but also more distant towns and cities: Casablanca, Agadir and even Tata [2] .

The activists from the Tamassint association, still wanted and seeking refuge in the mountains, arrived surrounded by children. The slogans

grew louder and the crowd drew closer together. Hami and his comrades were welcomed as heroes. "Neither fear nor repression will stop a popular march". "For shame, their reconciliation through bludgeons".

"The earthquake may be a natural disaster, but our marginalisation is a political choice;" "Record for history, the resistance of the outsiders;" "Continue our resistance, for our right to housing and reconstruction."

"They speak of a state of law, you can see the marginalised population, where are our houses?"; "We demand an end to the siege, rebuilding, freedom for our prisoners"; "Tamassint forgotten and circled, with no housing or amenities".

For several hours the crowd remained in the square, crying out in anger and re-affirming their determination. Small groups of people showed up. The police remained in the distance and did not appear on the scene.

A march went round the village to the marketplace, gathering around 3000 people, then it headed to the centre of the village. A member of the Tamassint association spoke, and slogans rang out. He spoke of the village of Tamassint's struggle and resistance and called for the mobilisation to continue, for an end to the siege, rebuilding, freeing the prisoners.

Then the representatives of the caravan spoke. Firstly, Tetouan, represented by Ahmed M'rabet, originally from the region and who lived for 5 years in Cairo with A. Khatabi. These were impressive words from a man who represented the memories of several generations of struggle, among those who chose to continue A. Khatabi's struggle for their entire lives, without compromise or recanting.

He spoke to the different generations gathered here in front of what remains of one of the commandment posts of the short-lived Rif Republic. Tamassint has always been a bulwark of the resistance of the Rif people. This struggle kept alive by Haddou Akchich remains forceful in Tamassint.

Among the audience we can see the faces of old people marked by years of fear and repression, and youths filled with determination. Ahmed M'rabet, in the name of this historical memory that refuses to be quashed, reminds the crowd that the determination shown by the people of Tamassint only continues this tradition. "Si Mohand [3], we are continuing the struggle", cried out the crowd after his speech.

After the Tanger caravan representative spoke, the people heard from the representative of ATTAC who came from Casablanca to affirm their support and the need to unite struggles to support the demands of the Tamassint people. Then came a representative from Agadir, who recalled that after the Agadir earthquake in 1960, luxury complexes were rebuilt but the marginalised people still live in shantytowns and unsanitary neighbourhoods.

From Tata, a young activist came to express the support of Tata inhabitants, also struggling for the right to health, in this faraway region marginalised and kept on the sidelines, fighting for their basic rights.

From Nador and Targuiste, the demands were raised:

- an end to the surrounding of Tamassint
- freedom for the prisoners [4]
- government reconstruction of decent housing

An Angry Springtime

Morocco is living through an Angry Springtime from the North to the South.

After six trade-unionist mineworkers sentenced to ten years' in prison were freed as a result of a national and international solidarity campaign, after the Tata demonstrations for the right to health, after the demonstrations by the people in Khenifra, by fishermen, the movement against marginalisation in Sidi Ifni and just recently in Laayoun, despite harsh repression by the authorities, nothing

stops the anger of the people pushed to the sidelines, left unemployed, and all the forgotten people of "Morocco from below".

The "useful Morocco" built under the pressure and modelled by neoliberal globalisation has disastrous impacts on the people. And people in the most isolated regions are challenging it. From the North to the South, basic demands are being raised by the population.

Fifty years after independence, the people still lack housing, health care, education, infrastructures and amenities. They have only received repression, terror, marginalisation: street children, illiteracy, unemployed graduates, candidates for clandestine passages to Spain in small boats, repudiated women in the streets. What little public services exist have been privatised and challenges are raised to labour law, education undergoes "reforms", and trade-union freedoms are curtailed.

Despite this, political and trade union organisations have not fulfilled their duty to resist and to support struggles. This casts discredit on so-called civil society associations, often corrupt and venial, promoting a sham democracy.

The grumblings of an angry spring can be heard. A new generation is appearing everywhere, demanding to speak out and struggle on its own, and no longer trusting in empty slogans and endless oratory from corrupt and powerless leaders. The springtime of the Morocco from below is raising its voice from Tamassint to Laayoun, from the North to the South, from Ajdir to Agadir.

30 May 2005

Send emails and faxes in protest before 9 June to the following addresses:

The Prime Minister:
courrier@pm.gov.ma Fax n°
037768656

The Minister of Justice:
courrier@mj.gov.ma Fax n° : 212
037723710

The Minister of the Interior:

Pascal Lamy - bad news for poor

6 June 2005, by **Damien Millet, Éric Toussaint, Juan Tortosa**

With this appointment, populations which have been subjected to neoliberalism for more than 25 years will not see any shift in policies forcibly imposed by multilateral institutions. On the contrary, Pascal Lamy's victory against the three candidates from the South for the WTO general directorship will inevitably mean yet another turn of the screw to the advantage of global finance and multinational companies.



This brash liberal-socialist is a former member of the executive committee of the French Socialist Party, while fervently defending the market creed. He was Jacques Delors' main collaborator at the European Commission and helped to make it a powerful neoliberal engine.

He was one of the senior managers of the French bank Crédit Lyonnais responsible for its privatisation and made his name between 1999 and 2004 as a particularly arrogant European Commissioner for Trade, scorning the interests of the most vulnerable populations. Finally, he is an Officer of the Order of Merit in Gabon, which interestingly shows he has made a place for himself in French-African networks.

His election, to be confirmed on 26 May, is a new step in the strengthening of the US and EU hold on international institutions. It is to be

added to a long and very significant series: the election of Rodrigo Rato (former Spanish Finance Minister in the José Maria Aznar administration) as the IMF manager in April 2004; the election of Ann Veneman (former Agriculture Minister in the Bush administration) as the head of UNICEF in January 2005; the election of Paul Wolfowitz (former US Defence Ministry number two) as head of the World Bank (WB) in March 2005.

The few members from Southern countries to achieve such positions are also perfectly moulded in the neoliberal model: Supachai Panitchpakdi, from Thailand, left the WTO for the UN Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Kemal Dervis, the former WB official and ultraliberal former Turkish Minister of Economy, has just been appointed at the head of the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

With such a close mesh of key positions at the international level, the global net in which common goods, public services and populations are trapped is going to further tighten. Pascal Lamy said that his main priority will be to swiftly conclude the Doha Round negotiations started in November 2001, against which hundreds of social movements mobilized around the world.

While the production of generic drugs is severely restricted, an agreement permitting the importation of these generic products was

obtained by poor countries in August 2003. However, this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that, following pressure from big pharmaceutical companies, these imports are only authorised after a long and restrictive procedure, making the drugs inaccessible for most Third World countries.



And as though this were not bad enough, in March 2005, under the pressure of the WTO, India, the leading producer of generic drugs for AIDS, adopted a very restrictive patent reform, which makes it illegal to copy patented drugs and will dramatically increase the price of AIDS drugs available in Southern countries, preventing millions of patients from accessing these drugs.

It is in this context that the CADTM demands the withdrawal of the Doha Agenda, the suppression of the Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement, the abrogation of the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS), and more generally, the end of structural adjustment policies imposed through the debt mechanism by the International Money Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the WTO, to the benefit of very few. It is time to put an end to this disastrous logic whose failure to advance human development has been amply demonstrated.

[List of actions at G8 Scotland Summit](#)

Marxism and Religion

6 June 2005, by **Michael Löwy**

Is religion still, as Marx and Engels saw it in the nineteenth century, a bulwark of reaction, obscurantism and conservatism? To a large extent, the answer is yes. Their view still applies to many Catholic institutions, to the fundamentalist currents of the main confessions (Christian, Jewish or Muslim), to most evangelical groups (and their expression in the so-called "Electronic Church") and to the majority of the new religious sects - some of which, such as the notorious Moon Church, are nothing but a skilful combination of financial manipulations, obscurantist brain-washing and fanatical anti-communism.

Liberation Theology

However, the emergence of revolutionary Christianity and Liberation Theology in Latin America (and elsewhere) opens a new historical chapter and raises exciting new questions which cannot be answered without a renewal of the Marxist analysis of religion, the subject of this article.

The well-known phrase that religion is the "opiate of the people" is considered as the quintessence of the Marxist conception of the religious phenomenon by most of its supporters and its opponents. How far is this an accurate viewpoint?



First of all, one should emphasize that this statement is not at all specifically Marxist. The same phrase can be found, in various contexts, in the writings of German philosophers Kant, Herder, Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, Moses Hess and Heinrich Heine. For instance, in his essay on Ludwig Börne

(1840), Heine already uses it in a rather positive (although ironical) way: "Welcome be a religion that pours into the bitter chalice of the suffering human species some sweet, soporific drops of spiritual opium, some drops of love, hope and faith."

Moses Hess, in his essays published in Switzerland in 1843, takes a more critical (but still ambiguous) stand: "Religion can make bearable...the unhappy consciousness of serfdom...in the same way as opium is of good help in painful diseases."

Hegel

The expression appeared shortly afterwards in Marx's article on the German philosopher Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1844). An attentive reading of the paragraph where this phrase appears, reveals that it is more qualified and less one-sided than usually believed. Although obviously critical of religion, Marx takes into account the dual character of the phenomenon: "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of an unspiritual situation. It is the opiate of the people."

If one reads the whole essay, it appears clearly that Marx's viewpoint owes more to left neo-Hegelianism, which saw religion as the alienation of the human essence, than to Enlightenment philosophy, which simply denounced it as a clerical conspiracy. In fact when Marx wrote the above passage he was still a disciple of Feuerbach, and a neo-Hegelian. His analysis of religion was therefore "pre-Marxist," without any class reference, and rather ahistorical. But it had a dialectical quality, grasping the contradictory character

of the religious "distress": both a legitimization of existing conditions and a protest against it.

It was only later, particularly in *The German Ideology* (1846), that the proper Marxist study of religion as a social and historical reality began. The key element of this new method for the analysis of religion is to approach it as one of the many forms of ideology - i.e. of the spiritual production of a people, of the production of ideas, representations and consciousness, necessarily conditioned by material production and the corresponding social relations.

Although he uses from time to time the concept of "reflection" - which will lead several generations of Marxists into a sterile side-track - the key idea of the book is the need to explain the genesis and development of the various forms of consciousness (religion, ethics, philosophy, etc) by the social relations, "by which means, of course, the whole thing can be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another)."

