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### Mao in Question

17 August 2005, by **Phil Hearse**

Jung Chang, author of the best-selling *Wild Swans*, and Jon Halliday, formerly the East Asian expert of the New Left Review editorial board, spent 10 years researching and writing this book. Their sources are not just written records and memoirs, but hundreds of interviews with participants, in China itself and internationally.

If even 20% of the facts about the modus operandi of the CCP and Mao [1] presented in this book are true (and that's an absolute minimum) it is going to force many leftists - even those who were always critical of Mao and Maoism - to re-evaluate their views.

It seems obvious now that many of the opinions expressed in the pre-1976 period, even by critical Marxists, let alone Maoists and liberal Mao groupies like Edgar Snow and William Hinton [2], were wildly optimistic about the regime in general, its attitude to the popular masses, its alleged 'egalitarianism' and the supposedly radical and revolutionary forces within sections of the student youth and workers during the Cultural Revolution.



However, while constructing an irrefutable charge sheet against Mao,

Jung Chang and Jon Halliday are unable to build their own explanatory framework for why the Chinese Communist Party took power in 1949 and what the basic social forces at work were. Thus they inadvertently make Mao seem not just evil, but a Machiavellian political genius of unparalleled proportions.

### Mao Indicted

The Jung- Halliday charge sheet is formidable, and only a representative slice of it can be reproduced here, to give the general flavour. The authors charge that:

a) In the late 1920s and early 1930s Mao carried out serial unprincipled manoeuvres to attempt to gain control of the different Red Armies, denigrate and humiliate their successful leaders, gain rank and position in the eyes of the Shanghai party headquarters and Moscow and callously send thousands of Red Army soldiers to their deaths in militarily useless actions aimed at discrediting other commanders. This reached its peak in his successful subjugation and humiliation of Zhu De, the most successful Red Army commander.

b) The first 'red base' ruled over by Mao and his army (in Hunan) operated on the basis of terror and pillage, of which the main victims were the peasants - a continual theme in Mao's

progress. When Mao's army left after 15 months the area was bled dry and the locals hated the Reds. Wounded men and civilian Communists left behind were massacred.

c) Between 1929 and 1931 Mao unified his own small army with the much larger and more successful armies of Peng De-huai and Zhu De, manoeuvring to become overall commander. Trying also to subjugate the Communist-controlled province of Jiangxi to his command, Mao met stiff resistance from local Communists. He responded by launching a massive purge against 'Anti-Bolsheviks' ('ABs'). The authors allege that 4,400 Communists were identified as ABs, that most were killed and all were tortured, and Mao later admitted that this. They further allege on the basis of the testimonies of survivors, that the wives of 'AB' leaders were sadistically tortured.

d) The first 'Red State' in Jiangxi (1931-34, capital Ruijin), where Mao was not (yet) the sole, supreme leader, but where the basic institutions and security apparatus had been put in place by Chou En-lai, was a state based on the extraction of the maximum surplus from the local population, to support the Communist apparatus and military machine.

The area was the site of the world's then largest known deposits of tungsten, a source of huge income,

but this huge income did not restrain the attempts to maximise extractions from the population, in the form of ceaseless labour, forced purchase of 'bonds', donating family jewellery and other valuables. Peasants and workers were forced to give literally everything, even losing their houses and furniture and being reduced to penury.

The local regime was also one of constant political mobilisation in the form of endless, mind-numbing, meetings and rallies which consumed what free time was left over from labour.

## Bureaucratic Privilege from an Early Stage

e) During the Long March Mao did not march or ride on a horse, as frequently depicted, but was carried on a litter. As usual he lived a life of extreme comfort, while conditions for the ordinary soldiers and other on the march were terribly hard. Mao had collected a secret horde of confiscated money and other valuables, which was taken with him on the march.

By the time of the Long March bureaucratic privilege for the leaders was firmly established in a finely-graded and precise hierarchy. This included for example access to medical treatment and food. Mao was indifferent to the suffering of the rank and file, to which his own irrational military decisions often contributed. Some of these were deliberate, to undermine potential rival commanders and ensure they suffered significant losses.

f) Mao excelled at publicity, which ensured him constant attention by the party centre and in Moscow; this was aided by the hagiographic writings of US liberal journalist Edgar Snow.

g) Mao's armies did virtually nothing to fight the Japanese invaders; rather he preserved his armies the better to fight the Nationalists. This drove Stalin to distraction during the Second World War, when he was desperate to tie up the Japanese, to prevent them

invading from the East while the Soviet state tried to repel the Nazi invasion.

## Executions and Torture

h) Mao's Second World War base in Yen'an was built through terror. Again it was an exemplar of gross bureaucratic privilege, with even a Rolls Royce sent by Chinese laundry workers in New York to be an ambulance for wounded soldiers, appropriated by Mao for his personal use. Thousands of idealistic youth went there to join the fight against landlordism and imperialism; once there they were not allowed to leave and subject to forced labour. Executions and torture were common.

Discontent with this was articulated by the writings of Wang Shi-wei (who had translated some of Trotsky's works into Chinese) and a political opposition began to emerge, although it never had time to crystallise. The result was brutal, almost unimaginable, repression in which thousands were brutally tortured and murdered and a regime of constant interrogations and 'confessions' was established.

i) Mao came to power mainly through Russian backing in terms of arms, and also the Russian invasion of Manchuria at the end of the war. He further benefited from the incompetence of Chiang Kai-shek, who was much more popular than the Communists, but unaccountably let Mao and the Communists off the hook on many occasions. The actual seizure of power was followed by the execution of hundreds of thousands, mainly to instil in the population and appropriate understanding of the need for obedience

j) The central dynamic of post-revolutionary China revolved around Mao's determination to make his country into a first-rate military superpower. To do this meant huge purchases of arms and technology from Russia and Eastern Europe, which was paid for by massive exports of food and agricultural produce to those countries, while the peasantry in

China starved.

Ever more unrealistic targets were given for peasant production and millions were reduced to starvation and penury. This was the source of the first political battles with Peng De-huai and Liu Sao-chi in 1956, when their alliance with Chou En-lai actually forced some temporary retreat on Mao's priority to heavy industry.

## Mao's Forced March to Industrialisation

This conflict over Mao's unrealistic attempt to force-march China into superpower status through insane extractions from the peasants and the even more insane Great Leap Forward (1958-9) led to a split in the party leadership which precipitated the Cultural Revolution, an attempt by Mao to circumvent party structures by unleashing the hero-worshipping youth to carry out more mass murder and mayhem. This split was only finally resolved by Mao's death, the defeat of the Gang of Four, and ultimately the reforms of Deng Xiaoping.

This brief attempt to sum up some of the main themes of a lavishly-documented 800-page book leaves out thousands of details and hundreds of crimes, but hopefully the main gist of it can be grasped. It seems obvious however that whatever the truth of the Jung-Halliday charge sheet (and about the repression and violence it's clearly mainly true) their overall 'story' lacks focus and conviction.

"One very bad man took over China because he was a megalomaniac who wanted all the power, all the luxury and all the women for himself" is not a convincing story: it might (just) explain the rise of a gangland Mafia boss, but the conquest of the most populous nation on earth requires a little more explanation.

Two things need explaining: a) why did thousands of idealistic youth, workers and peasants rally to the Communists? b) What, socially and politically, did Chiang Kai-shek and

the nationalists represent?

On the former question it seems obvious that the Communists put forward a programme of national independence and anti-imperialism, together with anti-landlordism (land reform), anti-warlordism and social egalitarianism, capable of attracting tens of thousands. Jung-Halliday don't attempt to measure what Chiang and the Nationalists represented, nor their relationship with imperialism. They seem to think it adequate to say that Chiang was the real nationalist, the one who was popular, and really represented "the nation". But whose nation? What social classes backed him? What social programme did he represent?

Double standards operate even on the details of crimes and human rights. Mao's many crimes are lavishly documented and commented on in gut-wrenching detail, by crimes by the Nationalists are mentioned in a matter-of-fact, detached way.

## Historical Contradiction

The authors can't seem to deal with a paradox, an historical contradiction, and a tragic one of course: that an elemental struggle of revolutionary proportions of the ultra-exploited Chinese workers and peasants was channelled by an organisation formed in the school of Stalinism, which established a brutal, totalitarian political tyranny, one which needed no lessons from Stalin in how to stay in power through the unremitting use of murderous repression. And the authors are incapable of looking at the overall social results of the revolution.

One conclusion from the book seems obvious; the argument that the revolution was a "peasant" revolution and the CCP was a "peasant" party is contradicted by virtually every fact the book offers. Mao and the party leadership had complete contempt for the peasants. The "countryside to the cities" theory was an ex post facto invention (by Lin Biao, not Mao). Mao was always concerned to take power in the cities. The CCP leadership had its

roots in the radicalised petty-bourgeoisie in the cities, and of course those sections of the working class in which supported the party.



Cultural Revolution: Red Guards denounce 'capitalist roaders'.

The class that became the privileged interlocutor of the ruling bureaucracy after the revolution was the working class. If the peasantry was subject to persistent super-exploitation in the "Red Bases" and then at an all-China level, the working class had installed the minimum social backup of the "iron rice bowl" and some basic social provision, albeit primitive, in the same way as the working class in Russia and eastern Europe.

This of course represented real social progress, but it is not discussed. Indeed the real conditions of the workers (and peasants) in non-communist controlled China before 1949 is not examined - no mention of the carts going around (Western-dominated) Shanghai each morning to pick up the 80-100 bodies of the homeless who had died overnight, and indeed no real examination of the fate of the landlord-dominated peasant millions.

Although there is not space to elaborate this here, the book poses serious questions for simplistic, formulaic and circular theories of Stalinism, which identified it unilaterally as always "popular frontist", always opposed to taking power as against keeping the bourgeoisie in power, and always subservient to the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy (and in any case why was it true that the Soviet bureaucracy was always against Communists taking power, after the experience of eastern Europe?). Of course the word "Stalinism" is not important in itself, provided that not using it is not a way of implying "more democratic", "less repressive", "more egalitarian" etc.

On the basis of the facts enumerated in this book, it is very difficult to sustain the view that the CCP suffered bureaucratic degeneration after the

seizure of power. Once the CCP had conquered territorial spaces, it proceeded to set up a bureaucratic tyranny with immense social privileges for the leaders, in each and every case. The political police, the Chinese KGB, was well-established by the early 1940s in Yenan.

## Super-exploitation of the Peasantry

There is one central aspect of the argumentation in the book which I find utterly convincing - the quest from the early 1950s onwards for rapid industrialisation and arms accumulation, in order to force-march China into becoming a superpower. The dynamics of this seem to me to be irrefutable.

Stalin himself remarked that China's arms requirements were "excessive" and that the Soviet Union had never allocated such a large proportion of GDP to arms, even during the war against the Nazis! By even 1954-5 Mao was arguing that the peasants were eating too much (a constant refrain from Mao), and that appropriation of grain and other agricultural products by the state had to be stepped up. It wasn't so much that the state appropriated the *surplus*, more that it tried to accumulate just about everything.

Alleged resistance to state accumulation of most agricultural products led to another massive purge with thousands of executions and probably many thousands of suicides in 1955. It also led to the setting up of the Peoples Communes, so that the whole of the agricultural product would come under the direct and immediate purview and control of the party. The Peng-Liu-Chou En-lai resistance to this insanity, based on their direct experiences visiting villages and the widespread knowledge that disenchantment with and hostility to the party had become endemic in the population, led to a tactical retreat by Mao in 1956, but Mao came back strongly with the Hundred Flowers campaign and the Great Leap Forward. [3]

# The Hundred Flowers and the Great Leap Forward

Jung-Halliday see the Hundred Flowers campaign as a deliberate trap. In February 1957 Mao invited criticism of the party under the banner of "Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend." An extraordinary outflowing of wall-posters and primitive samizdat appeared denouncing the regime.

Only five months later, when many oppositionists had shown their hand and come into the open, the Hundred Flowers were shut down and the brutal purge of "rightists" was launched, with hundreds of thousands of "intellectuals" denounced and imprisoned and many thousands executed. Whether the Hundred Flowers was a deliberate ploy to force the opposition into the open to be purged its difficult to know. Maybe Mao just got scared about the extent of the opposition it revealed. Either way, the closing down of the Hundred Flowers and the launching of the anti-rightist campaign resulted in creating the conditions for consolidating Mao's

position in the leadership and the next insane bid for rapid industrialisation, the Great Leap Forward.

The Great Leap (1958-61) combined demands for impossible levels of agricultural production, huge forced-labour projects like dams and canals, and of course the infamous and useless back-yard steel production. The conflicts over the super-exploitation of the peasantry, and the insanities of the Great Leap which cost more than 30 million lives through starvation and over-work, led directly to the Cultural Revolution, a systematic attempt by Mao to go outside the structures of the party by mobilising millions of Red Guards to "Bombard the headquarters", ie attack Liu Shao-chi and anyone who might harbour similar criticisms.