After writing, with Engels, *The German Ideology*, Marx paid very little attention to religion as such, i.e. as a specific cultural/ideological universe of meaning. One can find, however, in the first volume of *Capital*, some interesting methodological remarks; for instance, the well-known footnote where he answers to the argument according to which the importance of politics in the Ancient times, and of religion in the Middle-Age reveal the inadequacy of the materialist interpretation of history: "Neither could the Middle-Age live from Catholicism, nor Antiquity from politics. The respective economic conditions explain, in fact, why Catholicism there and politics here played the dominant role."

Marx will never bother to provide the

economic reasons for the importance of medieval religion, but this passage is quite important, because it acknowledges that, under certain historical circumstances, religion can indeed play a decisive role in the life of a society.

In spite of his general lack of interest in religion, Marx paid attention to the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism. Several passages in *Capital* make reference to the contribution of Protestantism to the early emergence of capitalism-for instance by stimulating the expropriation of Church property and communal pastures.

Protestantism

In the *Grundrisse* he makes - half a century before German sociologist Max Weber's famous essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* the following illuminating comment on the intimate association between Protestantism and capitalism: "The cult of money has its asceticism, its self-denial, its self-sacrifice-economy and frugality, contempt for mundane, temporal and fleeting pleasures; the chase after the eternal treasure. Hence the connection between English Puritanism or Dutch Protestantism and money-making." The parallel (but not identity!) with Weber's thesis is astonishing - the more so since Weber could not have read this passage (the *Grundrisse* was published for the first time in 1940).

On the other hand, Marx often referred to capitalism as a "religion of daily life" based on the fetishism of commodities. He described capital as "a Moloch that requires the whole world as a due sacrifice," and capitalist progress as a "monstrous pagan god, that only wanted to drink nectar in the skulls of the dead."

His critique of political economy is peppered with frequent references to idolatry: Baal, Moloch, Mammon, the Golden Calf and, of course, the concept of "fetish" itself. But this language has rather a metaphorical than a substantial meaning in terms of the sociology of religion.

Engels

Engels displayed a much greater interest than Marx in religious phenomena and their historic role. Engels' main contribution to the Marxist study of religions is his analysis of the relationship of religious representations to class struggle. Over and beyond the philosophical polemic of "materialism against idealism" he was interested in understanding and explaining concrete social and historical forms of religion. Christianity no longer appeared (like in Feuerbach) as a timeless "essence", but as a cultural system undergoing transformations in different historical periods: first as a religion of the slaves, later as the state ideology of the Roman Empire, then tailored to feudal hierarchy and finally adapted to bourgeois society. It thus appears as a symbolic space fought over by antagonistic social forces-for instance, in the sixteenth century, feudal theology, bourgeois Protestantism and plebeian heresies.

Occasionally his analysis slips towards a narrowly utilitarian, instrumental interpretation of religious movements: "each of the different classes uses its own appropriate religion... and it makes little difference whether these gentlemen believe in their respective religions or not."



Salvadorean marchers carry banner of Archbishop Oscar Romero, assassinated by the death squads, San Salvador 1980

Engels seems to find nothing but the "religious disguise" of class interests in the different forms of belief. However, thanks to his class-struggle method, he realized-unlike the Enlightenment philosophers - that the clergy was not a socially homogeneous body: in certain historical conjunctures, it divided itself according to its class composition. Thus during the Reformation, we have on the one side the high clergy, the feudal summit of the hierarchy, and on the other, the lower clergy, which supplied the ideologues of the Reformation and of the revolutionary

peasant movement.

While being a materialist, an atheist and an irreconcilable enemy of religion, Engels nevertheless grasped, like the young Marx, the dual character of the phenomenon: its role in legitimating established order, but also, according to social circumstances, its critical, protesting and even revolutionary role. Furthermore, most of the concrete studies he wrote concerned the rebellious forms of religion.

Primitive Christianity

First of all he was interested in primitive Christianity, which he defined as the religion of the poor, the banished, the damned, the persecuted and oppressed. The first Christians came from the lowest levels of society: slaves, free people who had been deprived of their rights and small peasants who were crippled by debts.

He even went so far as to draw an astonishing parallel between this primitive Christianity and modern socialism: a) the two great movements are not the creation of leaders and prophets-although prophets are never in short supply in either of them-but are mass movements; b) both are movements of the oppressed, suffering persecution, their members are proscribed and hunted down by the ruling authorities; c) both preach an imminent liberation from slavery and misery.

To embellish his comparison Engels, somewhat provocatively, quoted a saying of the French historian Renan: "If you want to get an idea of what the first Christian communities where like, take a look at a local branch of the International Workingmen's Association" (the multi-national network of working-class organizations formed in 1864, also known as the First International).

According to Engels, the parallel between socialism and early Christianity is present in all movements that dream, throughout the centuries, to restore the primitive Christian religion-from the Taborites

of John Zizka and the anabaptists of Thomas Münzer to (after 1830) the French revolutionary com-munists and the partisans of the German utopian com-munist Wilhelm Weitling.

There remains, however, in the eyes of Engels, an essential difference between the two movements: the primitive Christians transposed deliverance to the hereafter whereas socialism places it in this world.

Thomas Münzer

But is this difference as clear-cut as it appears at first sight? In his study of the great peasant wars in Germany it seems to become blurred: Thomas Münzer, the theologian and leader of the revolutionary peasants and heretic (anabaptist) plebeians of the 16th century, wanted the immediate establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God, the millenarian Kingdom of the prophets. According to Engels, the Kingdom of God for Münzer was a society without class differences, private property and state authority independent of, or foreign to, the members of that society. However, Engels was still tempted to reduce religion to a stratagem: he spoke of Münzer's Christian "phraseology" and his biblical "cloak". The specifically religious dimension of Münzerian millenarianism, its spiritual and moral force, its authentically experienced mystical depth, seem to have eluded him.

Engels does not hide his admiration for the German Chiliastic prophet, whose ideas he describes as "quasi-communist" and "religious revolutionary": they were less a synthesis of the plebeian demands from those times than "a brilliant anticipation" of future proletarian emancipatory aims. This anticipatory and utopian dimension of religion-not to be explained in terms of the "reflection theory" -is not further explored by Engels but is intensely and richly worked out (as we shall see later) by Ernst Bloch.

The last revolutionary movement that was waged under the banner of religion was, according to Engels, the English Puritan movement of the 17th century. If religion, and not materialism, furnished the ideology of

this revolution, it is because of the politically reactionary nature of this philosophy in England, represented by Hobbes and other partisans of royal absolutism. In contrast to this conservative materialism and deism, the Protestant sects gave to the war against the Stuart royalty its religious banner and its fighters.

This analysis is quite interesting: breaking with the linear vision of history inherited from the Enlightenment, Engels acknowledges that the struggle between materialism and religion does not necessarily correspond to the war between revolution and counter-revolution, progress and regression, liberty and despotism, oppressed and ruling classes. In this precise case, the relation is exactly the opposite one: revolutionary religion against absolutist materialism.

European Labour Movement

Engels was convinced that since the French Revolution, religion could no more function as a revolutionary ideology, and he was surprised when French and German communists such as Cabet or Weitling would claim that "Christianity is Communism." He could not predict liberation theology, but, thanks to his analysis of religious phenomena from the viewpoint of class struggle, he brought out the protest potential of religion and opened the way for a new approach-distinct both from Enlightenment philosophy (religion as a clerical conspiracy) and from German neo-Hegelianism (religion as alienated human essence)-to the relationship between religion and society.

Many Marxists in the European labour movement were radically hostile to religion but believed that the atheistic battle against religious ideology must be subordinated to the concrete necessities of the class struggle, which demands unity between workers who believe in God and those who do not. Lenin himself, who very often denounced religion as a "mystical fog", insisted in his article *Socialism and Religion* (1905) that atheism should not be part of the party's

programme because "unity in the really revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class for creation of a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven."

Rosa Luxemburg shared this strategy, but she developed a different and original approach. Although a staunch atheist herself, she attacked in her writings less religion as such than the reactionary policy of the Church in the name of its own tradition. In an essay written in 1905 ("Church and Socialism") she claimed that modern socialists are more faithful to the original principles of Christianity than the conservative clergy of today. Since the socialists struggle for a social order of equality, freedom and fraternity, the priests, if they honestly wanted to implement in the life of humanity the Christian principle "love thy neighbour as thyself", should welcome the socialist movement. When the clergy support the rich, and those who exploit and oppress the poor, they are in explicit contradiction with Christian teachings: they do serve not Christ but the Golden Calf.

The first apostles of Christianity were passionate communists and the Fathers of the Church (like Basil the Great and John Chrysostom) denounced social injustice. Today this cause is taken up by the socialist movement which brings to the poor the Gospel of fraternity and equality, and calls on the people to establish on earth the Kingdom of freedom and neighbour-love. Instead of waging a philosophical battle in the name of materialism, Rosa Luxemburg tried to rescue the social dimension of the Christian tradition for the labour movement.

Ernst Bloch

Ernst Bloch is the first Marxist author who radically changed the theoretical framework - without abandoning the Marxist and revolutionary perspective. In a similar way to Engels, he distinguished two socially opposed currents: on one side the theocratic religion of the official churches, the opiate of the people, a mystifying apparatus at the service of the powerful; on the other the

underground, subversive and heretical religion of the Albigensians, the Hussites, Joachim de Flore, Thomas Münzer, Franz von Baader, Wilhelm Weitling and Leo Tolstoy. However, unlike Engels, Bloch refused to see religion uniquely as a "cloak" of class interests: he explicitly criticized this conception. In its protest and rebellious forms religion is one of the most significant forms of utopian consciousness, one of the richest expressions of the Principle of Hope.

Basing himself on these philosophical presuppositions, Bloch develops a heterodox and iconoclastic interpretation of the Bible-both the Old and the New Testaments-drawing out the *Biblia pauperum* (Bible of the poor) which denounces the Pharaohs and calls on each and everyone to choose either Caesar or Christ.

A religious atheist-according to him only an atheist can be a good Christian and vice-versa-and a theologian of the revolution, Bloch not only produced a Marxist reading of millenarianism (following Engels) but also-and this was new-a millenarian interpretation of Marxism, through which the socialist struggle for the Kingdom of Freedom is perceived as the direct heir of the eschatological and collectivist heresies of the past.

Of course Bloch, like the young Marx of the famous 1844 quotation, recognized the dual character of the religious phenomenon, its oppressive aspect as well as its potential for revolt. The first requires the use of what he calls "the cold stream of Marxism": the relentless materialist analysis of ideologies, idols and idolatries. The second one however requires "the warm stream of Marxism," seeking to rescue religion's utopian cultural surplus, its critical and anticipatory force. Beyond any "dialogue," Bloch dreamt of an authentic union between Christianity and revolution, like the one which came into being during the Peasant Wars of the 16th century.