Jung Chang has modestly claimed this book will transform the way that China sees Mao and the Mao legacy. I suspect tens of millions of Chinese already have a highly critical view of Mao and the Mao period. The problem is that merely by adding up the catastrophes and crimes of Mao leads to an unspoken conclusion, but one which is obviously the position of the book's authors - that it would have been better if the revolution had not taken place. Jung-Halliday would have obviously preferred it if not Mao but

Chang Kai-shek and the Nationalists had come to power.

But it is highly speculative to believe that democracy and prosperity would have resulted. China would still have been in the grip of imperialism, the peasants would have been under the landlords and the Kuomintang would probably have instituted a military dictatorship. Despite all the errors, crimes and fearful economic waste, major progress towards industrialisation was made under Mao, national unity was created and the country broke with imperialism. Contrary to the contemporary myth that China's runaway economic growth was created by globalisation, the infrastructural basis for it was created through industrialisation following the victory of the revolution in 1949, and the statification of the economy in the 1950s.

But the tragedy is that the Jung-Halliday discourse is all too credible to the younger Chinese generation in the light of what we now know about the political tyranny under Mao. It will take a long time, and many new experiences in the Middle Kingdom and internationally, for socialism to become a major force in China again.

*A shorter version of this article appears in the special autumn issue of Socialist Outlook on China.*

## Toxic chemical defence sabotaged

8 August 2005, by **Daniel Tanuro**

This declaration [4] confirms a significant turning point. Conceived initially as a "new policy" in the fight against chemical pollution, REACH has raised hope among some of the EU prioritizing the health of its peoples before the profits of the multinationals. But the hopes have gone up in smoke.

The chemical industry mobilized all its forces to torpedo the project, the governments supported it and the partisans of REACH in the institutions

were restrained. Verheugen's little sound bite leaves no doubt as to the intentions of the Barroso team. Legislation genuinely compatible with the precautionary principle is decidedly incompatible with the neoliberal framework.

To understand the battle around REACH, we need to go back more than 25 years, to 1976 to be exact. At the time, the small town of Seveso in northern Italy was the theatre of the first chemical industrial catastrophe in

history - dioxin pollution. In the wake of the emotions raised by this drama, in 1981 the decision was taken at the European level to submit all new chemical products to toxicity tests, at the cost of the producers.



Substances marketed before the catastrophe were not affected by this decision, hence the industry, to avoid



costs, decided to continue to produce, sell and use by preference the old products. These are not subject to regulation unless the public powers prove - at their cost - that they are dangerous. In this case, the evaluation of the risk is as long and complex as it is costly, given that around 40 different legislations are in force in the member states and at the European level.

Twenty-five years later, the result of this differentiation between “old” and “new” products can be seen in some figures:

- in volume, 99% of the hundred thousand substances put on sale have never been analyzed... for the simple reason that only a small number of them (2,700) were put on the market after 1981;
- 70% of the new products - subject to preliminary tests - have been classed as “dangerous”. It might therefore be thought that the proportion of dangerous products would be at least as significant among the old products if these latter were tested, but it cannot be formally proved;
- of 141 old substances identified as presenting serious risks to health and the environment, only a third have been subjected to the procedure of evaluation and less than five have been subjected to regulation.

## Health in peril

Seveso or no Seveso, the European chemical industry has then conserved the right to produce virtually anything. However, as production goes ever upwards [5], the dossier on chemical poisoning of the biosphere has continued to pile up, with new proof of the impact of chemicals on human health and the environment. For several years, doctors and biologists have multiplied their warnings. [6]

They particularly draw attention to the three categories of molecules whose toxicity and ecotoxicity are recognized: Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) and organic chlorine pesticides (OCPs) (see box). Compounds belong to these families are persistent and “bioaccumulables”

pollutants (they particularly accumulate in fat, including in the fatty cells of milk). Several components are extremely toxic, even in very small doses if exposure is long term.

The effects of chemical pollution have been well established by numerous studies on animals. Multiple examples prove that a series of products upset the hormonal system: exposure to these “endocrine disrupters”, causes marine mollusks to change sex, while gulls become hermaphrodite, hawks and falcons lay eggs that break, seals lose their immune defence and so on.

In the absence of systematic tests, the effects on human health are less well known. Nonetheless many specialists are increasingly convinced that chemical poisoning is one of the direct or indirect causes of the increase observed in illnesses like asthma, cancer, hormonal disturbances, genetic mutations, some deformations of the fetus and some neurological illnesses. Concern is particularly serious around the consequences of pollution for pregnant women and children, since growing organisms absorb more pollutants. [7]

More and more children are developing allergies. The well-known fact that asthma has become the most significant chronic illness on a world scale among children is probably due not only to the pollution of the air by particles but also to chemical pollution, including pollution through food. Some neurologists believe that the greater incidence of attention deficit syndrome and hyperactivity among the young is in part attributable to chemical pollution.

The specialized literature cites many examples of this genre. [8] The norms of exposure to pollutants - when they exist - have often been established in reference to the impact of products on adult males, while “cocktail effects” resulting from a mixture of substances are little studied.

## Reconciling

## environment and competitiveness?

As these environmental concerns have developed, it was felt that the legislation in force in Europe was too disparate, and consequently ill-adapted to the single market. This, combined with the desire to create a profile for the European Union (EU) as a motor force of “durable development”, was probably at the origin of the process which would lead to REACH. In April 1988, the Environment Ministers’ Council asked the Commission to prepare a draft European regulation on chemicals.



Chromium hexavalent poisoning scandal dramatised by movie “Erin Brokovich”

A year later, the Council mandated the Commission to draw up a proposal for a “new policy” based on durable development as well as on the precautionary principle, and giving the industry responsibility for proving that its products were not harmful. A gradual process led to the White Paper “Strategy For a Future Chemicals Policy”, adopted by the Commission, then by the Council, at the beginning of 2001. The chemical industry would unleash an unprecedented mobilization against this text.

Drawn up by the services of the Directorate-General for the Environment, the White Paper of 2001 proposed the establishment over a period of 11 years of a system of registration, evaluation and authorization of chemical substances: REACH. The main elements of the system envisaged were the following:

- registration of some 30,000 substances produced or imported in quantities of more than 1 tonnes per year;
- during the registration there would be an obligation for the industry to provide data on the intrinsic properties of these 30,000 products, to evaluate them from the point of view of their (eco) toxicity and provide

information on this subject to downstream users. The extension of accountability to these users also;

- different levels of evaluation according to the danger presented by the intrinsic characteristics of the products, their use, exposure and quantities;

- incentives to research by the industry for substitute products for "substances of very high concern" (carcinogens, mutagens, reproductive toxins). In the absence of substitutes, production would require special authorization and respect for certain conditions; [9]

- integration of existing substances in the registration system by stages, between now and 2012, beginning by testing over five years substances responsible for significant exposure whose known or supposed properties are "of very high concern";

- creation of a European agency to manage the data base, classify, identify and label the products, draw up for each of them a safety record proposing measures of risk management and so on.

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In the vision of the Commission, more specifically of the DG Environment and commissioner Margot Wallström, REACH was to prove that the protection of the environment and public information are compatible with the promotion of competitiveness on a liberalized world market

That's why the White Book insisted on the utility for the companies of a progressive harmonization of legislation as well as stressing the protection of trade secrecy. That is also why it stresses the fact that, with consumers increasingly concerned about the environment, REACH would allow the European industry to score some points over its US and Japanese competitors.

The cost of REACH for the industry was estimated at 2.1 billion euros in 11 years: a completely supportable burden given that the expected turnover of the sector for the same period was more than 5,000 billion euros. The White Book's cost-benefit analysis offset these 2.1 billion euros against the growing costs that illnesses due to pollution represent for health insurance systems. [10]

According to EU civil servants,

REACH would allow social security to save 54 billion euros over 11 years. Can it be that the most powerful chemical industry in the world cannot devote 0.042% of its turnover to guarantee the harmlessness of its products, while improving people's health and the quality of the environment?

## **The bosses, their friends and the friends of the friends**

The response of the employers has shown the utterly utopian character of this reasoning that a cost for the industry could be compensated by a gain for society. This response has involved several phases that we will not go into here. [11] To summarise simply, from the adoption of the White Paper the European Council of Chemical Manufacturers' Federations (ECCMF) launched a huge offensive around three main ideas:

1. REACH would be bureaucratic, top heavy, inefficient and more costly than predicted by the Commission;
2. REACH would be broadly useless given the voluntary efforts already agreed by the industry and the good regulations in the area of health protection for employees in the workplace;
3. REACH would be contrary to the "Lisbon strategy" and would endanger the competitiveness of a key sector, and consequently jobs (1.7 million jobs directly, 3 million indirectly).

Very significant resources have been invested, notably in the production of ever more catastrophist impact studies. One of these studies predicted the loss of 2,350,000 jobs in Germany. Another predicted a 1.7% to 3.2% fall in GNP for France. All these so-called scientific studies have been exposed as fraudulent, including by the official bodies, but the media have nonetheless given them very wide coverage. Also, they have broadly echoed the blackmail of relocation, notably when the British company Elementis (a world leader in chrome) threatened to transfer 40% of its

production in Asia. [12] Three aspects of this exceptional offensive merit being highlighted: the involvement of the US chemical industry and the Bush administration, the spectacular intervention by Blair, Chirac and Schröder and, last but not least, the collaboration of trade union organizations in the European Mining, Chemistry and Energy Trade Unions Federation (EMCEF). Let's briefly look at these aspects.

- Capitalists of the world, unite against regulation: the European and US bosses in chemicals are locked in ferocious competition, but they have formed a solid common front against REACH. The American Chemistry Council (ACC) mobilized alongside CEFIC, both to defend its exports on the European market and to ensure that REACH did not serve as a model for similar legislation in the USA. [13] It involved itself in the battle through the Transatlantic Business Dialogue (TABD), an important centre for the development of pro-business free trade policies. The ACC stirred up its members, the press, and above all the Bush administration (whose election campaign it had previously actively supported).

A report exists which shows in detail how the White House, guided by the chemicals bosses, mobilized itself and the state apparatus against REACH. While Secretary of State Colin Powell gave instructions to US embassies and trade representatives in 50 countries, but a whole series of bodies made their contribution. The highest officers of the EPA (Environment Protection Agency) were sent to Europe to explain the environmental advantages of the system of voluntary evaluation of chemicals by US companies. [14]

- The common intervention by Blair, Schröder and Chirac was of the same kind. Meeting in Berlin in September 2003, the three leaders addressed an open letter to Romano Prodi. The president of the Commission was sharply called to order in the name of the Lisbon objectives: "It is also essential to comprehensively assess all important Community projects with respect to their potential effects on industrial competitiveness". It could not have been clearer. The moment chosen for this intervention was not

neutral given that the “final” version of REACH - that which was to be sent to the European Parliament - was precisely in the process of being polished up in the offices in Brussels.

- As for the EMCEF, its rallying to the employers' camp merits being highlighted. [15] The EMCEF has indeed adopted a “common statement of views” with the employers. The text begins by stating that “the chemical industry is one of Europe's most international, competitive and successful industries” [2,700 new products out of 100,000 in 25 years!]. All the key themes of the employers' propaganda are taken up in this document: preference for voluntary commitments from the industry, priority for competitiveness, the protection of industrial secrecy, denunciation of useless bureaucratic burdens, the specific situation of small and medium enterprises, the healthy collaboration between employers and trade unions around the improvement of health at work in the sector, and so on. The conclusion: together with the employers, the EMCEF demands the maintenance of the existing legal and operational framework in the area of chemicals. [16]

## Shrinking away

To better assess the impact of this common union-employer declaration, it should be stressed that it was adopted in November 2003, or after the pressures from the industry, Bush and Blair-Chirac-Schröder had led the Commission to completely change the nature of REACH.

Indeed, the text adopted in October 2003 by the Brussels Areopagus which the employers and unions denounced is no more than the shadow of the White Paper: the amount of information to be supplied by the companies during the registration of substances was considerably reduced; evaluation no concerns no more than 10% of products; most imports are no longer affected; the protection of commercial and industrial secrecy has been strengthened, at the expense of the information made available to the public; the production of substances of very high concern can continue, even if there are substitute products,

providing the producer can show that there are “adequate” measures of control. And so on.

In signing this “common declaration”, the EMCEF has aligned itself with aggressive employers who, emboldened by the success of their offensive, wish to push further until total victory.

The history of REACH is that of its gradual disappearance. What's more, in addition to the setbacks mentioned above, the employers had already obtained, successively: no registration below one tonnes per year, no tests below 10t/year, exemption for polymers and intermediary products, co-piloting of REACH by the DG Industry instead of the DG Environment alone and so on.

In the process, the cost for the industry has been brought down to 0.01% of turnover. But it is still too much. The real objective of the employers is a system in which the evaluation of toxicity and ecotoxicity is replaced by a “risk evaluation”, without obligation of substitution. That is to say, in broad outline, the maintenance of the status quo.

Through a whole series of maneuvers, scrutiny of REACH at the European Parliament has been postponed after the elections of June 2004. A new impact study has been ordered - in the “spirit of Lisbon”, of course. It is this study that Verheugen alluded to in January, when he told the new deputies of possible “profound modifications” of REACH. On all the evidence, the conclusions have preceded the results. One child in 500 in Europe is affected by leukemia before the age of 15 and 55% of cancers are due to chemical pollution. The vampires of chemicals wash their hands of this and the politicians support them: profit first!

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## Appendix 1

### PBDEs, PCBs, OCPs

At a certain point in the REACH saga,

former European environment commissioner Margot Wallström agreed to submit her blood to analysis for the presence of persistent and bio-accumulable chemicals. The analysis revealed the presence of different varieties of polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) and organic chlorine pesticides (OCPs).

PBDEs are used in textiles, furniture, cars and electrical engineering. Mixed into plastics and polyurethane foam, they delay combustion in case of a fire. Ms Wallström's blood contained two kinds of PBDE which have been banned in the EU, but these pollutants don't recognize frontiers and can travel very long distances. Contamination takes place primarily through food, but also through inhalation.

PCBs have been used massively in the electrical industry (the manufacture of transformers) as well as painting and plastics. They were also used as flame-retardants until it was noticed that their combustion liberates large quantities of carcinogenic dioxins. They have been banned in the EU since 1996 and are also banned by the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. [17]

However, more than a million tonnes have been produced during the 20th century and they have accumulated particularly in sea mud estuaries. Fishes are another source of PCB contamination.

OCPs need no introduction: everybody knows about DDT, which can be transported a very long distance by air and water. Now banned because of its ecotoxicity and long remanence, DDT is however still used against malaria in poor countries. The Stockholm Convention outlaws DDT and eight other POCs, but it remains hard to escape. In fact, there is DDT everywhere - even in the fat of Antarctic penguins - and it will stay there for a long time.

Signed on May 23, 2001, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) came into force last March after long controversies and despite the opposition of the USA. It envisages the total elimination of dioxins and furans



(products of combustion processes), PCBs and nine POCs: aldrin, chlordane, dieldrin, endrin, heptachlore, hexachlorobenzene, mirex, DDT, toxaphene.

## Appendix 2

### The REACH saga

- April 1988: the Environment Council asks the Commission to revise the legislation.
- November 1998: a "revision of chemicals policy" is referred to the European Council.
- June 1999: the European Council asks the Commission to prepare by the end of 2000 a proposal for revision based on sustainability, the precautionary principle and the reversal of the burden of proof in relation to the toxicity of products.
- February 2001: the Commission adopts the White Paper "Strategy For a Future Chemicals Policy"
- June 2001: the European Council adopts conclusions on the basis of the

White Paper and asks the Commission to present a proposal for European regulation on the question by the end of the year.

- November 2001: the European Parliament adopts a resolution approving the White Paper and demands the strengthening of protection for health and the environment.

- End of 2001(?): The US government echoes the criticisms of REACH by the American Chemistry Council in an undated and unheaded document known as a "nonpaper". According to this "nonpaper", \$8.8 billion of US exports are threatened by REACH, the principle of substitution is an "arbitrary discrimination" and the precautionary principle "could provide cover for politically-motivated bans and other severe restrictions [18].

- March 2002: Colin Powell asks the US embassies in EU countries and 35 other countries to "raise the EU chemicals policy with relevant government officials (e.g. officials from the Environment Ministry, Economics/Trade Ministry, and Foreign Affairs Ministry) and the local business community and offer the nonpaper as a brief description of USG [U.S. government] views."

- March 2003: the European Council

asks the Competitiveness Council to involve itself in the REACH process.

- May 2003: the Commission presents a draft regulation and a strategy for the consultation of the bodies involved and the public.

- September 2003: open letter from Blair, Chirac and Schröder to Romano Prodi.

- October 2003: the Commission presents the draft regulation for the joint decision of the Council and Parliament.

- March 2004: memorandum between the Commission, the UNICE and the ECCMF: the Commission and the industry will together assemble case studies on the economic impact of REACH. A working group is set up involving various bodies.

- July 2004: the representatives of the WWF and the European Environmental Bureau (140 associations) withdraw from the working group on the impact of REACH, to protest against the influence of the chemicals industry.

- January 17, 2005: the UNICE asks for a "prioritization based on risk" (in other words: not based on the intrinsic characteristics - carcinogenic, mutagenic, reprotoxic - of the products). [19].

## Justice for Munir!

27 July 2005, by **Pierre Rousset**



### Munir Said Thalib

Munir Said Thalib was 38 years old when he died of arsenic poisoning on September 7, 2004, while flying to Holland on a Garuda flight. According to an inquest, he had previously been the target of three other assassination attempts, involving: a fake car accident, a black magic curse and a first attempt at poisoning that failed. The inquest implicated the highly official National Intelligence Agency (BIN).

Munir was a key figure in the fight for human rights in a country which lived under one of the most bloodthirsty anti-Communist dictatorships on the planet for more than three decades (1965-1998). Immediately after the fall of the Suharto regime, he devoted himself to publicising the truth about the kidnapping and torture of militants carried out by the Kopassus special forces. Munir created the Commission for Disappearance and Victims of Violence (Kontras) and supported the families of democratic activists "erased" (kidnapped and murdered) by army units. He also occupied the post of executive director of

Indonesian Human Rights Monitor.

Kopassus, an elite corps of the army, was responsible for a reign of terror in East Timor as well as Aceh. After the overthrow of the dictatorship, the Indonesian army continued to commit numerous crimes in East Timor, notably to oppose the independence referendum in 1999. Once again, Munir played a very important role in bringing to light the responsibilities of superior officers, like the chief of staff, General Wiranto. Kopassus also had links with Islamist groups like Laksar Jihad and Jemaah Islamiah (the latter being accused of having carried out



the 2002 Bali bombings).

Munir had publicly criticised the national secret service agency BIN. According to his colleagues, at the time of his death he was investigating a corruption scandal involving the air company Garuda. He knew he was in danger. [20]

A team of investigators (TPF or in English, Fact Finding Team) has been set up by presidential decision to look into this murder. It is chaired by the Brigadier General of the police, Marsudhi.

The first murder suspect is a pilot with Garuda, Polycarpus Priyanto, whose presence on the flight to Amsterdam has not been explained and who had given his place in first class to Munir. His accomplices would have been two members of the crew who were responsible for serving the meals. It seems clear that Priyanto would not have acted independently. Who were the people behind the murder? According to the investigators, "members of Indonesia's intelligence service appear to have been involved". Thus, 26 phone calls were made between the office of the deputy director of BIN, Major General Muchdi Purwopranjono, and numbers belonging to the pilot, Priyanto. [21]

The investigating team has encountered a veritable refusal of cooperation from the secret services, Major General Muchdi Purwopranjono

and a former henchman of the dictatorship, Makhmud Hendropriyono. [22] For his part, Priyanto says he was recruited by the secret services, which would point to BIN's responsibility.



#### Munir's burial

For Suciwati, Munir's widow, the political character of the murder of her husband is not in doubt. She reaffirmed it in a recent interview in the Indonesian newspaper "Tempo". "My husband has been the victim of a political assassination because of his fight for human rights. This murder is the fruit of a planned conspiracy, because it is not possible that it has been planned by one single person... The investigation has been going on for several months, but it was only on March 18 that the police revealed the name of a first suspect, then of two others [a pilot, a steward and a hostess]. I am certain that they are only underlings and that the people behind the crime have still not been troubled. The recent developments in the affair confirm the first suspicions, namely the implication of the directors of Garuda [Indonesia's national airline company], as well as the Indonesian secret services in the murder plot".

"Munir was assassinated at a time when, they say, freedom of expression, human rights and democracy are

respected. But this murder reminds us that around us terror is still threatening." [23]

By refusing to cooperate with the investigators, the secret services have played for time, since the mandate of the TPF ended on June 23, 2005. On June 21, the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) launched an appeal for the investigation to be allowed to continue and for its independence to be assured.

The Commission also demanded that the family of Munir, the democratic activists and the witnesses are effectively protected as "Munir's widow, the staff of the human rights organization Kontras and other human rights activists who had worked closely with Munir, have received various death threats, giving rise to fears for their safety". [24]

The presidency committed itself to responding rapidly to the conclusions and recommendations of the TPF. However, 20 days after the investigators submitted their report to president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the Indonesian authorities have still not reacted. Asked about it at press conferences, officials are content to dodge the basic questions, by announcing that the pilot, Priyanto, will soon come to trial. [25]

This is not good enough. The investigation must be allowed to finish its work. Justice for Munir!

## Move to form new party

22 July 2005, by **Stuart Piper**



#### Inside the Imperial Theatre

The mood was serious but enthusiastic as an overflowing auditorium listened to national leaders of the union confederation, the UNT, to leaders of the oil workers in Puerto La Cruz and the steel workers in Puerto Ordaz, and

to representatives of student organisations and the alternative media, explain why they thought a new party was needed.

There were differences of emphasis but the general drift was the same: the revolutionary process in Venezuela is at a crossroads, it must either go forwards or backwards; there is resistance from some within the

government and the Bolivarian movement; in order to deepen and radicalise the process it is indispensable to build a mass revolutionary party with a clear socialist perspective.

In the words of the draft theses drawn up by the organisers of the meeting, "the moment is ripe". The Venezuelan people have definitively broken with

the old bourgeois parties of the IVth Republic, and "they are beginning to distance themselves from the new, corrupt, clientelistic and bureaucratic parties of the Vth Republic. ...To all these fellow Venezuelans we say: let us build our own political organisation, just as we are consolidating other organisations of great importance for our struggle, like the UNT, the co-operatives, the land committees and the UBEs, in order to confront the enemies of this revolutionary process. Now we urgently need to build a party of our own, of the workers and of the people, in order to struggle for socialism."

Although not formally sponsoring the movement for a new party, the meeting received important support from the legendary guerrilla leader, Carlos Lanz, who was appointed earlier this year by President Chavez to head up the introduction of "revolutionary co-management" in the basic industries of the south-eastern state of Guayana. This experience, unfolding first in the ALCASA aluminium plant and now spreading to other state-owned factories in the area, has many of the characteristics of workers' control and even full-blown self-management. It is undoubtedly one of the most advanced expressions of the Bolivarian revolution. It is also bringing together in the factories union activists and revolutionary militants from several different traditions, including those of the mainly Trotskyist OIR and those of Carlos Lanz' own 13 April current. He told the meeting that what they were doing at ALCASA "prefigures the socialism of the 21st century" which President Chavez has begun in recent months to identify as the goal of his Bolivarian revolution. But he also pointed out that there were some in the government deliberately trying to derail these plans for revolutionary co-management.

A leader of the electricity workers, Joaquin Osorio, described how

supposedly pro-Chavez managers in the state electricity company were persecuting the trade unionists struggling to introduce co-management there.

There was also polite criticism of some of Hugo Chavez' own apparent confusions. Referring to the president's claim last Mayday that in Venezuela there was already a government of the workers, Gonzalo Gomez, a founder of the Aporrea alternative news service, asked: if that is what he thinks, then he has to tell us where the mechanisms are, that allow Venezuelan workers to discuss and decide whether or not to pay the foreign debt, or whether or not to devalue the currency.

It was announced that an organising committee from the sponsoring groups would begin meeting to draw up a calendar of activities, as well as proposals for an action plan, a programmatic platform and statutes. The aim would be to hold a founding conference for the new party in January, at the time of the Americas and World Social Forum in Caracas. The movement for the new party is provisionally called UNIR, and the name currently proposed for the party itself is the PTRS, the Workers Party for the Socialist Revolution.

This movement for a new party has quite a bit going for it. Its significant roots in Venezuela's industrial workplaces - clear from the very 'proletarian' turn-out for Saturday's launch - is an important start. So is its commitment to building a mass workers' party with a profoundly democratic internal life, including the rights of minorities to organise and be represented. The participation of diverse currents, as well as the draft theses themselves, show that the movement's ideological identity, and therefore its potential appeal, is also broader than that of the more narrowly Trotskyist character of its

main promoters.

But there is still a long way to go before this promising start can hope to provide the kind of democratically-organised leadership the Venezuelan process clearly needs. The movement's comparatively weak presence in Venezuela's poor urban communities is a real problem. (In a country where those in formal employment make up a minority of the workforce, it not surprising that the epicentre of the Bolivarian revolution has been in the communities and not in the workplaces.) So too is the low proportion of women - several protested when the platform for Saturday's launch at first sported only one woman and more than a dozen men - and the still limited involvement of young people.

There are also big strategic and tactical challenges ahead. What exactly should be the relationship of this new party to Chavez himself? And if Chavez and those close to him were to succeed in their apparent plans to relaunch the Vth Republic Movement as a genuine mass party of the Bolivarian revolution (with tendency rights and all), would a future PTRS join up, or stand aside? Most fundamentally of all, what kind of strategic vision is needed to try to build the current revolutionary process into one of workers' power and socialist democracy?

This movement for a new party has big responsibilities. And those of us following the process from afar have a big responsibility to support them in every way we can.

Saturday's launch meeting heard international greetings given by representatives from the MST and the MAS in Argentina, from the ISO in the United States, and from the French LCR and the Fourth International. Other organisations sent written greetings, including the MES/PSol in Brazil and the PST in Colombia.