Frankfurt School

Bloch's views were to a certain extent

shared by members of the German radical scholars known as the Frankfurt School. Max Horkheimer considered that "religion is the record of the wishes, nostalgias and indictments of countless generations." Erich Fromm, in his book *The Dogma of Christ* (1930), used Marxism and psychoanalysis to illuminate the Messianic, plebeian, egalitarian and anti-authoritarian essence of primitive Christianity. And the writer Walter Benjamin tried to combine, in a unique and original synthesis, theology and Marxism, Jewish Messianism and historical materialism, class struggle and redemption.

Lucien Goldmann's work *The Hidden God* (1955) is another path-breaking attempt at renewing the Marxist study of religion. Although of a very different inspiration than Bloch, he was also interested in redeeming the moral and human value of religious tradition. The most surprising and original part of his book is the attempt to compare-without assimilating one to another-religious faith and Marxist faith: both have in common the refusal of pure individualism (rationalist or empiricist) and the belief in trans-individual values: God for religion, the human community for socialism.

In both cases the faith is based on a wager - the wager on the existence of God and the Marxist wager on the liberation of humanity-that presupposes risk, the danger of failure and the hope of success. Both imply some fundamental belief which is not demonstrable on the exclusive level of factual judgements.

What separates them is of course the suprahistorical character of religious transcendence: "The Marxist faith is a faith in the historical future that human beings themselves make, or rather that we must make by our activity, a 'wager' in the success of our actions; the transcendence that is the object of this faith is neither supernatural nor transhistorical, but supra-individual, nothing more but also nothing less." Without wanting in any way to "Christianize Marxism" Lucien Goldmann introduced, thanks to the concept of faith, a new way of

looking at the conflictual relationship between religious belief and Marxist atheism.

Marx and Engels thought religion's subversive role was a thing of the past, which no longer had any significance in the epoch of modern class struggle. This forecast was more or less historically confirmed for a century - with a few important exceptions (particularly in France): the Christian socialists of the 1930s, the worker priests of the 1940s, the left-wing of the Christian unions in the 1950s, etc.

But to understand what has been happening for the last thirty years in Latin America (and to a lesser extent also in other continents) around the issue of Liberation Theology we need to integrate into our analysis the insights of Bloch and Goldmann on the utopian potential of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Oppression of women and religious doctrine

What is sorely lacking in these "classical" Marxist discussions on religion is a discussion of the implications of religious doctrines and practices for women. Patriarchy, unequal treatment of women, and the denial of reproductive rights prevail among the main religious denominations - particularly Judaism, Christianity and Islam - and take extremely oppressive forms among fundamentalist currents.

In fact, one of the key criteria for judging the progressive or regressive character of religious movements is their attitude towards women, and particularly on their right to control their own bodies: divorce, contraception, abortion. A renewal of Marxist reflection on religion in the twenty-first century requires us to put the issue of women's rights at the center of the argument.

This article first appeared in [New Socialist](#).

Deepening Brutality of America's War

3 June 2005, by **Phil Hearse**

April was a bad month for the US aim of militarily crushing the resistance fighters. A total of 77 US troops were killed - the most since November's attack on Fallujah - as well as hundreds of Iraqi soldiers and police. According to the US army, insurgent attacks have doubled since early this year. In some places the fighting has turned into Sunni-Shia gun battles, while other Shia fighters have attacked US and British forces. Hundreds have been killed in bomb attacks.

US forces have stepped up their attempts to draw resistance fighters into open battle. In early May thousands of marines launched 'Operation Matador' in Anbar province, the desert region West of Baghdad, in an attempt to find and eliminate fighters, as well as to try to stem the influx of fighters across the Syrian border.



According to the Los Angeles Times: "For seven days, Marines rumbled through desert villages and fought pitched battles against a surprisingly well-co-ordinated enemy. On the first day of the operation, insurgents appeared to be willing to stand their ground and fight the Marines, but U.S. military officials now believe that may have been a tactic to delay U.S. troops from crossing into the Ramana region north of the Euphrates River. This delay, officials said, could have given many of the insurgents time to escape into Syria.

" 'It's an extremely frustrating fight,' said Maj. Steve White, operations director for the 3rd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment. 'Fighting these guys is like picking up water. You're going to lose some every time'.

"A military news release declared the mission a success, saying that U.S. troops had killed more than 125 insurgents. Nine Marines were killed and 40 were wounded during the operation.

"Yet as soon as the operation concluded, the Marines crossed back over the Euphrates River and left no U.S. or Iraqi government presence in the region - generally considered a major mistake in counterinsurgency warfare." [5].

Indiscriminate Bombardment

Local people complained that the Marines had bombarded villages from the air indiscriminately, and they had returned to their homes to find them destroyed. The conclusion many US observers drew is that there are just not enough US troops in the area, or in Iraq as a whole, to successfully thwart a guerrilla war.

Since the beginning of the year American forces have resorted to huge house-to-house sweeps looking for suspected insurgents, particularly in Baghdad and resulting in hundreds being detained. On May 23 thousands of US and allied Iraqi troops swept through suburbs of Baghdad in "Operation Squeeze Play", detaining - according to their figures - 437 people.

According to Tom Lasseter, "Bystanders were also apparently caught up in the dragnet, however. Some Iraqis said that while Operation Squeeze Play took some insurgents off the streets, it's also likely to fuel the same cycle that has hounded the American presence for two years: angering moderate Iraqis while giving insurgents a friendlier environment in which to carry out attacks." [6]

Sectarian Killings and Death Squads

The emergence of fighting in some towns between Sunnis and Shi'as, and an apparent war of tit-for-tat assassinations is lending a sinister new twist to the quagmire. It is clear from the number of bodies which have been discovered that death squads are operating, and it is not clear exactly who they are. According to Mohammad Bazi "The signs of sectarian warfare are everywhere in Iraq these days: clerics assassinated outside their mosques, dozens of execution victims turning up in ditches and car bombers inflicting heavy casualties on the country's Shia Muslim majority.

"Nearly four months after Iraq's election, when millions of Iraqis defied insurgent threats by voting for a new parliament, sectarian violence now threatens to drag the country into civil war. Most victims so far have been Shias targeted by Sunni insurgents. But the recent discoveries throughout Iraq of more than 50 bodies - men from both sects, apparently abducted and executed - highlight a new problem: a wave of retaliatory killings between Sunnis and Shias." [7]

At the beginning of the year the US was considering putting in place an assassination programme to try to eliminate insurgency leaders. According to former UN arms inspector Scott Ritter; "... the Pentagon is considering the organisation, training and equipping of so-called death squads, teams of Iraqi assassins who would be used to infiltrate and eliminate the leadership of the Iraqi resistance.

"Called the Salvador Option, in reference to similar US-backed death squads that terrorised the population of El Salvador during the 1980s, the

proposed plan actually has as its roots the Phoenix assassination programme undertaken during the Vietnam war, where American-led assassins killed thousands of known or suspected Vietcong collaborators.

"Perhaps it is a sign of the desperation felt inside the Pentagon, or an underscoring of the ideological perversity of those in charge, that the US military would draw upon the failed programmes of the past to resolve an insoluble problem of today." [8]

If the US was operating assassination squads or secretly assisting them, it would not be the first time in Iraq. According to Ritter: "The Salvador Option would not be the first embrace of assassination as a tool of occupation undertaken by the United States in Iraq.

"In the months following Paul Bremer's taking over of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in June 2003, the streets of Baghdad crawled with scores of assassination squads.

"Among the more effective and brutal of these units were those drawn from the Badr Brigade, the armed militia of the Shia political party known as the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI. Although not publicly acknowledged, the role played by the various anti-Saddam militias in confronting the residual elements of Saddam's former ruling Ba'ath Party offered a glimpse into what was, and is, an unspoken element of the US policy regarding de-Ba'athification - let the Iraqis do the dirty work.

"SCIRI's efforts to exterminate Ba'ath Party remnants still loyal to Saddam Hussein, or who stand accused of committing crimes against SCIRI or its sympathisers, attracted the attention of the "black" side of the CPA-run de-Baathification efforts - covert operations run by the CIA and elite Special Operations units of the United States military. Of all the various players in this deadly game, the Badr militia stood out as the most willing and able to take the fight to the Baathist holdouts. Tipped off by the CPA's covert operatives, the Badr assassination squads killed dozens of

Baathists in and around Baghdad."

Brutal Colonial War

Now the US has decided to swamp Baghdad with troops to try to make insurgent bomb attacks more difficult. Operation Lightning aims at the permanent deployment of 40,000 US and Iraqi troops around the city.

Overall then, while constructing a provisional government the US is following the classical path taken in brutal colonial wars - in Aden, Kenya, Algeria, Vietnam and many other places - of responding to unresolved insurgency by drastically increasing violence and repression, which becomes ever more indiscriminate and punishes the civilian population more and more.



Nothing more demonstrates the callousness towards Iraqi civilians than the continuing plight of 200,000-plus refugees from the destroyed city of Fallujah, flattened by marines last November. Most remain stuck in pathetic camps, unable to return to their destroyed homes. Jonathan Steele and Dhar Jamail [9] writing in the UK Guardian state: "In the 1930s the Spanish city of Guernica became a symbol of wanton murder and destruction. In the 1990s Grozny was cruelly flattened by the Russians; it still lies in ruins. This decade's unforgettable monument to brutality and overkill is Falluja.."

Anti-war activist Milan Raj, founder of Voices in the Wilderness, has reconstructed a detailed picture of why Fallujah became a key centre of the resistance, and his account is more evidence of the random callousness of US troops. [10]

He argues: "But how did Fallujah become the heart of the Iraqi insurgency? For the answer we must turn back to the events of April 2003, when US troops entered the peaceful city of Fallujah and occupied the local secondary school. Local people angry about the US occupation, and

demanding the re-opening of the school, demonstrated outside the school on the evening of 28 April, nearly three weeks after the fall of the regime. US soldiers fired on the crowd, killing 13 civilians immediately.

"This is the same number of civilians as was killed by British soldiers in Derry in Northern Ireland on Bloody Sunday in 1972. The Fallujah massacre was Iraq's Bloody Sunday, a similarly potent injustice sparking armed resistance. The official US account was that 25 armed civilians, mixed in with the crowd and also positioned on nearby rooftops, fired on the soldiers of the 82nd Airborne, leading to a 'fire-fight'. (BBC News Online, 29 April 2003) Phil Reeves, a reporter for the Independent on Sunday, conducted a careful independent investigation and concluded that the official story was a 'highly implausible version of events'.

"Despite the atrocity that had been visited on them, the people of Fallujah continued to protest nonviolently. A demonstration was held on 30 April, two days after the school massacre.