# The Actuality of Ernest Mandel

18 July 2005, by Gilbert Achcar



This political and ideological context weighed heavily on the reception of Mandel's death. There was a natural tendency to see in him mainly a representative of a generation overdetermined by living through the experience of the Soviet Union - people born in the early years of the Russian "communist" regime and passing away at the time of its final demise. Mandel could thus be easily perceived as a representative of a specifically 20th-century Marxism whose main trends were very much concerned with the Soviet Union, whether supportively or critically. Those wishing to carry on a Marxist-inspired fight against capitalism were advocating a return to Marx (who, of course, was alive and kicking, as everyone noticed fairly quickly). For some, this meant more or less leaping past the legacy of both "Soviet Marxism" and its critics, while others sought to combine a new-look Marx with brands of critical philosophical thought that were as remote from the issue of the USSR as they were from the actual class struggle - and therefore unaffected by the great historical shift.

In reality, any view confining Ernest Mandel's legacy to a chapter in the history of Marxism that is related to the existence of the Soviet Union can only stem from sheer ignorance of his writings. For however one rates Mandel's numerous contributions on the Soviet Union - which actually could be deemed the least original part of his work, as they were devoted in large part to an orthodox defence of Trotsky's analysis - these were but a small fraction of his voluminous body of writings. Ernest Mandel always protested energetically - and rightly so - against any attempt at defining the theoretical and political profile of the international movement he inspired,

and hence his own profile, as mainly - if not merely - "anti-Stalinist." He always insisted that the most essential part of the fight he waged with his comrades was against capitalism, and that Stalinism was a much more ephemeral phenomenon than capitalism.

The truth of the matter is that if the "return to Marx" is to be considered as the defining feature of modern-day Marxism, then Ernest Mandel is the most relevant of late Marxists. The main body of Mandel's work is in fact based on a direct re-appropriation and reappraisal of original Marxism. Many of his main theoretical works fall into this category, especially *Marxist Economic Theory*, *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx* and the introductions to the Penguin edition of the three volumes of Marx's *Capital*. Mandel thus established himself as one of the key modern interpreters of Marx's economic theory, and no serious "return to Marx" - in the economic sphere at the very least - could spare itself the obligation of reading Mandel as a most useful and informative companion to Marx's economic thought.

If Mandel had only written the above-mentioned works, his relevance to modern-day Marxism would already be obvious. But he did much more than that: Ernest Mandel was the author of what Perry Anderson, the most knowledgeable practitioner of the history of Marxist ideas, has described in his *Considerations on Western Marxism* as "the first theoretical analysis of the global development of the capitalist mode of production since the Second World War, conceived within the framework of classical Marxist categories." As a matter of fact, *Late Capitalism*, Mandel's masterpiece, though it was not the first attempt at interpreting the dynamics of post-Second World War capitalism, is the first - and to this day

the only -attempt to deal with this daunting task in a comprehensive manner. Mandel strove to update Marx's categories and use them to analyse not the economic sphere alone, but also the social, political and ideological spheres - veritably producing an analysis of the post-Second World War "capitalist mode of production" in the most inclusive sense of this Marxist formula.

Moreover, Mandel developed key instruments for the analysis of the stage that global capitalism entered after the long post-war boom, especially through the crucial role he played in rehabilitating and updating the theory of the "long waves" of capitalist development. He also formulated a major analysis of the nature of the protracted recession of global capitalism that has been in progress since the 1970s. His interpretation is one of the most stimulating and serious attempts at explaining the historical dynamics of global capitalism over the long haul, and thus one that could only be ignored at the cost of missing a crucial piece of Marxist theoretical discussion in economics. One of Mandel's most important contributions in this regard consisted in putting a very great emphasis on class struggle and forms of bourgeois rule as major factors in the historical dynamics of the capitalist economies.

He rightly saw that the success of capitalist efforts to impose a new form of (de)regulation on the global economy - what is now commonly referred to as capitalist "globalization" - would depend largely on the balance of social forces. With his eye on the European fraction of global capitalism, he concluded the last of his books to come out before his death, the updated 1995 edition of *Long Waves of Capitalist Development*, with the following, still very relevant prognosis:

*If long periods of prosperity create*

*more favourable conditions for compromise and "consensus," long periods of depression favour conflicts in which all contenders refuse to make important concessions. Not successful regulation but growing contradictions and strife tend to prevail.*

*So there will be no "soft landing" from the long depression, only business cycles upturns followed by new recessions, with a steady increase in unemployment and long-term average rates of growth much lower than those of the "postwar boom."*

Mandel, most faithful in this regard to Marx, regarded the class struggle as a major factor in economic history and prognosis, instead of producing a Marxist adaptation of the bourgeois classical economics' belief in the omnipotence of the "invisible hand" of market forces or of the mercantilists' vision of a world economy where contending states are the determining factor. He shared Marx's vision because like Marx he was himself deeply immersed in the class struggle: Mandel was as far removed from armchair Marxism as anyone could be. He was a dedicated militant of the workers movement throughout his life, devoting the major part of his time to political intervention in the actual

movement in various ways.

It was unfortunate that Mandel did not live long enough to witness the rise of the new global movement against neoliberalism and imperialist wars. Had he still been with us and in good health, there can be no doubt that he would have contributed powerfully to building the movement, bringing to it not only his immense erudition and experience, but also his unquenchable revolutionary enthusiasm. In many ways, he would have been very much in tune with the new movement and the new wave of youth radicalization, as he was so fully in tune with the 1968 wave at a time when he was already 45 years old.



Ernest Mandel's legacy is actually much more in harmony with the young component of the new global movement than many of its older components are. This is because his revolutionary commitment was always deeply ethical: far from the cynical view of the world of bureaucrats and professional grafters, Mandel's inspiration was highly ethical. His

revolutionary humanism - a characteristic that he shared with that icon of juvenile revolutionary ardour that he came to befriend and with whom he also shared a first name, Ernesto Che Guevara - was one of the defining features of Mandel's personality and theoretical production.

Moreover, he was very much in harmony with the younger generation insofar as freedom and democracy were among the highest values he adhered to. In this regard Mandel was probably, among Marxists of the second half of the 20th century, one of the closest spiritually to the woman he admired profoundly and who has stood the test of time admirably: Rosa Luxemburg. Any person familiar with Mandel's political writings knows that he was in many ways a "Luxemburgist," not only in his deep belief in the revolutionary potential of the masses, but also in his intensely felt internationalism and his conviction that democratic freedoms are as necessary to the revolutionary movement as breathable air is to human beings.

Ernest Mandel is an indispensable source for the development of a 21st-century Marxism.

## The US SWP in the 1960s - Two reviews

12 July 2005, by **Duncan Chapel, Paul Le Blanc**

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### How US revolutionaries navigated through the 1960s

**Chris Brooks**

**This volume follows the struggles**

**and successes of Sheppard and the US socialist organizations from the challenging years of the 1950s through to 1973, when the socialist left had been strengthened by a new generation of activists.**



An SWP contingent - antiwar march New York 1968

Sheppard's memoirs are partisan of, and sympathetic to, the two organizations Sheppard was an active

member of: Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) and then of Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), which had been founded as the American section of the Fourth International in 1938. [26] The SWP and its members had survived isolation, government disruption and systematic victimization through the 1950s. In the 1960s, activists like Sheppard built a revolutionary alternative to the Communist Party and Social Democratic movements in the United States, both of which aimed to channel progressive activists towards the Democratic Party.

Sheppard's memoir explains how and



why the Fourth Internationalists worked in defense of the black struggle, the Cuban revolution and the Vietnamese revolution. By helping the Young Socialist Alliance to energize a new generation, the revolutionaries made a historic contribution towards ending the war in Vietnam.

Above all, Sheppard's book is a history of the SWP's leadership transition. Through the 1960s, the central leaders of the SWP were mostly activists who had joined the movement in the 1930s and 1940s. This highly qualified leadership team was starting to age and saw the opportunity to bring in a new layer of leaders, including Sheppard.

The old revolutionary generation helped the new one to understand the centrality of international collaboration in the struggle to end the war in Vietnam. Seasoned leaders like Joseph Hansen, George Breitman and Farrell Dobbs helped younger leaders to navigate through the largest radicalization in US history and a deep global radicalization. Sheppard's book covers all of this material rapidly, directly and intensively. [27]

This book also gives an excellent flavor of the internal realities of the SWP: its strong organization coherence; the reluctance of aging SWP founder James P. Cannon to withdraw from his leadership role; the tendency of some branches to develop into fiefdoms; the strong apparatus (at one point, something like a fifth of SWP members worked for the party); and the power of its political committee. [28]

Sheppard's account attempts to be both a memoir and a history. He was a supporter of the Fourth International, which publishes *International Viewpoint*, and eventually one of its leaders. He held a number of central leadership roles until the 1980s, when those organizations withdrew from the Fourth International. However, this book is much more a history than a memoir: Sheppard's personal motivations, feeling and relationships are skipped over quickly but since this book covers an immense scope with such excellence, any criticisms we could make should not detract from

the value of this book.

It should also be noted that this opening volume of Sheppard's book is deeply partisan of the SWP and the approach of its leadership committees. The net effect of this is to present the SWP as basically without internal, subjective problems by the time the book closes, in 1973. This accelerates the pace of the book, simplifies a complex history and reflects the opinions of its publishers, the DSP of Australia. However, this gives the book its weakness.

This simplification is unfortunate, especially because the SWP at this time was leading a minority tendency of opinion in the Fourth International. Both viewpoints in the debate were partially correct, but Sheppard's weak account of some disagreements makes the opinions of those that the SWP disagrees with impossible to understand. In particular, some comments concerning FI leaders such as Ernest Mandel, Tariq Ali and some leading comrades in France would have been better to have made in more detail, or not to have been made at all.

However, the general picture of a healthy SWP co-habiting with a sickening FI certainly conceals a number of developing tensions inside the SWP: In the discussions for the SWP's 1973 convention, a group of SWP members found themselves disagreeing with the monolithic SWP leadership on some issues (and, in fact, agreeing with the majority viewpoint in the Fourth International). These comrades had detected an adaptation by the SWP to more cautious political positions which offered the opportunity of larger mobilizations on a lower political basis (those comrades claimed that 'Victory to the Vietnamese Revolution' was replaced by 'Bring the troops home now', 'Free Abortion on Demand' became 'Repeal all abortion laws') and detected a less challenging approach towards the trade union leaderships. Those comrades were purged the following year by Sheppard and his then-colleagues in the SWP's leadership.

Some readers will hope that this book

will show them the roots of the SWP's political crisis in the 1980s, which led to the SWP's re-orientation towards the Cuban bureaucracy, the wrong-headed expulsion and exclusion of members who maintained solidarity with the FI, and its final withdrawal from the FI. This crisis ripens in the second volume of Sheppard's book, but the origins are signaled.

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## The Socialist Workers Party in the Sixties and Beyond

Paul Le Blanc

**Today's realities continue to reflect class, racial, and gender oppression, cultural and environmental degradation, antidemocratic and imperialist violence. Such things continue to spawn shock, disillusionment, anger, protest, resistance. There has been a resurgence of radicalization among layers of the population in the United States, especially among many who have come to political awareness since American capitalism's much-heralded triumph over "Communism." Barry Sheppard's book is a sustained exercise in retrieving memories of experiences associated with left-wing radicalism prevalent in the 1960s. This is done especially for the benefit of younger activists who have become engaged in the struggle for global justice in opposition to the corporate-military quest for "empire."**



Actually, Sheppard's memoir begins in the mid-1950s and concludes in 1973, the first of two volumes corresponding to his own involvement, which ended in 1988, in the U.S. Socialist Workers Party (SWP), associated with the

revolutionary perspectives of Leon Trotsky. These perspectives included Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, which saw worker-led democratic revolution spilling over into socialist revolution; an unyielding revolutionary internationalism; and a rejection of the bureaucratic dictatorship represented by the Stalin regime in the USSR.

## What the SWP Did

Sheppard's contribution is unique in its focus on the remarkable rise of the SWP in the 1960s and early 1970s. Born out of fierce factional conflicts in the Stalinized Communist Party of the 1920s and in the reformist Socialist Party of the 1930s, and after hopeful glory days of the 1930s and '40s, the SWP had become a shell of itself by the 1950s, thanks to an unprecedented capitalist prosperity and a stifling climate of Cold War anti-Communism in the wake of World War II. From 1960 to 1973, however, the SWP and its youth group the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) grew from about 400 to about 3,000 cadres. They became a significant force in a number of initiatives:

- **Fair Play for Cuba Committees**, organized to oppose aggressive policies by the U.S. government against Cuba after Fidel Castro and Che Guevara led the Cuban Revolution to triumph in 1959;

- **Student Peace Union**, which protested against the testing of atomic and hydrogen bombs and the threat to humanity posed by the possibility of nuclear war in the early 1960s;

- **Civil rights and black liberation movements**, in activities ranging from eyewitness reporting on early challenges to Jim Crow in the South for the SWP's newsweekly, *The Militant*, to honoring black trade unionist E.D. Nixon (who played a pivotal role in the 1955-56 Montgomery Bus Boycott), to helping organize nationwide picketing of Woolworth's stores in support of the 1960 Greensboro lunch-counter sit-ins, to rallying in defense of Robert F. Williams (militant president of the Monroe, North Carolina, NAACP, who advocated armed self-defense by Blacks against the Ku Klux Klan); the SWP also played a special role in

helping Malcolm X convey his revolutionary nationalist perspectives more widely than would otherwise have been possible;

- **Early stirrings of feminism's "second wave"** - from animated early discussion of Frederick Engels's views on gender equality in pre-class societies and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, to involvement with the National Organization for Women and the abortion rights struggle, not to mention the increasingly prominent involvement of women in the SWP and YSA at all levels;

- **Socialist electoral challenges to capitalist politics-as-usual**, sometimes joining with others on the Left to run left-wing candidates, sometimes running aggressive and colorful campaigns in the name of the SWP, and always using the campaigns, often quite effectively, to promote current social struggles and to win people to socialist ideas;

- **The movement to end the war in Vietnam.**

In this last initiative, one can find a number of key elements of the SWP's success. The period of the Vietnam war was the first time in U.S. history when a majority of the population shifted from accepting the government's war to opposing it. Mass demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands and reflecting the thinking of millions were organized year after year, by such broad coalitions as the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam and the National Peace Action Coalition, posing a sharp challenge and a growing barrier to the power of prowar politicians and policymakers. Some in the antiwar movement (including the present author) had an illusion that the antiwar effort could be shifted into a multi-issue course in order to transform it into a mass radical movement. We believed this would be able to usher in a more fundamental social and political change than "merely" U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam; for some this was seen as taking place through the Democratic Party, for others it was seen as taking place well to the left of and against both the Democratic and Republican parties.

In contrast, the SWP called for a movement with a single focus-

immediate, unconditional U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam (translated into the popular slogan "bring the troops home now"). That was too radical for most Democratic Party liberals, who preferred more equivocal slogans. SWPers nonetheless labored tirelessly to build a nonexclusionary united front to organize peaceful, legal mass demonstrations around the "out now" position. While the single-issue focus was linked to other various issues (Black liberation, women's liberation, labor struggles, opposition to poverty, civil liberties, etc.), in speeches, flyers, and specific contingents in the mass demonstrations, the demonstrations were open to all who agreed on the antiwar perspective, regardless of where they stood on other issues, and regardless of what political party they did or did not support. This was the strategy that, in fact, made the antiwar movement an increasingly effective force that helped limit the options of the warmakers, by mobilizing colossal demonstrations year after year. As the group that was most consistent in advancing this orientation, and as a quite effective and highly-disciplined party, the SWP became central and unrivaled leaders of the antiwar movement and helped bring an end to that bloody conflict.

## Some Personal Recollections

This brought a significant layer of new left and antiwar activists (including the present author) into the SWP by 1973, which is basically when this first volume of Sheppard's memoir ends.

The SWP and YSA were organizationally and politically far more serious than anything I had participated in previously. I received an incomparable and multifaceted education within them. One facet of this was simply practical, resulting from a variety of internal assignments (branch secretary, forum series director, literature sales director, bookstore director, financial director, branch organizer, as well as executive committee member) that taught me the nuts and bolts of maintaining a very active political organization in which a diverse number of individuals

had to work together to accomplish a great deal.

As an electoral candidate and as a participant in a number of election campaign committees, I gained valuable experience in explaining socialist ideas to many different kinds of people. And I participated in party fractions that were active in "mass work": opposing the U.S. war in Vietnam; protesting the U.S.-sponsored coup in Chile and working to defend Latin American political prisoners; building support for struggles of the farm workers, teachers, mine workers, and other unions; undertaking civil liberties efforts and opposing the death penalty; participating in student protests against tuition hikes; struggling for abortion rights and the Equal Rights Amendment for women; campaigning against South African apartheid and against racism here at home; and protesting against the dangers of nuclear power.

While it was not possible for me personally, at any given moment, to be involved in everything that needed to be done to bring about a better world, by being part of an organization in which all phases of activity were democratically and collectively evaluated and decided upon, I could be involved in far more activity—all of which was interrelated and part of a unified revolutionary, socialist, practical orientation—than would otherwise have been possible.

A sense of revolutionary continuity that came, in part, from having several generations of activists in a single organization. There were time-tested perspectives and norms, a rich pool of knowledge and political experience. Some of the older comrades seemed simply to be glad that they could still be part of a revolutionary movement that was being regenerated by an influx of young activists, whom they embraced with a perhaps too uncritical affection. Others seemed concerned that older revolutionary virtues of their own youth would be lost unless they (sometimes rigidly and imperiously) provided firm guidance, undergirded with long lectures and occasionally punctuated with fierce reprimands. But many of the veteran cadres maintained a balance, relating

to the newer forces on a basis of genuine equality—patiently sharing their own knowledge, seeking to learn from new experience, encouraging the full development of the young comrades while frankly putting forward their own thinking on perspectives and directions for the SWP. On the whole, all these older comrades had considerable prestige among the younger layers.

Many different qualities could be found among the younger members. There was a tremendous eagerness and vibrancy—sometimes a maddening "eager-beaver" enthusiasm and a youthful "we're the greatest" arrogance about the SWP and YSA, which alienated unsympathetic outsiders. Some took to copying the mannerisms of the prestigious elders—talking sagely about "the way we do things" even if they had been members for only twelve months, speaking about experiences of bygone years (before they had been born) as if they had been participants, hewing sometimes rigidly (unlike many of the older comrades) to imperfectly assimilated orthodoxies. These jostled with the more rebellious spirits who saw no need to cease being outspoken mavericks simply because their rebelliousness had brought them into a revolutionary organization. This by itself guaranteed the flare-up of passionate, animated arguments—sometimes fed by one or another neurosis, and sometimes cohering around genuine political differences. There were also many who were more pragmatically inclined (sometimes interested in discussing ideas, sometimes not) who concentrated their energies more exclusively on working effectively in the mass movements and maintaining party institutions. Theories, party history, and critical ideas were judged in more practical terms of how they seemed to advance the party's work in the here and now. The energies of all these young activists contributed to the movement's dynamism in the 1970s.

Much energy was certainly needed for the seemingly endless succession of weekly branch meetings, educationals, fraction and committee meetings, sales of the party's newspaper *The Militant*, forums, activities of the mass movements, and so on that formed a

way of life for many of us. This made the SWP an especially demanding environment for normal working people, students serious about their formal education, and those with families. This very distinctive subculture helped to make us effective in the many activities, movements, and struggles that we engaged in. It also created a separate universe that often made it difficult for us to understand and relate to those outside of it. This could have a negative impact on members' sense of perspective. Sometimes this made it possible for collectively-embraced notions to distort our understanding of complex realities, undermining our effectiveness in communicating to people. It also blunted our ability, sometimes, to anticipate possibilities and limitations in the dynamic political and social contexts of the larger society.

## Failings and Decline

In the early 1970s, a transition was initiated, resulting in the older central leadership layer, shaped by the 1930s and '40s labor struggles, being replaced by a much younger layer of 1960s activists, led by Carleton College graduate Jack Barnes and his second-in-command Barry Sheppard from Boston University and MIT.

Although the writings of Lenin, Trotsky, and U.S. Trotskyist founder James P. Cannon were avidly read, discussed, and internalized by the young activists, the context in which the revolutionary "teachers" from earlier decades had lived and the context in which the avid students of the 1960s lived were qualitatively different. The relationship of the new radicals to the rest of the working class, not to mention the culture and consciousness of both the actual proletariat and its would-be "vanguard" in the 1970s were far different from what was true in the early 1900s or the 1930s. A failure to comprehend the meaning of this ruptured continuity would contribute to the rise of a fatal disorientation that accelerated within the SWP as the 1970s flowed into the 1980s, culminating in fragmentation and

implosion. For some disillusioned SWPers, responsibility for these outcomes was laid at the door of Lenin and/or Trotsky and/or Cannon. Some bitterly came to dismiss everything having to do with the SWP.

This failure, however, more or less afflicted all Marxist-oriented organizations in the U.S. from the late 1970s through the late 1980s. Ironically, this occurred as influences from the 1960s radicalization permeated much of the U.S. population, and as negative impacts from the early manifestations of "globalization" created remarkable new openings for left-wing developments within the working class. At the same time, many actual and potential activists who are technically part of the working class have been more drawn to "identities" related to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, etc., and to specific issues (war and militarism, human rights, ecological concerns, globalization, etc.).

The SWP that Barry Shepard describes might have weathered the crisis of the late 1970s and '80s—it would seem to have contained qualities facilitating fruitful adaptation. It stands to reason, therefore, that there were certain other qualities in the SWP, muted or missing in volume 1 of Sheppard's memoir, that generated a far less positive outcome. This included a hothouse and disruptively carried-out "industrialization" policy in the late 1970s, which sent almost all cadres into factories regardless of personal, political, or economic realities—an especially serious problem given the relative decline of U.S. industry in the 1980s. It included a romantic fantasy that Fidel Castro's Cuban Communist Party was about to forge a new revolutionary international—"necessitating" a rapid, top-down abandonment of Trotskyist theory. It included a grotesque tightening of "party discipline" that drove hundreds of actual, incipient, and potential dissidents out of the SWP (including a majority of its remaining veterans from the 1930s and '40s)—a campaign which Sheppard helped to implement in its early stages, and of which he was a victim in its later stages.

The SWP seems so incredibly good in this book—how could it have turned out so badly? There is hardly a glimmer of such negative possibilities in what Sheppard writes. But there is more than one reason why this limitation can be forgiven. First of all, Sheppard himself explicitly acknowledges these silences, and he promises to take up such matters in the upcoming volume that deals with the SWP's decline. Second, this relatively uncritical account provides a sense of the mindset, at the time, of Sheppard and many other SWP comrades. And it also allows for a straightforward telling of a story that needs to be told.

Even in this first volume, Sheppard begins to introduce a critical note. While the SWP and YSA played a role in early civil rights efforts of the late 1950s and '60s, he suggests that it would have been wise for them to become involved in the 1964 Freedom Summer efforts of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He is critical of the SWP's earlier homophobic tendencies (shared with most of the Left up to the 1970s) and self-critically suggests that its pathbreaking reversal of this failed to go far enough. While Sheppard never questions the centrality of the working class as the force that must bring the socialist future into being, he suggests that an overly optimistic notion predominated in the SWP leadership regarding how soon class-conscious workers might be expected to play such a role on the U.S. political scene. And while he clearly indicates his own preference for the leadership style and perspectives of Farrell Dobbs over the older and more seasoned Jim Cannon, he does draw attention—in his discussion of an initial tightening of organizational norms in 1965-66—to Cannon's prophetic warning to the Dobbs leadership (even more relevant for the Barnes leadership): "Don't strangle the party."

### **A Book Worth Reading**

In this book we get a sense of how a relative handful of people—aging Trotskyist veterans and younger activists—utilized certain basic organizational norms and political principles to build a dynamic organization that made a real

difference in the United States from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. At the same time, while providing insights on the personalities and internal workings of U.S. Trotskyism in this period, Sheppard conscientiously seeks to connect the activities of the SWP to the larger historical contexts: the Cold War, the Hungarian revolution, the Algerian war for independence, developments in the Middle East, the "thaw" in the USSR, the mass slaughter of leftists in Indonesia, the Vietnam conflict, the so-called Cultural Revolution in China, the May-June 1968 student-worker rebellion in France, the ill-fated Prague Spring that reached for "socialism with a human face," and more.

Another valuable dimension of the volume is Sheppard's discussion of the Fourth International, the global organizational network of revolutionary groups embracing a majority of the world's organized Trotskyists, to which the SWP adhered as a "sympathizing section." He gives interesting glimpses of some of his own rich experiences with comrades in Europe, India, and Sri Lanka. He also begins a discussion (to be concluded in volume 2) of a sharp factional dispute in the Fourth International from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s over whether the world revolutionary breakthrough would be advanced by a continental strategy of rural guerrilla warfare in Latin America. Sheppard and other SWP leaders argued in the negative, insisting on the continued relevance of the classical Leninist-Trotskyist method of party building and applying the Transitional Program, seeking to raise demands to reach and mobilize mass movements.

This orthodoxy posited that all political organizing must facilitate two things: (1) the education and mobilization of masses of people, especially the working-class majority, to struggle for democratic and "immediate" social and economic advances, and (2) the building and strengthening of a revolutionary party capable of helping to lead masses of workers and their allies not only in struggles for democratic and immediate demands, but also for transitional demands leading towards



socialism. Such an orientation also put the SWP at loggerheads with many other currents on the U.S. Left in the heady days of which Sheppard writes.

There are some errors that have crept into this text which should be corrected in future printings. Reference is made to the almost suicidally ultraleft Weatherman faction of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) arising a year before it actually came into being. Another incorrect reference is made to the Pentagon Papers as the source demonstrating that Presidents Johnson and Nixon, in contrast to their public statements of indifference, were quite concerned and upset by mass antiwar protests. This fact is revealed in numerous comments by their former aides and, for Nixon, also in the Watergate Transcripts-but not in the Pentagon Papers which (as Sheppard notes elsewhere in this volume) "documented the involvement of the United States from 1945 to mid-1968"

in Vietnam, and "told the truth, in contrast to the lies the government spoonfed the public about the reasons for the war."