"During the protest, US troops shot dead two more unarmed demonstrators. No US soldiers were injured or killed, despite claims that they had been fired on first. Reporters from the British Daily Mirror were six feet from the US soldier who opened fire on the demonstrators. A young boy 'hurled a sandal at the US jeep-with a M2 heavy machine gun post on the back-as it drove past in a convoy of other vehicles.' The soldier in charge of the machine gun ducked down, 'then pressed his thumb on the trigger' to unleash a 20-second burst of automatic fire at 'a crowd of 1,000 unarmed people.'

"...After two Bloody Sundays in three days, the people of Fallujah turned decisively to violence. Khalaf Abed Shebib, a tribal leader in Falluja, said a few days later, 'People are ready to die in this battle.' Two days after 30 April massacre a local imam had had to call off a demonstration after seeing protesters stuffing hand grenades into their pockets."

Worldwide Gulag

After detailed investigations by numerous journalists and human rights organisations a detailed picture of the US worldwide network of detention and torture is emerging. It is increasingly based on secret detention facilities in Afghanistan, but according to the US lawyers organisation Human Rights First [11], in addition to Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay there are at least 22 detention facilities in Iraq, one confirmed and two suspected centres in the US itself, two in Pakistan, a CIA interrogation centre in Jordan and probably some kind of detention and interrogation facility at the US base on the British-owned island of Diego Garcia. According to Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark [12] "The floating population of 'ghost detainees', according to US and UK military officials, now exceeds 10,000.

"What has been glimpsed in Afghanistan is a radical plan to replace Guantánamo Bay. When that detention centre was set up in January 2002, it was essentially an offshore gulag - beyond the reach of the US constitution and even the Geneva conventions. That all changed in July 2004. The US supreme court ruled that the federal court in Washington had jurisdiction to hear a case that would decide if the Cuban detentions were in violation of the US constitution, its laws or treaties.

"The military commissions, which had been intended to dispense justice to the prisoners, were in disarray, too. No prosecution cases had been prepared and no defence cases would be readily offered as the US National Association of Criminal Defence Lawyers had described the commissions as unethical, a decision backed by a federal judge who ruled in January that they were "illegal". Guantánamo was suddenly bogged down in domestic lawsuits. It had lost its practicality. So a global prison network built up over the previous three years, beyond the reach of American and European judicial process, immediately began to pick up the slack. The process became explicit last week when the Pentagon announced that half of the 540 or so

inmates at Guantánamo are to be transferred to prisons in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia....

"Prisoner transports crisscross the country (Afghanistan) between a proliferating network of detention facilities. In addition to the camps in Gardez, there are thought to be US holding facilities in the cities of Khost, Asadabad and Jalalabad, as well as an official US detention centre in Kandahar, where the tough regime has been nicknamed 'Camp Slappy' by former prisoners. There are 20 more facilities in outlying US compounds and fire bases that complement a major 'collection centre' at Bagram air force base. The CIA has one facility at Bagram and another, known as the 'Salt Pit', in an abandoned brick factory north of Kabul. More than 1,500 prisoners from Afghanistan and many other countries are thought to be held in such jails, although no one knows for sure because the US military declines to comment.

"Anyone who has got in the way of the prison transports has been met with brutal force. Bidar directed us to a small Shia neighbourhood on the edge of town where a multiple killing was still under investigation. Inside a frozen courtyard, a former policeman, Said Sardar, 25, was sat beside his crutches. On May 1 2004, he was manning a checkpoint when a car careened through. 'Inside were men dressed like Arabs, but they were western men,' he said. 'They had prisoners in the car.' Sardar fired a warning shot for the car to stop. 'The western men returned fire and within minutes two US attack helicopters hovered above us. They fired three rockets at the police station. One screamed past me. I saw its fiery tail and blacked out'...

"We have obtained prisoner letters, declassified FBI files, legal depositions, witness statements and testimony from US and UK officials, which document the alleged methods deployed in Afghanistan - shackles, hoods, electrocution, whips, mock executions, sexual humiliation and starvation - and suggest they are practised across the network. Sir Nigel Rodley, a former UN special rapporteur on torture, said, 'The

more hidden detention practices there are, the more likely that all legal and moral constraints on official behaviour will be removed'."

Rendering Suspects for Torture

One of the most sinister aspects of the worldwide system of torture and secret detention is the 'rendering' of suspects to their countries of origin, or third-party states, where they will be tortured. The CIA, using a front company, operates a Gulfstream jet which moves detainees around to different US facilities, or 'renders' them torture to other states.

One of many examples is the following case described by Levy and Scott-Clark of two Egyptian refugees in Sweden, 'rendered' back to their home country at the request of the US: "On December 18 2001, Agiza and a second Egyptian refugee, Mohammed Al-Zery, had been arrested by Swedish intelligence acting upon a request from the US. They were driven, shackled and blindfolded, to Stockholm's Bromma airport, where they were cuffed and cut from their clothes. Suppositories were inserted into both men's anuses, they were wrapped in plastic nappies, dressed in jumpsuits and handed over to an American aircrew who flew them out of Sweden on a private executive jet.

"Agiza and Al-Zery landed in Cairo at 3am the next morning and were taken to the state security investigation office, where they were held in solitary confinement in underground cells. Mohammed Zarai, former director of the Cairo-based Human Rights Centre for the Assistance of Prisoners, told us that Agiza was repeatedly electrocuted, hung upside down, whipped with an electrical flex and hospitalised after being made to lick his cell floor clean."

Amnesty Slams

Bush

George Bush at the end of May denounced the new Amnesty International report *Guantánamo and beyond: The continuing pursuit of unchecked executive power* as absurd. Amnesty said that Guantanamo is the 'new Gulag'. Bush replied that in the future the occupation of Iraq would be seen as the US's "golden moment".

The tone and language of the Amnesty report is almost unprecedented. Despite its unpopularity with repressive governments, Amnesty guards its political neutrality and 'respectability' jealously - indeed these things are precondition for it being able to bring pressure on governments. But on this occasion Amnesty has even been prepared to reply immediately to Bush, accusing him of once again failing to address the issues. Amnesty says

"Guantánamo is only the visible part of the story. Evidence continues to mount that the US operates a network of detention centres where people are held in secret or outside any proper legal framework — from Afghanistan to Iraq and beyond," said Amnesty International.

"US interrogation and detention policies and practices during the 'war on terror', have deliberately and systematically breached the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment. Individuals held in US custody have been transferred for interrogation to countries known to practice torture.

"If President Bush and his administration are serious about freedom and human dignity they should recommit to the rule of law and human rights." Amnesty then call for:

- end all secret and incommunicado detentions;
- grant the International Committee of the Red Cross full access to all detainees including those held in secret locations;
- ensure recourse to the law for all detainees;
- establish a full independent commission of inquiry into all allegations of torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary detentions and "disappearances";
- bring to justice anyone responsible for authorizing or committing human rights violations."

According to Amnesty the US has detained more than 70,000 people during the 'war on terrorism'.

The indefatigable British Middle East commentator Robert Fisk delivered a searing indictment of the whole enterprise in another brilliant article in the UK Independent: [13] "Two years after "Mission Accomplished", whatever moral stature the United States could claim at the end of its invasion of Iraq has long ago been squandered in the torture and abuse and deaths at Abu Ghraib. That the symbol of Saddam Hussein's brutality should have been turned by his own enemies into the symbol of their own brutality is a singularly ironic epitaph for the whole Iraq adventure. We have all been contaminated by the cruelty of the interrogators and the guards and prison commanders.

"How did this culture of filth start in America's "war on terror"? The institutionalised injustice which we have witnessed across the world, the vile American "renditions" in which prisoners are freighted to countries where they can be roasted, electrified or, in Uzbekistan, cooked alive in fat? As Bob Herbert wrote in The New York Times, what seemed mind-

boggling when the first pictures emerged from Abu Ghraib is now routine, typical of the abuse that has 'permeated the Bush administration's operations'.

"With an insurgency growing ever more vicious and uncontrollable, the emptiness of Mr Bush's silly boast is plain. The real mission, it seems, was to institutionalise the cruelty of Western armies, staining us forever with the depravity of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and Bagram - not to mention the secret prisons which even the Red Cross cannot visit and wherein who knows what vileness is conducted. What, I wonder, is our next 'mission'?"

Naomi Klein gives explicit replies to Fisk's rhetorical questions in her recent article on torture. [14] Torture she says is not about getting information, it's about intimidation and control, to strike fear into enemies and potential enemies. "This is torture's true purpose: to terrorize—not only the people in Guantánamo's cages and Syria's isolation cells but also, and more important, the broader community that hears about these abuses.

"Torture is a machine designed to break the will to resist—the individual prisoner's will and the collective will.... the only sensible explanation for torture's persistent popularity comes from a most unlikely source. "Lynndie England, the fall girl for Abu Ghraib, was asked during her botched trial why she and her colleagues had forced naked prisoners into a human pyramid. "As a way to control them," she replied. Exactly. As an interrogation tool, torture is a bust. But when it comes to social control, nothing works quite like torture."



1 June 2005

NO! - from the Left

31 May 2005, by **Murray Smith**

What was also clear, and finally recognised by a media that had been almost uniformly partisan of the "Yes" vote, was that the battle had been won by the "No from the left".

Of course far-right leaders like Jean-Marie Le Pen and Philippe de Villiers were on television claiming victory. But the sociological and political composition of the vote showed that the bulk of the "No" votes didn't come from their supporters.



Among social categories, 81 per cent of manual workers, 79 per cent of the unemployed, 60 per cent of white-collar workers and 56 per cent of "intermediary professions" voted "No". The only categories where the "Yes" was in a majority were executives and intellectual professions (62 per cent), those with a university education (57 per cent) and pensioners (56 per cent).

An analysis of the vote by age group shows that the "No" won by 59 per cent among 18-34 year-olds and 65 per cent among 35-49 year-olds. The "Yes" was only in a majority among those over 65. Politically, 67 per cent of left-wing voters opted for the "No" - almost unanimously among supporters of the Communist Party and the revolutionary Left, but also 59 per cent of Socialist supporters and 64 per cent of Green supporters. And 61 per cent of non-aligned voters voted "No". Only supporters of the two mainstream right-wing parties, the

UMP and the UDF, voted massively (76 per cent) in favour of the Constitution.

If we put the far Right at 15 per cent of the electorate, that means that the other 40 per cent for the "No" came from supporters of the Left and the non-aligned. Questioned on the reasons for their vote, those who voted "No" cited the economic and social situation in France, especially the issue of unemployment, and the "too liberal" character of the treaty.