There are, of course, also interpretations of events that are open to question. Having been in the New Left milieu about which the author writes from the outside, I think there are oversimplifications mixed with the insights-which may also be the case regarding the influence of the Communist Party, with which the SWP had been crossing swords for over three decades. Yet even if one might question certain judgments, they give a fairly accurate gauge of the kinds of judgments many SWPers made at the time. The text is also generously sprinkled with gems of bluntly-expressed wisdom, such as "Whenever capitalist politicians talk about 'the national interest,' take heed. They invariably mean the interests of the ruling rich."

Some of the SWP's history and personalities are conveyed, as well, with a generous sampling of photographs, and the volume is enhanced with three helpful indexes: one of names, one of organizations, and one of events, ideas and topics. While not pretending to be the final word on the history of American Trotskyism, Sheppard's book tells a story worth telling. It is a valuable source for activists (and for scholars), and one looks forward to the continuation of the story in the next volume. Its publication will help to advance thinking and discussions that will inevitably be stirred by this first volume regarding the extent to which positive aspects of the SWP's legacy might be utilized (and negative aspects avoided) in ways that will help activists transform the 21st century.

[This review has been taken from [Labor Standard](#). A somewhat different version of this review will appear in [Against the Current](#).]

## After the success of the "No" from the left

10 July 2005, by **Laurent Carasso**

What we saw was a profound movement in French society. The most spectacular aspect was obviously its class character: 80 per cent of manual workers, 70 per cent of white collar workers, more than 60 per cent of young people voted for the "No". It was the most working-class towns and polling stations that voted "No".



So this "No" is the direct expression of the social and political crisis that the country has been going through for years. It could be seen in the previous electoral contests, either through popular abstention, or through the systematic punishment of the parties that were in government. It is the kind

of punishment that Lionel Jospin, at the time Socialist Prime Minister, suffered in the presidential election of 2002. The same thing happened in 2004, at the regional and European elections, which were a disaster for the UMP and the UDF under the government of UMP member Raffarin. The unprecedented aspect of this vote on the constitutional treaty is that the electors were able to vote at the same time against all the parties, whether of Left or Right, that were responsible for neoliberal policies.

It was the popular classes getting their own back. The vote crystallised on the electoral terrain a profound social discontent. That is not surprising, since successive governments have never hesitated to make the link between their measures

of social regression and the European Union. But it is a reality that that has been largely underestimated, on the right, but also by the Hollande leadership of the Socialist party.

### A decade of resistance

For ten years, in France, as in the other countries of the European Union, the neoliberal attacks have been piling up, threatening public services, social protection and secure employment. Every wage earner is directly concerned by these attacks. The advance towards the neoliberal model has been continuous. In 1995 there took place a general strike against the Juppé Plan to reform

Social Security (health insurance), a movement of which the rail workers were the backbone. The Right paid dearly for this attack. The reform was blocked and two years later the Left arrived in strength in the National Assembly. In five years, it largely exhausted its store of confidence, privatising more enterprises than the two preceding right-wing governments together. In 2002, during the presidential election, a first warning shot had unsettled the liberal leaders: Lionel Jospin, candidate of the Socialist Party, failed to make it into the second round, the far Left won 10 per cent of the votes, almost three times more than the Communist Party, and Jacques Chirac only won 19 percent of the vote. Only a scare campaign made it possible for Jacques Chirac to be plebiscited in the second round against Jean-Marie Le Pen, candidate of the National Front. By turning the second round into an anti-fascist vote, the SP, like the Right sought to conceal the growing breach between it and the popular electorate.

Nevertheless, a year later, for several weeks a powerful strike movement mobilised workers against the reform of the pensions system, linked to a general strike movement among teachers. This movement was finally defeated but left, in popular consciousness and among the militants of the workers' movement, the understanding that the bourgeoisie was setting out to dismantle all the social gains of previous decades, a dismantling that was permanently justified by the imperatives of globalisation and the construction of the European Union, a dismantling that was the responsibility of the Right, but also of the social-liberal Left.

Since 2003, the agenda of liberal reforms has continued. In 2004, in particular, the Raffarin government established the Douste-Blazy Plan, attacking the health insurance system, with the same logic as the previous attack against pensions. This attack was conducted parallel to a reform of the hospitals ("Hospital 2007"), which also led to harsher conditions of work, with a compartmentalisation by department and the setting up of regional hospitalisation agencies responsible making the hospitals

profitable according to capitalist criteria. Only the active complicity of the political and trade union leadership of the workers' movement prevented the building of a fightback similar to the previous year's movement, although the task was not made any easier by the demoralisation of many militant sectors who were still digesting the previous year's defeat.

Nevertheless, on the initiative of ATTAC, the Copernic Foundation and many union sectors, as well as of the LCR and the PCF, the country was covered with a network of collectives in defence of Social Security, taking up again the anti-neoliberal responses put forward the previous year during the debate on pensions. It was a defeat without a battle, but a defeat that once again reinforced the consciousnesses of the need to combat a project of society, which, step by step, was destabilising workers and reinforcing social inequality.

Parallel to this, the energy sector was attacked by the change in the status of EDF-GDF (the state electricity and gas companies) in order to open them up to private capital. Unfortunately, the leadership of the Energy Federation of the CGT, which was by far the majority union in the sector, did nothing to organise the fightback and coordinate the militant actions that were conducted in several regions. During the summer of 2004, the successive announcements of the privatisation of France Telecom and of the closure of 6,000 local post offices completed the tableau of the neoliberal calendar.

On all the questions of privatisation, the French trade union movement did not provide a global response, did not seek to build a general mobilisation which could have been carried forward by an alternative project of development of public services in the service of social needs. The CGT has in this domain the main responsibility, because that is where there are the bulk of the militant forces who could have built such a fightback, but that must obviously not hide either the rallying of the CFDT, the second most important trade union confederation, to such projects, nor the passivity of Force Ouvrière. Each sector was left to its own devices and the willingness

to fight of militant sectors of the CGT, or of SUD-PTT, could not impede these processes. On the other hand, the defence of public services provided once again the basis for building numerous local collectives and for the organisation, in February 2005, of a national mobilisation in Guéret, prefecture of the department of Creuse, in the centre of France, which became a symbol of the desertification of public services.

To these questions of global social policy were have been added, over the last few months, continuing mass lay-offs and workplace closures and the inexorable rise in the number of unemployed, who are subjected to growing culpabilisation and to reduced benefits. The question of relocation, which was very much present in the European election campaign, is a result of the growing desire of employers to increase their profit margins by relocating production units in Eastern Europe, or more generally by the pressure exerted on wages and working conditions by the blackmail of relocations. In the same way, the question if wages came to the forefront again, both the public and the private sectors being subjected to a policy of wage austerity which led to a drop in purchasing power, reinforced by the rise in rents, the price of everyday consumer products and energy bills.

So in the last few years - and in the months preceding the referendum - there has been an increase in the attacks, a disorganised fightback and a growing feeling of insecurity and destabilisation among workers. And that was taking place without this feeling being able to be expressed positively by perspectives of social struggles or of a political alternative, the leadership of the Socialist Party having yielded a long time ago to these liberal evolutions.

Parallel to that, there has been a broad politicisation of trade union sectors and of the global justice movement, expressed in particular during the European Social Forum of Paris-St. Denis in November 2003.

# **An accumulation of - badly interpreted - experiences**

In this context, the regional elections of April 2004 had given a false impression of the situation. Without having conducted a really dynamic campaign, the Socialist Party, for the main part, and its traditional allies, the Greens and the PCF, had been the beneficiaries of an overwhelming vote aimed at punishing the Right, which gave social democracy control of 21 out of 23 regions. In spite of a united campaign conducted by Lutte Ouvrière (LO) and the LCR, the far Left found itself weakened by this electoral movement, dropping below 5 per cent of the vote. Some people saw in that, after the “protest” votes of 2002, the proof that traditional politics had reasserted itself and that the perspective of putting the Left back in office had regained the credibility it had lost. Subsequent events located this vote within a global perspective, showing that the vote for the SP was a vote against the Right and in no way a renewed popular adhesion to this party or a marginalisation of the political positions of the far Left.

It is no doubt a false view of reality and an underestimation of popular discontent that led Jacques Chirac to embark on the adventure of the referendum and François Hollande, First Secretary of the Socialist Party, to strongly commit his party to the battle for the “Yes”. By only having a superficial view of the votes of 2002 and 2004, it seemed to both of them that the victory of the “Yes” was guaranteed. To such an extent that François Hollande did not hesitate to appear in a photo alongside (UMP leader) Nicolas Sarkozy, on the cover of a mass-circulation magazine. Furthermore, Jacques Chirac saw himself as sure to be the main beneficiary of this result, faced with a Socialist Party that could not fail to be divided on the question.

A particularity of French politics lies in the fact that there exists widely in the workers’ movement an anti-

neoliberal political sentiment, which makes the connection between capitalist globalisation, the policy of the European Union and the national policies of attacking social gains. This sentiment has been steadily maintained by the social struggles of recent years, and also by the actions conducted by the global justice movement and the Peasant Confederation, the existence in France of a radical social movement involving associations and unions, and of a far Left that is very much present on the political scene, in particular in recent years with the popularity of Olivier Besancenot. This political sentiment also has its negative aspects, in a national view of things that is somewhat haughty vis-à-vis the other countries of Western Europe, considering France as a citadel of the social state, besieged by the Anglo-Saxon model, thus ignoring the gains that were won in the post-war years, in Northern Europe as in Britain, in Germany or in Italy, for example. This view of things comforts sovereignist or republican currents who see in the French state as such a protection against social attacks.

Nevertheless, it is this widespread sentiment that explains why, alone in Europe, the Socialist Party could be so divided on the question of the Constitution, with an internal referendum in which more than 40 per cent of the membership voted to reject the European Constitutional Treaty (ECT).

So this movement for the “No” has deep roots and social, associative, trade union and political backing.

## **A campaign patiently built...**

As soon as the question of the referendum came onto the agenda, in the summer of 2004, the Copernic Foundation - a centre of initiative and analysis which brings together political militants (LCR, PCF, Greens, critical Socialists), trade unionists, anti-liberal activists of various associations - took the initiative of launching a broad appeal for the rejection of the Constitution on a left basis, for a “social and internationalist

No”. At that point only the militant sectors were preoccupied by the question of the referendum, but this appeal made it possible, from autumn onwards, to build many united front collectives. The LCR completely committed itself to this appeal and to the building of united front collectives. On the political level this “Appeal of the 200” involved, other than the Ligue, the PCF, militants of PRS (“For a Social Republic”, a club in the SP around Jean-Luc Mélenchon), MARS (a current that came from the Citizens’ Movement of Jean-Pierre Chevènement), the “ecologists for the No” of the minority of the Greens, plus militants from the trade unions and from various associations.

Lutte Ouvrière had a particular attitude throughout this campaign. In contrast to its position at the time of the Maastricht Treaty, when it had called for abstention, incurring the criticism that it had by so doing contributed to the narrow victory, with 51 per cent, of the “Yes” during the French referendum of September 1992, it decided in December 2004 to come out in favour of the “No”, more to avoid being criticised again than to really conduct a campaign. During the first half of 2005, the militants of LO were absent from the collectives and from the united front campaign and they themselves conducted practically no campaign, Arlette Laguiller making only a few appearances on television on the question.

In the early stages of the campaign, the PCF, signatory of the Appeal of the 200, kept its distance, concentrating on organising its own campaign and...waiting for the SP to take a position, hoping that a victory for the “No” would act as the driving force for a campaign of the entire Left. Subsequently, in the vast majority of towns and cities in the country, the PCF really committed itself to the united front campaign.

There were two real turning points in the campaign. The internal referendum of the Socialist Party, in December, in which Laurent Fabius, the party’s number 2, after having “hesitated for a long time”, came out in favour of the “No”. This choice, coming from a convinced social-liberal, who had himself supported all

the previous treaties since the Single Act and Maastricht, surprised many people. A tactical position, looking towards the 2007 presidential election? Obviously. But also no doubt a sharper understanding than his colleague Hollande of popular resentment against liberal Europe. The vote, which produced 59 per cent for the "Yes", resulted in a clearer commitment of the minority currents of the SP to the campaign, although Henri Emmanuelli and Laurent Fabius concentrated on running their own campaigns, Fabius being obviously unable to identify with the radical content of the Appeal of the 200 and of the united front campaign. The result also more clearly committed the PCF to the united front collectives and meetings.

After a real internal debate, ATTAC came out without hesitation for the "No" and played an important role in all the work of explanation and information at local level. The same was true of the Peasant Confederation.

The position of these two organisations had a big impact on the left. Because François Hollande as well as Daniel Cohn-Bendit tried throughout the campaign to present the "Yes" as an "intelligent, open" vote, compared to the "No - fearful and frustrated". The credibility of the Peasant Confederation and of ATTAC among intellectual layers and the better-off sections of the working class helped to build a broad base for the "No" vote.