And 35 per cent of them expressed the hope that the constitutional treaty could be renegotiated. So as the campaigners for a "No from the left" have been saying for months, most people who voted "No" didn't do so because they were chauvinist, anti-European or whatever. They voted against neo-liberalism and its devastating effects in France and in Europe.

The political effects of the vote will be multiple. "Chirac disavowed, Europe destabilised", said the headline in the Monday edition of "Le Monde". Chirac is likely to sack Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, a convenient scapegoat. Raffarin may be replaced by Nicolas Sarkozy, who on television on Sunday night produced the somewhat original analysis that the French people had voted "No" because they wanted even more neo-liberal policies... Which is what they will get if he is nominated. Or Chirac may feel that nominating Sarkozy would be too much of a provocation.

The President himself is now indeed

disavowed and seriously weakened, and it is difficult to see how he can still envisage standing again in the 2007 presidential election. On the left, only the LCR called clearly and unequivocally for Chirac to resign and for the dissolution of Parliament.

But of course not all the losers were on the right. The majority leaderships of the Socialist Party and the Greens were also disavowed by their own supporters, and post-referendum battles in both parties look set to be fierce. Socialist leaders like François Hollande, Dominique Strauss-Kahn and Lionel Jospin who led the "Yes" campaign are unlikely to meekly hand the party over to those like Laurent Fabius, Henri Emmanuelli and Jean-Luc Mélenchon who defended the "No".

On a European level it is not of course "Europe" that has been destabilised but the neo-liberal EU project. And listening to a succession of European leaders of left and right on Sunday night, they gave no signs of drawing any lessons from the defeat. One after the other they came on the screen to reprimand the unruly French and announce that business would go on as usual.

Of course most of them won't have anything as messy as a referendum to contend with, having chosen parliamentary ratification of the treaty. Whatever the defenders of the Constitution say, the French "No" can open up the debate on Europe that hasn't yet taken place in most countries of the EU. The opponents of neo-liberal Europe have a chance to

go on the offensive, not only for the rejection of this Constitution but also for a break with the undemocratic way it was drawn up, and to demand that the peoples of Europe elect constituent assemblies to draw up new proposals. The LCR has called for a European Social Forum to discuss the way forward

In France, on the left, the victory of the "No" opens up new possibilities for building a radical anti-capitalist force. The months of cooperation between militants of different parties and of none, of collaboration with trade unionists and activists of social movements, have created a real dynamic and raised expectations. Discussions have already begun on how to build a force on the left that can break with what in France is called "alternance" - the pattern

whereby governments of left and right alternate regularly, with a high degree of continuity in their neo-liberal policies.



These discussions will certainly continue, no doubt against a background of continuing social resistance to the neo-liberal offensive of Chirac and whoever he names as Prime Minister. What is needed is to build a credible alternative to the social-liberalism that is incarnated by the Socialist Party leadership. In a declaration the day after the referendum, the LCR proposed that the 1,000 committees for a "No from the left" that have mushroomed over the last months continue and work towards a national meeting.

It has also proposed a meeting of the political organisations that helped last autumn to launch the "Appeal of the 200" that was the basis for the committees. Some of the forces involved in the "No" campaign will be tempted to be drawn into a new union of the Left under SP hegemony, to prepare a new "alternance" for 2007.

But that perspective will be combated not only by the LCR but by many other activists, including in the Communist Party, and even by some Socialist Party members. Prospects have never looked better for building a radical anti-capitalist force in France. The coming weeks and months will be decisive.

[Read the LCR declaration on the referendum outcome.](#)

Argentina: Fresh Air, Old Storms

29 May 2005, by **Eduardo Lucita**

The Argentine economy is recovering slowly from the crisis that plunged it into the longest (1998/2002) and perhaps deepest recession of our national history. GDP fell by more than 20% and investment fell by 60%.

Two years of sustained growth of GDP, with annual rates of 8.8% and 9% (2003-2004); employment at its highest levels since 1998 (more than 1,600,000 new jobs created according to the INDEC); a partial restructuring of the foreign debt which led the country to declare the cessation of payments in 2002, although the debt remains US\$145 billion. and a big fiscal surplus (5.8%) are the most eloquent testament to this recovery.



The counterpart to this is a strong commitment to payments over the next 10 years; depressed wages; an unemployment rate of 17%; a large

increase in undeclared work and the precarization of labour. The result is an increasingly regressive distribution of incomes, with the gap between the richest 10% and the poorest 10%, which was 29:1 in 2001, now at 32:1.

With the expansionary cycle of the economy conflicts over the appropriation of social wealth have returned to the forefront of the political scene. This is true both of capital/labour relations - where labour seeks to improve the conditions of sale of its labor power - and of inter-capitalist conflicts, where the different fractions seek to increase their participation in the appropriation of the economic surplus.

The exhaustion of the neoliberal

phase

The return of struggles for the redistribution of income is the result of the lack of synch between economic growth and the evolution of real wages but also of tensions accumulated over the last decade and the modification of relative prices post-devaluation. But there are deeper reasons connected to the logic of the accumulation and reproduction of capital.

The neoliberal phase of capital has exhausted itself even if its effects continue to be felt. This exhaustion is not the result of its failure but on the contrary of its success, or at least the fact that it has achieved most of its proposed objectives: restructuring of productive space and distribution; deregulation of markets; reform of the state and transfer to the private sector of its goods and responsibilities, new conditions for the insertion of the country in the world-wide market and,

above all, for establishing a durable relationship of forces favouring capital.

Like any phase that comes to an end, it augurs the beginning of a new one. The Kirchner government is, among other things, an expression of capital's change of phase. This does not mean any new hopes in the possibilities of a national capitalism, the emergence of native bourgeoisies or still less a conflict of orientation inside the government. [15] But it indicates that the current struggles - conflicts between and within classes - develop on a political-economic scene different from that of the preceding phase.

This scenario cannot be abstracted from the world and regional framework. [16]. On the contrary, they are intimately linked.

The degree of concentration and centralization of capital reached in the long neoliberal phase dominates the whole process, imposing a strong continuity of the economic model based on the export of primary goods. Despite this hegemony it cannot escape the contradictions generated by the capitalist system itself.

One of these contradictions appears already through the inter-capitalist conflict over the economic surplus [17], which we are not able to deal with in this article, while the other is what we will look at here. It is clear that, at least at the moment, these contradictions do not have the virulence of other periods. .

A new cycle of wage struggles

The subject suddenly jumped to page one of all the newspapers in the final months of 2004. The temporal coincidence of conflicts in telephones, the metro and railways, teaching and legal personnel in the province of Buenos Aires was the detonator. For the journalistic vulgate it was about wage struggles, although not all the conflicts had that origin, but the reality is that once again economy and politics are being expressed through trade union action.

It is clear that the government, which needed to give a new boost to internal demand, legitimized this debate and conflict. [18]

In recent meetings with the employers' bodies, the minister of the economy has warned: "Either you give an increase or we will do it by decree". Meanwhile the minister of labour has said "we have gone past the period of negative conflicts, characterized by struggles in defence of jobs, now we are in positive conflicts, that characterize periods of economic growth".

To emphasize the point still more, the President intervened in the telephone conflict to say that "this government is not neutral in the wage struggle, we are in favour of the workers." (See the daily editions of "Clarín" for November and December 2004). This was accompanied by the leaders of the CGT (the traditional trade union federation led by the Peronists) who in various declarations stressed the necessity of wages catching up.

More recently an analysis originating from the Central Bank of the Argentine Republic (BCRA) demonstrates that between 2001 and 2004 prices rose more quickly than wages, that production increased more than employment and thus "there has been a strong increase in the productivity of labour".

The conclusion of the study is very clear: "the significant increase in the gross operating surplus makes it possible that wages could catch up without these increases affecting prices", according to the economic supplement of "Clarín" on March 6, 2005. [19]

For sure these declarations and studies refer to workers in the private sector, protected by collective bargaining (20% of the total workforce) and do not cover workers in the public sector (14% of the total) whose wages are practically frozen. This is an essential variable at the time when the government is calculating the fiscal surplus necessary to meet the commitments made during the restructuring of the foreign debt.

However this does not mean that the

new cycle of wage struggles has been impelled by the government or the CGT. On the contrary it is the structural fall in wages - whose origins go back to the big devaluation of 2002 - sharpened by the steep modification of the exchange rate, which have been the motor and material bases of the demands. In the 2001/2004 period the purchasing power of wages fell on average by 20%, whereas the share of wage-earners in GDP is now barely 20% against 24.3% in 2001. [20] Thus the current dynamic of the process of accumulation and reproduction of capital in the country leads to the systematic deterioration of the distributive equation of incomes and if jobs and wage earners incomes have grown in the last two years, this growth was less than that of GDP. The social reaction was not however immediate.

The "success" of devaluation consisted in the ability of the government to control the banking bloodletting and above all in the fact that the people accepted price increases without big protest movements. It was only recently, when the situation became stabilized and an expansionary cycle of the economy began - maintained fundamentally by agrarian and oil exports, an incipient revival in investment and internal demand coming mainly from the rich and middle sectors - that the wage conflict has come to the surface.

In reality the conflict has become public, because for more than a year conflicts accumulated, often in subterranean and larval form, with the aim of improving the conditions of the sale of labour power. According to reports of the New Majority Centre of Studies, in 2004 there were 244 strikes against 122 in 2003, the majority in the public sector, although in some months strikes were more numerous in the private sector and there was a strong growth in strikes in the services sector.

On the other hand in the most recent period joint negotiations have increased. According to official figures in 2004 236 collective agreements were signed and approved, which represents nearly double the figure for 2003. 63% of agreements related to companies and the rest to branches of

activity. Most of these agreements led to real wage increases and renegotiations of flexible work practices. ("Clarín", December 5, 2004).

Currently more than a hundred collective agreements are being negotiated and the main analysts agree that the tendency to social conflict is growing. They give an explanation for these prognoses: 85% of the five million declared workers have since December 2001 had wage increases lower than inflation ("Clarín", September 5, 2005). Moreover the traditional union leaderships have in 89% of cases signed agreements in which the minimal wage agreed is below the poverty level.

Following these agreements and including the successive increases granted by government decrees, wages are today 20% below their level of 2001. For state employees the deterioration is on average 28% and for non-declared workers it is estimated to be 26%.

The struggle of the metro workers, which had entered an impasse, resumed in mid-January and ended in success. The workers won a wage increase of around 44% for the lowest categories, but also completely bypassed the union bureaucracy and largely surpassed the wage increase limits proposed by the government (around 20%).

This victory by workers whose pay surpasses the national average, as is the case with the metro workers but also those in telephones, has relocated the wage struggle to another level. Until now the reference point was set by the poverty threshold, but now the historical highest value of the family shopping basket has been taken as reference.