The French Greens decided by a narrow margin in favour of a "critical Yes". But the omnipresence of Cohn-Bendit in the campaign for the neoliberal "Yes", often alongside François Bayrou, leader of the UDF, eclipsed any autonomous campaign and left the field open to the minority, which was present in the united front collectives and rallies.

The most important problem was that of the trade union movement.

Caught up in its aggiornamento into a trade union of negotiation and of insertion into the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the confederal leadership of the CGT was

for a long time tempted to adopt the position of the ETUC, of support for the ECT, a position shared in France by the CFDT. This position obviously went against the attitude of a large majority of militants. But the Thibault leadership obstinately refused to commit the confederation. That had, de facto, the effect of blocking the situation both in the main teachers' federation - the FSU - and in the Union Solidaires (which includes the SUD unions). Although these two organisations had taken a clear position of rejection of the Treaty, there was continuing resistance in their ranks to getting really committed to the "No" campaign, this lack of commitment being reinforced by the CGT's attitude. Fortunately, in February, during a meeting of the National Confederal Council, the CGT came out clearly, by 81 votes against 18, for the rejection of the treaty. This was the second decisive element of the campaign, which allowed the "No from the left" to solidly establish itself.

However, even before this vote, many trade union militants, from the CGT, from the FSU and from the SUD unions were present in the campaign, and many union bodies had themselves taken a position.

## **... a campaign dominated by the "No from the left"**

Overall, it is the commitment of all these forces that gave the campaign for the "No" its full breadth and marked it with a clear social content.

In the first months of 2005, the question of the Constitution and of the referendum became the central political question in the country. All the social questions contributed to strengthening the "No": the debate over re-locations, the mobilisation against the Bolkestein directive, an all too short-lived national mobilisation over wages on March 10th, 2005, the protest movement of school students that throughout the spring opposed a reform of the baccalauréat which was part of Education Minister Fillon's plan to undermine the school system, leading to greater social

discrimination. That was also the case with the attack on the 35-hour week by de-controlling overtime quotas, and especially with the government's decision to suppress the Whit Monday holiday. This decision, taken in a climate of quasi indifference following the heat wave of summer of 2004, which had led to the death of more than 10,000 old people, under the pretext of setting up a fund to finance dependent old people, which was to be paid for by this additional unpaid working day. But the implementation of the measure, on the eve of the referendum, produced a clash that once again reinforced the rise of the "No". After several days of an exemplary strike by the workers of the Total oil company against the suppression of the Whit Monday holiday, the government, panic-stricken, had to allow the management of the company to negotiate the abandoning of the extra working day for its employees.

Faced with this strength of the "No", throughout the campaign the whole of the media - newspapers, radio and television - conducted a partisan campaign in defence of the "Yes", caricaturing the "No", a campaign predicting that there would be chaos and that France would be outlawed by the other countries of the EU if the vote went against ratification. Jacques Chirac intervened there times on television, throwing his full weight into the balance. All to no avail!

The campaign was clearly dominated by the "No from the left", which mobilised more than 200,000 people in united front meetings, with hundreds of local public meetings. Books about the Constitution and magazine supplements were distributed on a large scale. This was in sharp contrast to the campaign in the Spanish state, where the electors were not even able to acquaint themselves with Part III of the treaty, which contains the essential elements of previous treaties and the concrete ultra-neoliberal measures.

Whereas in the autumn of 2004, the leaders of the "No" on the right, like Philippe De Villiers, often held centre stage and marked the campaign with their rejection of Turkey joining the EU, in the spring these themes were



marginalized, as was the very discreet campaign of the National Front, which only held a few meetings.

## **Crisis of legitimacy and denial of democracy**

The result of the referendum had a corrosive political effect. Its unchallengeable score sharply revealed the weakness of the social base of the neoliberal parties of Right and Left. Whereas 92 per cent of French MPs and senators voted in favour of the Constitution, 55 per cent of electors rejected it. That obviously creates a crisis of legitimacy, for Chirac and for the Assembly.

The total denial of democracy was clearly shown by the contempt with which Chirac considered that he didn't have to relay the popular vote in the European institutions. In 2003, Raffarin said to the millions of workers who were occupying the streets against the reform of pensions: "it is not the street that governs!". Today Chirac is basically saying, "it is not the ballot box that governs!". That can only reinforce the crisis of legitimacy of parliamentary institutions and electoral mechanisms.

Never has a government been so discredited as soon as it was appointed as the new government of De Villepin, appointed in haste to replace Raffarin in the wake of May 29th.

But the corrosive effect of the referendum can be seen in the very composition of this government. Only one minister from the UDF (who disobeyed his party's orders and was expelled from his party a few days later), a government organised around the unconditional supporters of Jacques Chirac, even ousting all the ministers who are supporters of his rival Nicolas Sarkozy within the UMP, and only including Sarkozy himself in order to deprive him of extra room for manoeuvre in the preparation of the presidential election of 2007.

In the same fashion, in the Socialist

Party, the first decision of the Hollande leadership was also to oust Laurent Fabius from his position as number 2 and from the National Secretariat, which was also made up solely of the losers of May 29th. It can be predicted that it will be very difficult for the Socialist leaders to put all that back together again...

All these defensive reflexes also show that this vote is once again an anti-system vote. A vote against all the parties of government. From a certain point of view that confirms the elements of growing distance between the traditional leaderships of the Left and the popular classes. These are profound long-term tendencies on the social and political level. But the vote brings out more forcibly the crisis of representation of the parties.

May 29th also poses a fundamental social question. It did not change the social relationship of forces and the government is launching fresh attacks. The class character of this vote poses a direct challenge to the social movement, above all the trade union movement. It is evidence, not necessarily of increased combativeness, but of a readiness to mobilise on fundamental social objectives around which the leaderships have up to now refused to organise action at the level that is required. This situation reinforces the urgency of converging actions by the militant forces who, in the CGT, the FSU and Solidaires share this readiness to fight back together against the neoliberal reforms.

## **The PCF at the heart of the contradictions**

The forces of the "no" from the left are obviously faced with a political challenge. The spokespersons of the PCF and of the SP minorities are already declaring that they refuse any logic of building a "radical pole" and that they want it reunify the "no from the left" and the "yes from the left", in a perspective of coming together for the general elections of 2007, whereas everything indicates that the SP will maintain the orientations that it has

applied for years and which remain within the framework of neoliberalism.

The heart of the contradiction on the left is now to be found within the PCF. This party has found fresh vigour in this campaign. It was in many rallies and meetings the dominant force. There are not new waves of recruitment, especially among young people, but the "Communist people" - many with grey or white hair - has woken up. That still means tens of thousands of militants. But it has woken up on an orientation that is combative, anti-neoliberal and opposed to the leadership of the SP. To be more precise, the PCF leadership maintained two parallel discourses throughout the campaign: a sharp denunciation of neoliberalism, but also the need to renew links with the "Yes from the left", in a perspective of a parliamentary and governmental majority. Similarly, PCF leader Marie-George Buffet often came back to the idea that there are not two Lefts...but only one, from the SP to the LCR... and that it was necessary to reunify all that!

If the broadest unity is obviously necessary against the MEDEF (the bosses' organisation) and the Right, the question that is now posed for tens of thousands of Communist militants is the following: in the present relationship of forces, where the party machines and the institutions are dominated on the left by social-liberalism - that includes the "No" of Laurent Fabius -, can we put together again a "new look Union of the Left" on an orientation imposed by the leadership of the SP or else do we have to build another alliance, in the dynamic of the "No from the left", - an alliance that is really anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist?

That is the real question that is posed. Take up the fight to change the relationship of forces on the left, with a perspective of breaking from capitalist imperatives, with all the risks that that entails, or else fall back into the rut of all the past governmental formulas, which have always respected the capitalist economy and capitalist institutions. That is the question that the LCR is going to ask the PCF in particular, but that it will also address to sectors of

the social movements, to left sectors of the Socialists and the Greens: social-liberal government or anti-capitalist alternative, that is the key question for the coming weeks and months. From this point of view, although what is most likely is an orientation that will try to rebuild a Union of the Left with the whole SP in a governmental perspective, sectors of the PCF can opt for a step to the left and a break with the leadership of the SP. In which case, that would seriously pose the question of a new anti-capitalist front or alliance including, besides the revolutionaries, a PCF or sectors of the PCF that would break with any policy of governmental alliance with the social liberals. But this question also concerns the trade union militants and the militants of various associations who were involved in the campaign. Not to seize the occasion to change the political landscape on the left, but instead to submit to new governmental perspectives under the leadership of the SP, would be somewhat incoherent with the political force that emerged during the campaign.

## **United front collectives and new anti-capitalist force**

This debate obviously dovetails with the debate on perspectives for the movement of the collectives. Today,

the unitary dynamic is such that the sectors who have taken part in this campaign, at least at rank and file level, have a strong desire to continue. The LCR is going to propose united front actions and objectives, social and political, against the programme of the new government and of the Right, in particular concerning defence of jobs, of labour legislation and of wages, because the new government is making a multitude of declarations about "adapting the French social model" to models "which create...jobs", even though these jobs are of the most insecure kind.

The LCR is also proposing to go forward after the French and Dutch "No's" towards a European conference, in order to draw up new European perspectives that correspond to social needs.

But at the same time, a discussion is posed in the collectives about the content of an anti-capitalist political alternative, a programme that breaks with the law of profit. It is in this sense that the LCR developed throughout the campaign a plan of ten anti-capitalist emergency measures, which, starting from immediate demands, put at the centre of things a new redistribution of wealth and incursions into capitalist property. This perspective is of course opposed to all the possible social-liberal governmental combinations and to any other government that remains within the framework of the capitalist economy and capitalist institutions. But the main thing is to pursue this

unitary movement, to make tests, around practical action and in struggles, to take forward action and analysis. The "No" was a decisive moment of the political struggle. It embodied not only elements of refusal, but also in a positive way the first elements of response, demands, debate, hope. Now we have to go beyond that...because the "No from the left", as such, does not constitute a sufficient political response for building an anti-capitalist alternative. We have to deepen our analysis, bring forward global propositions, but without dividing the movement. This is a particularly key question in order to bring together the militants and currents who could be ready for the perspective of a new anti-capitalist force.

This question is obviously fundamental, because the gulf that today exists between workers and their political representation poses objectively the question of this new force. The LCR played its full part in the united front. Olivier Besancenot was one of the main spokespersons of the campaign. A political situation in which the LCR can play an important role is opening up again. And the echo of the LCR's spokesperson largely exceeds the audience of the branches of the LCR, there again demonstrating the political space that could be occupied by a broad anti-capitalist force on a programme independent of compromises with social democracy. The balance sheet of this campaign provides a new occasion to go forward in this direction.

# **Crisis of the SPD and the New "Left Party"**

**9 July 2005, by Manuel Kellner**

Should we believe that 290,000 former SPD voters really think that the CDU is the best defender of their interests? No, rather it represents a reflex of despair.

The CDU defends virtually the same programme as the SPD, and they wish

to infringe still further against the social rights of wage earners, the unemployed and so on. But, the argument would run, would they not be "more competent" than the social democrats, which means "would they not be closer to the bosses, thus more capable of ensuring that there would

be more productive investment and less unemployment, and, one fine day, also less pressure for austerity?"

For the first time in a long time the SPD also lost to a new political formation to its left and one that put social problems to the fore of its

demands: the Electoral Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice (WASG) [29].



WASG supporters on the march in Essen

This latter succeeded not only in setting itself up, organizing candidacies in all the constituencies and gathering the necessary signatures, but also in gaining 2.2% of the votes. Around 180,000 people voted for the new party; 60,000 had abstained five years ago, but 50,000 are former SPD voters.

## Decline of the SPD

Since the elections in North Rhine-Westphalia, the SPD has fallen continually in the opinion polls at the federal level. It is solidly stuck below the imaginary barrier of 30%, and is currently at 26% (Forsa institute). It also continues to lose members - starting from nearly 900.000 members a few years ago, it has less than 600,000 currently. To measure the depth of the crisis that these figures reflect, we need to go back some decades.

At Bad Godesberg in 1958, when the SPD adopted a new programme eliminating any reference to Marxism and abandoning socialism as alternative project of society to capitalism (in the programme adopted at Bad Godesberg, socialism appeared only as an "ethical" reference), its objective was precisely to emerge from the legendary "ghetto" of 30%.

Effectively, the "comrade tendency" ("der Genosse Trend") was on the march, the culminating point being 1972, when the SPD won more than 45% of the votes and became, for the first time, the majority party.

The background to this was the revolt of the late 1960s combining with a need for reform inherent in the capitalist society of this time. SPD leader Willy Brandt expressed simultaneously the need for reform of the system, the integration of new emancipatory aspirations and the interests in social promotion of the

working class base of the SPD.

It was about the opening up of the universities to youth of working class origin, "Ostpolitik" [30] and the slogan "dare more democracy" (the authoritarian-bigot-conservative republic of Konrad Adenauer and his Christian Democratic successors being the negative reference).