This situation has led the government to seek an agreement between the employers (UIA) and the CGT, to put limits on future wage increases and try to channel conflicts into a controlled institutional framework. The leader of the CGT, Hugo Moyano, has said that: "The CGT does not want the wage struggle to go beyond its limits".

New collective leaderships

But the impulse for this new cycle of struggle is not merely economic. We are witnessing the growth, albeit still on a small scale, of a new generation of leaders, whose practices and orientation replace on the agenda the exercise of assembly-based democracy, respect for the decisions of the rank and file and direct action.

With the differences between the cases, this process seems for now circumscribed to some emblematic experiences: the Assembly of Delegates of the Buenos Aires metro; the telephone union in Buenos Aires; some teaching unions and sections, the union of ceramists at Neuquén; the assembly of delegates of the Rio Santiago naval shipyard; some corporative groupings and delegates from sectors or establishments acquiring their first experiences.

In all these cases distinctive characteristics can be observed:

- First, there is a clear generational renewal. The new leaders do not take on their shoulders the weight of the defeats of the previous generation or the weight of nostalgia for lost conquests: That does not mean a rupture of the historical memory of the working class but it means that a significant percentage of workers has entered the labour market in the present conditions of super-exploitation and they have the conviction of "a world to win".

- Secondly, these new leaders are the product of a long and silent work of reconstruction, in some cases quasi-clandestine, of rank and file bodies of our workers' movement - internal commissions, assemblies of delegates, tables of demands or representatives. These bodies express in a very clear manner the capital/labour relationship, which is not mediated by the bureaucratic leaderships and their relations with the State and the successive governments.

- This reconstruction has been influenced by the practices and action of direct democracy experienced from the beginning by the movements of

unemployed workers and the popular assemblies.

- In various conflicts, the new leaders have reappropriated the historic methods of struggle of the workers' movement, like occupation, whether of the strategic centres for the delivery of services (telephones) or terminals (metro) or by the formation OF pickets (railways and metro).

- As the main conflicts have been in the services sector - transport and communications - one of the key elements of success has been the relationship between workers and users of services. This relationship has placed the conflict at a higher level to that of the traditional economism of our trades unionism.

- Finally, these bodies and leaderships are built in the struggle itself, in confrontation with the bosses, the traditional union leaderships and the state itself. This represents a qualitative difference with the previous generation, which emerged in the course of the 1980s following the reestablishment of democracy after the years of dictatorship.

These experiences show that although the axis of the present struggles is wages this is not sufficient to play the role of backbone of social unity which the workers need to increase their strength in the absence of a coordinating center - a role that the CGT abandoned years ago and that the CTA (a new union federation which emerged in the 1990s) has not filled or tried to fill. The struggles remain fragmented and dispersed.

To understand this reality requires considering the diversity of the wages question. It is marked by a spectrum of situations which are as much the product of the forms of restructuring of capital in Argentina as the fragmentation that state and employers' policies have caused in order to make collective action difficult.

The reorganization of the workers

One consequence of capitalist

restructuring and the transformations in the role of the state over the last 25 years is that the traditional union leaderships do not know how to defend the immediate interests of the workers in the face of capital's offensive.

Faced with the absence of interlocutors the workers' movement has radicalized and opened itself to new perspective. However, opposed to these potentialities, fear of unemployment and the despotism of the employers, which strengthened in the 1990s, persists and an iron bureaucratic control is still exerted by the traditional leaderships. There is also the absence of protection for non-declared workers and the protection the state provides for these situations in its role as general representative of capital.

It should also be said that readiness to fight is not always synonymous with consciousness, and that in our country there is a strong tradition of social conflict that is not incompatible with political identification with the government.

In this complex and contradictory context the problem of reorganization is posed to the workers' movement. A phase has been exhausted and with the opening of a new one history seems to reconstitute the objective conditions that make possible the re-elaboration of a conception of class faced with the world of capital. Reorganization thus results from a concrete social and political necessity.

We need to start from these notes - without overestimating the concrete conditions but also without underestimating their potentialities - when sectors of the movement have been beginning to discuss the necessity of seeking alternative organizational forms.

These debates are not new nor are the positions novel. [21] They are the logical consequence of the situation created more than 50 years ago when Argentina's workers were expropriated of their social autonomy and political independence.

Despite the manifold and heroic experiences over this intense half-

century, the concrete question has not been resolved. And its resolution, as the Peruvian Maria'tegui said, "should be neither an imitation nor a copy but a heroic creation".

Nor should it be a copy of the first "classism", that of the anarchists, pure syndicalists and the first Socialists, who occupied a vacant place. Nor the classism that we tried to construct in the 1960s and early 1970s. The new conditions in which the class struggle develops does not seem to relate to those formidable experiences, recorded indelibly in our history, from which it is necessary to draw all the possible lessons.

On the contrary, it is in the current conditions of life and existence, in the new conditions imposed by capital and its state, and starting from them - and no others - that the movement has to reformulate its class politics, find answers to the immediate needs while affirming a strategic perspective.

This perspective should be independent in its objectives and in its programme, but it will have to build bridges to other sectors of society, to hegemonize its own power block so as to occupy the centre of the national political scene.

Such a perspective demands advancing surely in a process - perhaps slower than might be wished - of recomposition of the tissue of solidarities, constructing solid and direct links but also sufficiently flexible to integrate social and political diversity.

We start from an experience which has been original in the last half-century, the inheritance of the days of December 19 and 20 [2001]. This experience is none other than the understanding that nobody, not the state, not the churches, not the union leaderships, not the parties, nor anyone else who claims to speak for the working class, can replace the capacity to think, decide and do of the workers acting on their own account.

It is this recuperation of lost autonomy, not only in relation to the state but also diverse mediations, which is the indispensable guarantee to advance towards class

independence from the state, the employers and the historic union bureaucracy. But also not to transformed into a field of dispute for party patriotisms; not to submit to the needs of party self-construction which are often placed above the general interest of the working class.

In this perspective the question of democracy inside the workers' organizations acquires a fundamental dimension. The revocation of mandates, rotation of positions, the imperative character of assembly-based mandates, representation of minorities, direct election of internal commissions, free expression of the various internal currents - these are the essential characteristics to ensure the greatest participation of people with the smallest possible delegation.

In order to establish a new relationship between represented and representing, bases and leaders. And so that the reorganization underway is not only the result of an agreement between leaders.

The initiative of the Buenos Aires metro workers, who won the 6 hour working day, for the creation of a National Movement for the Reduction of the Working Day linked to increased wages, is an exemplar of the transcendence of sectoral interests, of breaking with fragmentation to promote the social unity of the workers behind a common objective that combines conjunctural necessities with more long term objectives.

Any attempt at reorganization-recomposition of the movement must start off from these conquests, and rest on real processes - and the conclusions that can be drawn from them - like those of the metro workers, the rail workers or the ceramists, whose unquestionable authority must be exerted to put limits to the struggles for hegemony of the parties and groups, in order to generate a framework of democratic discussion.



Eduardo Lucita

In the final instance it is about taking advantage of the impulse that

emanates from the fresh air originating from the real processes turbulence of the old storms.
underway so as not to fall victim to the

Social Partnership and Class Independence in the Post-Soviet Labour Movement

28 May 2005, by **David Mandel**

That struggle has been conducted against the bourgeoisie and the capitalist state, but even more so against ideological currents within the labour movement itself that implicitly or explicitly accept capitalism as inevitable, or at least preferable to any real alternative, and that reject the claim that labour and capital are opposed by contradictory interests. [22]

On the political level, revolutionary socialism has competed for workers' allegiance with reformism of various hues; while in the trade-union movement the proponents of "trade-unionism of struggle" ("syndicalisme de combat," in French) have fought it out with the supporters of "social partnership."



As an ideological or strategic orientation, "class independence" is based upon an analysis of the respective interests of labour and capital, labour and the state, as fundamentally antagonistic. Labour's relations with capital and the state are therefore determined in the final analysis by the correlation of class forces, rather than by any shared interests.

It follows that the labour movement's strategy in defending and promoting workers' interests should give priority to shifting the balance of forces in the workers' favour. And while many factors can contribute to the labour movement's strength, its main resource is the solidarity of rank-and-file workers, their active commitment

to common goals, and the confidence in their collective capacity to effect progressive change in their conditions of employment and in society as a whole.

"Social partnership," on the other hand, although it comes in a variety of forms and degrees, is a strategy ultimately based on the view that labour and capital share a fundamental, common interest in the success of the given enterprise and of the national economy as a whole. And success under capitalism always comes down to profitability, since without it there are no jobs, wages or benefits.

Accordingly, any serious conflict that might arise between labour and capital tends to be viewed as being due to a failure of communication or the refusal of one of the parties to understand its own long-term interest. Negotiations take the form of "social dialogue," rather than confrontation, and force (at least on the workers' part), while not excluded, is relegated to a mostly symbolic role.

It is worth noting that this harmonious view of capital-labour relations, often accompanied by "participation" schemes, has long been part of the arsenal of employers and governments. [23]

Today, perhaps more than at any other time since the emergence of mass, organized labour movements in the latter part of the nineteenth century, "social partnership" predominates in virtually all countries. [24]

This is at once a consequence and a cause of the major shift in the balance

of class forces against labour, that began in the 1970s in the established capitalist countries and in the late 1980s in the former Communist world. I will make my own position clear at the outset: "social partnership" is at best a case of wishful thinking that bears little relationship to capitalist reality, and all the less so to capitalism in its current neoliberal version; at worst, it is a manifestation of corrupt union leadership. Most often, it is a combination of the two.

But though the premises that underlay "social partnership" do not correspond to reality, as an ideology it has strong roots in reality, namely in labour's very real dependency upon capital, which is an inherent part of capitalism. And as a rule, the strength of "social partnership" in the labour movement varies inversely with labour's dependence upon capital. In other words, the ideology is more prevalent when labour is weaker, and vice versa. At the same time, "social partnership" itself contributes to, and reinforces, labour's weakness.

This article briefly examines the role of "social partnership" in the defeats suffered by the labour movements after the demise of the Communist regimes in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, the three predominantly Slavic and the most industrialized countries of the former Soviet Union. That role played itself out somewhat differently in each of the three countries, but in each case it contributed significantly to the dramatic setback suffered by workers, who saw their savings wiped out, their real wages fall by more than two thirds [25], and the promise of democracy broken, if democracy is

understood as a law-based state that allows free competition of social interests for influence on government policy. [26]

The argument here is not that a different strategy would necessarily have allowed workers to come out ahead from the fall of the bureaucratic dictatorship. Objective circumstances, outlined below, did not favour labour. But, at the least, the losses could certainly have been much smaller. The fact is that the unions did not make use even of the limited resources they readily had at their disposal to defend their members' interests. There were, of course, exceptions, but they were too few and isolated to affect the overall outcome.

Unfavourable Objective Circumstances

The distinction between "objective" and "subjective" conditions is at best relative but it is nevertheless useful in presenting the context in which post-Soviet trade unions have operated. "Objective" factors are those over which the unions can have little or no immediate influence; while "subjective" factors are within the immediate power of the unions to influence, mainly their strategic and tactical choices and the quality of their leadership.

One of the negative "objective" factors was, and remains, the legacy of more than half a century of totalitarian rule, during which workers could not organize independently. Gorbachev's liberalization changed that, but that period was too brief for most workers to have gained experience of independent organization and action. Moreover, the political opening came initially as a gift "from above"; it was not wrested in struggle. Referring to the Soviet era, the president of the minority union at the Volga Auto Factory (maker of Ladas) observed that "there was no working class; only isolated people in the same situation."

The first workers' meeting that was had not been convened and was not directed by management or party

authorities took place in September 1989 to discuss strike action, the first organized collective action ever at this plant of over 100,000 employees. Only two and a half years separated the coalminers' strike of July 1989 [36] As in the case of the FNPR, these holdings are substantial, and the federation's leadership has largely avoided accountability for their management to the affiliates, let alone the rank and file.

There was, however, at least one important difference from Russia: the Auto and Farm-Machine Workers' Union, created in 1991 on the basis of existing local and regional unions that had formerly been directly affiliated to a national office in Moscow. This union elected a president, Vladimir Zlenko, who was committed to a policy of fostering "class independence." He was also a convinced socialist (non-Stalinist, that is, democratic socialist), another rare phenomenon on the post-Soviet scene.

Zlenko gave active support to all local struggles in his union and held them up as examples for emulation. He nudged, cajoled and pressured his central committee, consisting mostly of plant and regional presidents, to amend the union's constitution to bar managerial personnel from membership. He finally achieved that in 1998, though enforcing the amendment was another matter. He also obtained an amendment ensuring greater representation of rank-and-file workers at union conferences, congresses and councils. He tried, and failed, to organize opposition to Stoyan in the FPU and he convinced his own union to support the Socialist Party, which at the time was a left social-democratic party opposed to the government.

Zlenko had some active support among his local and regional leaders, especially in industrial region of Kharkyv. But it was not enough to move the majority of local unions away from "partnership." Realizing that, he tried to follow a strategy aimed at supporting and generating pressure "from below" on the conservative, "conciliationist" leaders. To reach the membership, he published a monthly national paper and promoted rank-and-file education. But his capacity to

do this was limited by local leaders' refusal to share more than five per cent of their dues with the national office. This was twice as much as what the parallel office in Russia was receiving but far short of what was needed. In addition, the union's economic sector was being destroyed at a faster pace than in Russia: it lost almost three quarters of its jobs between 1991 and 2003, and of the 129,000 remaining workers, many were not fully employed or receiving wages regularly. [37]

At 60 years of age, after two mandates, Zlenko stepped down as president, believing he was leaving the union in trusted hands, those of his long-time vice president. But it did not take the latter long to shift the union into the predominant "partnership" mold, meeting little serious resistance from the rest of the union on the way. Zlenko, however, did not give up the fight. He helped to found the School for Worker Democracy, which offers rank-and-file education imbued with "class independence." Under his leadership, the school has developed a working relationships with some major unions, including auto, defence, radio-electronics and textile. This, too, sets Ukraine apart from Russia, where a similar school has been failed to illicit interest from FNPR-affiliates and works exclusively with the "alternative" unions. (These are even weaker in Ukraine than in Russia.)

Belarus

In Belarus, the smallest of the three countries, the issue of "class independence" posed itself in the most original manner. The two large industrial unions, Auto and Farm Machine and Radio-Electronics, entered the post-Soviet era with the greatest potential. The majority of their members had participated in an almost month-long, spontaneous, general strike in April 1991 that shook up the unions' leadership, as well as the local and central political establishment. As a result, the rank and file was relatively active, and there was a significant force pushing to end the tradition of subservience. Another favourable circumstance was the high concentration of union

membership in large industrial plants in the capital and its region. And while radio-electronics, which had been mainly producing for the Soviet army, subsequently lost most of its jobs, employment in the auto and farm-machine sectors fell by only twenty per cent between 1991 and 2002 (to about 150,000), a much smaller drop than in Russia or Ukraine.

There was largely thanks to the government's rejection of shock therapy (unique among post-Soviet regimes), a choice in which the unions initially played a role. Even today, industry has not undergone large-scale privatization, and the state conducts an active industrial policy. [38]

Both unions elected national leaders in 1991 who were committed to "class independence." This was particularly evident on the political level. In 1993, they founded the Belarussian Labour Party along social-democratic lines, and in 1996, when President Lukashenko, following a referendum, illegally amended the constitution to reinforce his powers at the expense of parliament, reduced to an obedient tool, both unions adopted strongly oppositional positions. Under their prodding, the Belarussian Federation of Trade Union itself eventually also joined the opposition, and in the 2001 presidential election, its president, V. Goncharik, unsuccessfully ran against Lukashenko as the candidate of the united democratic opposition. [39]

Union policy, however, was rather less clear on relations with management. In a minority of factories, the April 1991 strike had resulted in the election of new, independent union committees. But in most plants, the pressure "from below" had not been sufficient to oust the old leaders committed to "partnership." In some of these plants, minority alternative unions were formed. The national leadership maintained informal ties with them and, at least initially, was committed to supporting the local forces pushing for union independence.

But the national leaders eventually made peace, in practice if not officially, with the subservient plant leaders. This occurred as they focused

their energy on the political struggle. On the face of it, it made sense to focus on the government, since it owned the enterprises and still largely determined wage policy. The problem was, however, that this led the national leaders to reconcile themselves to the persistence of "social partnership" in the plants. In return for the tolerance of union subservience to management, the plant leaders gave their support to the political campaigns of the national leaders, voting for them in the Central Council.

But when it came to mobilizing the membership for these campaigns, the local leaders did little or nothing, because management, under pressure from the government, instructed them not to. The local unions that really mobilized were those that had broken with "partnership" and they regularly brought out a large proportion of their members, despite intimidation by management and the political authorities. But these local unions were a minority. As a result, the national leadership was unable to build a sufficiently strong correlation of forces against the government. Indeed, as time passed, active support among the rank and file for the unions' political actions fell off.

Another obstacle to mobilizing the rank and file against the government was the unions' failure to offer their members an economic programme with which they could identify. Although the national leaders demonstrated their independence vis-à-vis the government, they failed to develop independent positions vis-à-vis the bourgeoisie, in this case — the G-7 and its Belarussian allies. While the Labour Party's programme called for a strong social safety net, it was vague on economic policy. Its advocacy of "economic freedom" for enterprises could not help but raise doubts among workers who were well aware of the disastrous results of neo-liberal policies in Russia and Ukraine. One of the unions' leaders was, in fact, quite candid: "We'll let them [the liberals] do their job and we will defend the workers." Workers' misgivings were only heightened when the Labour Party joined an electoral alliance in the 2001 presidential elections with rightwing liberal parties

under the aegis of the US embassy. The plan was akin to what had occurred earlier in Serbia and what would happen in Ukraine's "orange revolution". But the Belarussian situation was different. Despite his arbitrariness and authoritarianism, many workers saw Lukashenko's rejection of shock therapy as defending the country's economy — and so their livelihoods — from the destructive forces that the West wanted to unleash against it. [40]

When the political showdown came after the elections, Lukashenko had little trouble crushing the political opposition of the unions, since their leaders could not mobilize significant rank-and-file support. In a number of plants, subservient union leaders, on orders from management, encountered no active resistance when they transferred the membership (which was not consulted) into new, state-sponsored unions. At the end of 2003, the leaders of those plant unions who had remained in the the Auto and Farm-Machine Workers' Union organized a putsch, replacing the national president with a Lukashenko loyalist.

Despite significant sympathy for the deposed national leaders in union ranks, only a small minority has remained loyal to them. They are now themselves in an "alternative" union, working with what remains of the other "alternatives," struggling heroically to survive against government repression. This is a hard fight, since workers who openly support them risk their jobs.

Why "social partnership"?

If "partnership" made defeat inevitable, why is it still so predominant? As argued above, this ideological orientation has its roots in the real dependency of workers on capital that is inherent to capitalism. The more dependent workers are on capital because of "objective" conditions, the stronger they hold on to them of "partnership," which reflects their lack of confidence in their collective ability to change conditions in their interest. The paradox is that

by effectively subordinating union action to management's interests, "partnership" acquiesces to and reinforces weakness, further contributing to the demoralization and blocking the sort of action that could rebuild confidence and solidarity.

It is not hard to understand the attraction of "social partnership" for union leaders who face aggressive employers and governments and whose membership is demoralized. In these conditions, leaders run a high personal risk if they try to mobilize the membership to confront management or the state. The chances of failure are considerable, and defeat might well lead to the leader's removal by an angry management or a dissatisfied membership and even to the union's destruction. On the other hand, since the leaders are subject to little pressure "from below," their chances of coming out ahead personally are much better if they act as junior "partners" to the administration. Management will likely tolerate the continued existence of such cooperative unions and might even make minor concessions to help them maintain their credibility among the membership.

This kind of reasoning, perhaps in less crude form, can appear quite legitimate in the eyes of union leaders. But the members might ask why they need a union to move backwards. Even if this strategy protects the union's existence, of what value is that if the price is the workers' continued weakness? In a moment of candor, an official in one of Russia's largest unions confided that it might be better if his union did not exist, since workers would have no illusions and they might begin to organize. (This was said at a time when non-payment of wages had reached epidemic proportions, and the union was unable or unwilling to do anything about it.)

Often, however, more blatant forms of corruption are also at work in influencing the strategic choice of union leaders. Those who "show understanding" can count on management's support in keeping their jobs. In post-Soviet circumstances, when the membership is divided and largely passive, the director's support is decisive.

Moreover, most industrial union leaders are former engineers. The law formally protects them from dismissal after leaving their union positions, but management can make life very miserable. Besides, after several years away from production, they become de-skilled. (This is one reason why workers tend to make more committed, militant leaders. But they are quite rare among union leadership.) Last but not least, management generally offers cooperative union leaders substantial material rewards, including the perspective of a well-paying managerial position.

Union leaders themselves cite their members' passivity in justification of "partnership," arguing that in a confrontation with management they would be left hanging out to dry by an indifferent, fearful rank and file. But this argument is disingenuous, since these same leaders make no effort to overcome demoralization among the membership. On the contrary, they actively discourage spontaneous collective actions by workers to defend their interests and cooperate with management to extinguishing them when they happen.

Widespread demoralization is a fact. It is the major source of labour's weakness which has its roots in the "objective" conditions outlined at the beginning of this article. But workers are not robots. their actions are not mechanically determined by their "objective" conditions. It is impossible to accurately gauge the potential of rank-and-file members for solidary, militant action without trying to organize it. Gramsci put it this way: "In reality, one can 'foresee' to the extent that one acts, to the extent that one applies a voluntary effort and therefore contributes concretely to creating the result 'foreseen.' Prediction reveals itself thus not as a scientific act of knowledge but as the abstract expression of the effort made, the practical way of creating a collective will." [41]

The point is not, of course, for the union to launch blindly into adventures, rejecting all concessions as a matter of principle. It is legitimate for a union — for the members, not the leaders in lieu of the

members, as is generally the practice — to decide to cut losses when it judges the correlation of forces unfavourable and not subject to significant change in the acceptable future. But this calls for a genuine analysis of the actual and potential correlation of forces and it has to follow a serious attempt to resist. And a critical element of that attempt is a leadership that displays a will and determination to lead the members, offering them realistic tactics and goals. None of this is part of the practice of unions wedded to "partnership."

The defeat suffered may indeed have been the most probable outcome. Nevertheless, it was not inevitable, certainly not in the disastrous form it took, which has taught capital around the world a lesson in how far workers can be pushed backwards. Despite widespread insecurity, weak solidarity and demoralization, a significant minority of workers in all three countries have displayed over the years a will to resist in the form of strikes and civil disobedience. These actions often attained positive results for the workers involved, but because they remained isolated, their gains were limited and they failed to make a tangible impact on the overall situation of the working class.

Things could have been different had leadership emerged prepared to unite and lead these isolated struggles. The active minority, which for the most part was socially indistinguishable from the others, might have developed into critical mass, strengthening the confidence of the rest. Union leaders who support "partnership" cannot avoid a share of responsibility for the defeat by citing unfavourable conditions. Many of these leaders do not even admit there has been a defeat, let alone attempt their role in it.

Class Independence and Socialism

In post-Soviet conditions, any leader who opts for "class independence" has to be something of a hero, that is an

individual with a rather selfless commitment to the workers' cause, since this course is a very difficult one and personally very risky. Historically, when the immediate perspective was bleak, such leaders appeared from the ranks of the socialist movement. They were sustained by their political commitment and their long-term historical perspective. The weakness of the "class-independence" orientation in the union movement and the virtual exclusion of socialism from the post-Soviet (indeed, world) political-ideological spectrum [42] are thus closely linked.

But they are linked in an even more fundamental way. Under capitalism, workers are dependent on capital, and no union or left political leader can ignore this. "Class independence" is an ideological orientation, an independent worker's ideology, not a state of affairs that can exist under

capitalism. But "class independence," like socialism, rejects capital's legitimacy and inevitability. It views capital's power as a usurpation that must be tolerated only because the balance of class forces will not presently allow it to be overthrown. However, the strategic perspective is constantly to encroach on capital's power, to try shift the balance of forces until capital's domination can be overthrown and replaced by democratic management of the economy. Unions that try to follow a strategy of independence from management but that accept capital's legitimacy ultimately get entangled in their own contradictions (for example, when they become lobbyists for government subsidies to their employers).

"Class independence" is, of course, not a panacea that offers a blue-print to victory. It is an ideological orientation

whose strategic goal is to end capital's domination. Capital today is very dominant, and workers are highly dependent on it. The confrontation of this strategic orientation with capitalist reality does not always make for obvious and simple choices of goals and tactics in concrete situations.

But it is an orientation that at least holds out the possibility for workers to move forward, even if the strategic goal of emancipation from capital at present seems only a distant hope. On the other hand, the accumulated experience with "social partnership" supports the observation that "Capitalist society without a socialist alternative is very likely to downgrade to barbaric forms of social life." [43]



David Mandel

Nationalization! The First Two Days of Bolivia's Second Gas War

28 May 2005, by Jeffery R Webber

While the march was met with something like a spirit of solidarity in El Alto, the radicalized population of this mostly indigenous, massive shantytown let the MAS-led marchers know that they were demanding, "neither thirty percent, nor fifty percent royalties - nationalization!"

The Federation of United Neighbours of El Alto (FEJUVE-El Alto) timed the beginning of an indefinite general strike for Monday to coincide with the arrival of the MAS marchers. The first day of the strike was not as effective as many had hoped. Mobilizations were limited, the transportation union failed to participate, and all blockades were lifted when night fell.



MAS peasants arrive in La Paz

Busses travelling to other departments of the country from La Paz were able to leave without obstacles. Nonetheless, despite the fact that El Alto's strikers were unable to shutdown the international airport located in their shantytown, American Airlines cancelled all flights to La Paz and other airlines cancelled flights selectively. Meanwhile, some travellers were forced to walk part of the way into El Alto to find transportation to neighbouring La Paz.

At 2:00pm, after the marchers and various sectors of El Alto had wound their way down the mountainside to the centre of La Paz, an open meeting was held in the Plaza of Heroes. About thirty thousand people were in attendance, shutting down all traffic in the centre of the city.

The divisions in the crowd and

between Morales and the other speakers were palpable, however. Participants included the Departmental Federation of Peasant Workers of La Paz, the Federation of Peasant Women "Bartolina Sisa," the National Council of Ayllus and Marcas, the Federation of Colonizers of La Paz, representatives of the indigenous people of the departments of Beni and Santa Cruz, the Federation of Petroleum Workers of Bolivia, the Landless Movement of Bolivia, and the Bolivian Workers Central, among others.

Of the sixteen core speakers, Morales was the only one who refused to call for the nationalization of gas, instead focusing on demands for a Constituent Assembly, and denouncing right-wing demands for "autonomy" from the oligarchy of the department of Santa

Cruz.

While Morales was speaking, the crowd of miners and affiliates of the Bolivian Workers Central (COB) around me were consistently trying to drown him out with calls for "Nationalization!" and "Close the Parliament!"

Jaime Solares, leader of the COB, called for nationalization, the closing of the Parliament, and the resignation of Carlos Mesa. He also called on the examples of Venezuela and Cuba to inspire the crowd. When he asked, "Who is the President of Venezuela?" thirty thousand protesters yelled back, "Chávez!"

In contrast, Morales asserted, "We are not asking for the closing of the Congress of the Republic because it is the symbol of Bolivian democracy." Román Loayza, leader of the central peasant organization of Bolivia (CSUTCB), and (dissident) senator of the MAS called for the nationalization of gas in solidarity with the bases of the social movements of the mainly Aymara high plateau (altiplano), and the city of El Alto, both comprising the key elements of the historic "Gas War" of September-October 2003.



Teachers' union joins the march

He announced in the open assembly that the protesters would wait for four days for the government to invoke a Constituent Assembly, and if did not happen by then, "We will take power." The crowd dispersed after the speakers, and what would follow in the coming days was unclear to everyone.

On Monday evening groups of Aymara peasants from the twenty provinces of the department of La Paz started arriving in El Alto and bedding down for the night with relatives and friends. They share with the rebellious alteños (residents of El Alto) the demand for the nationalization of natural gas. Gumucio Gutiérrez, agrarian leader of the province of Omasuyos, informed La Razon that they would be marching on Tuesday morning from El Alto with the

intention of entering the Plaza Murillo, which hosts the Presidential Palace.

I returned home from the open assembly in the Plaza of Heroes not knowing what to expect of Tuesday. Morales was completely uninspiring. But the crowd seemed of a different mood. The first day of the general strike in El Alto was weaker than we hoped, but I thought back to the second mobilization related to the Water War of March 2005 in El Alto. The first day of that strike had been weak as well, but was followed by two days in which the city was effectively paralyzed and exit routes from La Paz to other parts of the country blocked.

Tuesday, May 24, 2005

At 9:30 Tuesday morning over ten thousand mainly Aymara peasants descended from El Alto and made their way to the Plaza Murillo in La Paz. There they encountered metal barricades with a hoard of police behind them. At approximately noon, the peasants tried to enter the plaza, only to be temporarily dispersed with tear gas and rubber bullets. In other confrontations near the plaza, however, cooperative miners - with the assistance of dynamite - were able to repel the police. The miners entered the plaza, followed by the peasants and a small group of coca growers from the Chapare region (near the city of Cochabamba). They were quickly sent running with more tear gas and rubber bullets. At least six people were injured by rubber bullets. Apparently, a peasant protester was also hit in the eye by a tear gas canister fired by the police. Arrests were made, among them that of Roberto de la Cruz, a key alteño protagonist of the insurrection of October 2003.

In El Alto, the second day of the general strike was much stronger than the first. Also, highways connecting La Paz to much of the rest of the country, as well as the borders of Chile and Peru, were blockaded. While the strikers were unable to close the international airport for the second-day running, airport workers have announced a twenty-four hour strike to begin Wednesday in support of the nationalization of natural gas. The airport will thus be shutdown if all

goes as planned.

On Tuesday afternoon, an emergency assembly was held in FEJUVE-El Alto for all presidents of each of the neighbourhood zones, from each of the nine districts of the city. The press were locked out while the first two hours of intense discussion and debate took place.

Entering the assembly room when they called in the press, I was hit with the intense heat of five hundred bodies cramped into a room that normally holds three hundred. The temperature perhaps best reflects the sentiments of the neighbours gathered there. The memory of the dead and injured of October 2003 was evident in the speeches of each of the presidents of the nine districts.

The demands of the various districts, many with near-unanimous support: radicalization of mobilization measures starting Wednesday; intensification of the general strike; marches to La Paz; nationalization of gas; a trial of responsibilities for ex-President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada for his crimes of October 2003; the resignation of Mesa; and the closing of the Parliament.

Invoking the memory of the dead of October, Carlos Barrerra, president of District eight, proclaimed, "We have an enormous responsibility. On our backs are the thousands and thousands of the poor. We need to proceed as in October (2003). All the movements in the streets need to unite for the one hundred percent recuperation of our natural resources!"

A host of measures, including marches on La Paz, are scheduled to begin at 8:00 Wednesday morning. Meanwhile, President Mesa declared from the city of Sucre that he will neither resign nor change the election date, presently set for 2007. Given the number of mobilizations that are set to take place on Wednesday, Mesa's repeated public declarations that he will not kill a single Bolivian during his reign, will be put to the test.

With archives from LuAs Gómez at [Narco News](#). Thanks to Susan Spronk for helpful editorial comments. This

article first appeared at [ZNet](#). Photos
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