And it was also about the feeling, nourished by the economic expansion of the 1950s and 1960s, that one could continue to improve little by little the fate and living conditions of the mass of wage earners without touching the limits of system. In these conditions, the SPD was capable of safeguarding its role as a party which expressed (in however tortuous a fashion) the aspirations (and illusions) of a significant number of employees and which was at the same time open to the new layers.

Today the SPD seems once again enclosed in the shackles of 30%. Its decline is obviously the consequence of its neoliberal turn, motivated by the demands of a capitalism in decline, with stagnant and depressive tendencies. Henceforth, the bourgeoisie demands massive social regression, lower wages, the worsening of working conditions and so on, to counter the fall in the rate of profit.

Gerhard Schröder had said that it was necessary to win the votes of the "new centre". But this time the votes of the new "intermediary" layers were revealed as a somewhat unstable phenomenon, while the erosion of the popular electoral base of the SPD is palpable.

In the first half of the 1970s, cultural intelligence was "on the left" and the right was considered as backward and not very bright; today stupidity and retrograde obscurantism are the new cult, while all those who refer to social rights, defence of the interests of wage earners and the dispossessed, resist the dismantling of the public services and social benefits, who wish to resist a policy for which the "market" (read: profit) is all, are considered as "backward conservatives".

A long time ago the political life at the base of the SPD expressed the aspiration of workers to their own political expression. For a long time this party has degenerated, to become a machine of mutual aid to organize political careers.

The last thread conserving the specificity of the SPD as a party emerging from the workers' movement was the link with the trade union apparatuses and leaderships. But this link has become quite precarious. It is precisely people from the intermediary apparatus of these unions (above all IG Metall and Ver.di, the big services union) who have, together with others, launched the WASG. And the majority of union leaderships, while maintaining the alliance against nature with the SPD, tolerate this!

## Towards a new "Left Party"

The new "Left Party" - in gestation, at any rate in its present form - is to some extent the result of Gerhard Schröder's initiative seeking an early general election by organizing his own defeat in a vote of confidence in the Bundestag. It is still possible that the President of the Republic, Köhler, will not accept this legally dubious maneuver and it is also possible that the Supreme Court can reject it.

But after the electoral defeat in North Rhine-Westphalia, Schröder did not want to continue as if nothing had happened, nor did he want to resign. He wanted to cut short new waves of social protest and criticism inside of his own party and also make the formation of a new party to the left of the SPD more difficult. All these fine calculations do not seem to have worked out too well.

Social protests are already beginning to organize themselves. The German Social Forum at Erfurt at the end of July will be important in this respect. Criticism inside the SPD is growing, while the new "left party", even if does not yet formally exist, is rising systematically in the polls and is now at 11% in terms of voting intentions.

Already the SPD leadership has reacted and Schröder can no longer present "his policy", that of agenda 2010. He has been forced to present a modified political project, involving the introduction of a symbolic tax on the "rich", the correction of certain excesses of the Hartz IV plan (for example reintroduction of a longer period of payment of unemployment benefit I for those who have worked for decades and so on). [31]

After Oskar Lafontaine [32] - who joined the WASG a fortnight ago during the regional congress in North Rhine-Westphalia and was elected head of its provisional list [33] for the federal elections - a second well known member of the SPD, Ulrich Maurer of Baden-Württemberg, has just joined the WASG and the new "left party". A member of the SPD for 35 years and a longstanding regional deputy, Ulrich Maurer was even head of the SPD in the Baden-Württemberg region.

There will be others who will follow his example, to the extent that the new party rises in the polls. The WASG is moreover gaining 150 members per day and has just crossed the threshold of 7,000 members.

The announcement of an alliance of the PDS and WASG to work together in the federal elections has aroused a wave of hope and even enthusiasm. Last weekend, at the festival of the small German CP (DKP) in Dortmund, the biggest meeting, with 1,000 participants, was addressed by representatives of the PDS, the WASG, Attac, the German Social Forum and of course DKP president Heinz Stehr.

The latter announced that his party

would support the electoral alliance while not wishing to enter in the new party which could be created during the year.

Formally, the alliance, for legal reasons, will function as an "open list" of the PDS. With Schröder having precipitated things, the leadership of the PDS and WASG do not feel themselves capable of creating a new party as quickly as would be necessary for the federal elections. However, the PDS will change its name to "Linkspartei" (Left Party).

It is very clear that this amounts to an alliance, and everybody has an interest in behaving as if it is. When the newly created WASG, with a budget significantly lower than that of the PDS which had "invested" massively in its electoral material, obtained 2.2% of the vote in North Rhine-Westphalia and the PDS only 0.9%, it became very clear to the PDS leaders that their party could no longer hope to break through in the west, while the WASG represented the possibility of a real electoral breakthrough to the left of the SPD.

So any behaviour which does not recognize that this amounts in reality to an alliance - with its major components the PDS in the East and WASG in the West - risks enclosing the PDS in its own "ghetto".

But won't this Left Party led by Lafontaine and PDS leader Gregor Gysi be very "rightist" at the beginning?

For sure, the programme and profile of the new formation will not be anti-capitalist. Its basic idea is Keynesianism, and already its lack of an internationalist concept is evident in its penchant for nationalist

protectionism (against cheap labour coming from eastern Europe).

Inside the formation, the forces of the revolutionary and anti-capitalist left will have to strengthen their intervention as a current of ideas: they will have to put forward concrete demands in the interests of wage earners and the excluded, lead a debate on strategy, and argue for international action and orientation, starting with a pan-European campaign for an upwards adaptation of social minima and wages, a significant reduction of working time without loss of wages, the use of finances for social ends and not for military adventures, for high quality public services and so on.

Even if nothing indicates that the leading personnel of the WASG will be more "to the left" than that of the PDS, it seems all the same clear enough for the moment, that the new "Left Party" will reflect a leftwards tendency, encourage the movement of social protest and make it more difficult for the PDS leadership to force through its policy of co-government with the SPD at the regional level.

That's why Gysi has said that there will be no question of co-governing with the SPD at the federal level. However, he added two days later (in the newspaper "Stern") that with a "changed" SPD and without the "neoliberal Gerhard Schröder" at the helm, it would certainly be possible. All this shows that the anti-capitalist left must make itself heard in the new party, which, in the medium term, could very well in its turn (after the SPD, the Greens and many others) take the road of adaptation...

## One Step Forward

9 July 2005, by **Phil Hearse**

The outcome was a huge majority in favour of the 'Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacondona', which sets the movement on a new course of trying

to build unity with other sections of the left and global justice movement in Mexico and internationally. To that end the EZLN intends to send a

delegation to all parts of Mexico to engage in a broad-scale dialogue, with the aim of trying to forge a movement "for a programme of the left and a



new constitution.”

What lies behind this new turn by the EZLN and what will its proposals mean? Above all, the turn is designed to get the Zapatista movement out of its political isolation that has led it into an impasse. To better understand that we have to look at what has happened to the movement in the last seven years.



Between March and July of 1997 there were many attacks on the civilian communities of the Zapatistas. On December 22, 1997, a paramilitary group raided the town of Acteal, largely populated by Zapatista sympathisers. In this incident 45 unarmed people were massacred. Nine of the victims were men, twenty-one were women, and fifteen were children. The worst part about this massacre was that it was carried out by troops that had been recruited by the military from that area.

The Mexican government used the Acteal massacre as an excuse to heighten militarisation in Chiapas. On April 11 and May 1 of 1998, the Mexican government sent troops to violently dismantle two of the thirty-eight Zapatista autonomous zones. After these events, the Governor of Chiapas Roberto Albores Guillen stated, "I will finish off the autonomous municipalities."

The EZLN itself, deep in the selva, was unable to reach the villages quickly enough to present several dozens murders, rapes, beatings, destruction of crops and theft of the campesinos' money.

## Political Counter-offensive

After a period of silence, in 1999 the EZLN signalled a political offensive to defeat the military attacks; Subcommandante Marcos published his famous text "Masks and Silences" which called the Mexican left and 'civil society' to defend the Zapatistas. The EZLN launched a nationwide referendum for basic

social change, and over a thousand Zapatistas toured the country. Marcos himself addressed crowds in Mexico City. The scene seemed set for a new dialogue with the incoming right-wing PAN [34] government and its president Vicente Fox, elected in 2000.

Despite election promises the Fox government refused to implement the provisions of the San Andreas accords, which had promised the Zapatista communities autonomy and land rights. The villages remain penned in by the militarisation of the area, and conflict with state authorities is frequent. Some of the Chiapas mountain communities are loyal to the PRI [35] and they form the support basis of right-wing paramilitary groups, which themselves are a source of constant harassment and fear for the Zapatista municipalities.

As a consequence of the Fox government's refusal to negotiate the Zapatistas "took their bat and ball and went home." Despairing of a political breakthrough the EZLN leadership decided to concentrate on politico-military reorganisation and improving the lives of the Zapatista base communities.

## Autonomous Municipalities

Progressively the EZLN leadership has tried to hand decision-making over to local level, encouraging the autonomous municipalities and good government juntas to take the reigns of decision-making. According to Marcos the last few years have also involved an effort to develop a new generation of political cadres.

Self-organisation and egalitarian principles, as well as a considerable effort by Mexican and international NGOs, some of whom have permanent workers in the area, have achieved significant improvements in the health, education and nutrition of local people.

This social and political progress of course does not amount to *solving* the basic problems of the Chiapas indigenous peoples, which have their

roots in the poverty and lack of democracy at an all-Mexico level, although historically these things have hit the doubly- and trebly-exploited indigenous communities particularly hard.

## Frente Zapatista

In fact the Zapatista movement has always recognised that its objectives can only be achieved at an all-Mexico level, and indeed that the EZLN struggle is part of the international fight against neoliberal capitalism. However the position of Marcos and the EZLN leadership in relation to the fight for a reconstituted and united Mexican left has been very mixed, if not broadly negative.

In 1995 the Zapatistas took the initiative to form the nation wide Frente Zapatista (FZLN), which rapidly attracted many organised leftists as well as individuals. This could have become the basis for a new broad left party. But in the end the EZLN leadership vetoed such a development.

In a letter about the Sixth Declaration Marcos hints this was because the EZLN had promised its base communities that the movement would always be of the indigenous peoples and for the indigenous peoples, not something broader that could lose its focus on their needs and demands. Some commentators say Marcos feared losing control of the movement.

Whatever the reason, the refusal to turn the FZLN into a broad left party-type formation sounded its rapid death-knell as an effective political force. It survives as a "Zapatista solidarity campaign", without much in the way of members or influence.

Mexican civil society has mobilised periodically to defend the Zapatistas, but it does not need the FZLN to do it. On the contrary, as always, the fundamental loyalty of leftist activists and sympathisers will be to political organisations that put forward an overall and more-or-less coherent global political alternative. The tightly-controlled FZLN can never be that.

# All-Mexico Political Leadership?

Some have argued that providing Mexico-wide left political leadership is not the responsibility of the Zapatistas, who in any case will find it very difficult to provide this from a small and isolated corner of the country. In a [1999 interview](#), Jaime Gonzalez said of the Zapatistas:

“Now, how is it that this enormously popular movement has not been able to sustain any of its more general political initiatives? In my opinion the answer is simple: they do not have a clear strategy to win. They don’t know what to do with the elections and they don’t have the slightest idea of a programme for the rest of Mexico. And let me say, that’s not their responsibility. How can an indigenous uprising in one corner of southern Mexico have an elaborated programme for the whole of Mexican society? For the people in the north, for the economy, for an anti-capitalist transition? You could say it like this: the Zapatistas pose problems which they are inherently incapable of solving themselves.” [36]

Jaime Gonzalez’s comments contain a hint of self-contradiction. If the Zapatistas are such an enormously popular movement, they do have the potential to begin to give overall political leadership to the Mexican left, at least in co-operation with others. If they have the will and political vision (‘programme’ of course, but also sensible unitary tactics).

In 1998-2000 the EZLN played a very active political role, part of its political counter-offensive against the government, in giving all-out political support to the student strikers at Mexico City’s giant university UNAM (100,000 students), in the struggle against the imposition of student fees. They refused to give up 100% support for the UNAM strikers, even when it became clear the students’ ultra-left leadership was leading the struggle to defeat

In addition, for the first time, masked Zapatistas participated in Mexico City demonstrations - that of the SME union electricity workers, battling to defeat privatisation and in the 1999 May Day march. These initiatives seemed to indicate a willingness to take on a broader political role, but this was never followed up after the failure of the Fox government to rekindle the peace process started by the San Andreas accords.

## PRD Obstacle

Building a new broad anti-capitalist party would be tremendously important in the Mexican context because of the complete dominance of the left by the centre-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). A late-1980s split from the PRI, the PRD sucked in the Communist Party and its pressure indirectly helped to capsize the main Trotskyist organisation, the PRT, in the early 1990s. The PRD is nostalgic for the old nationalist-corporatist traditions of the PRI in the 1930s and 1940s, and was formed in opposition to the slide by the PRI into pro-American neoliberalism under ex-president Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

But over the years the PRD had drifted rightwards. There is little hint of anything resembling a radical left within it. It remains a huge obstacle to any socialist or anti-capitalist representation of the workers, peasants and indigenous people. Only the Zapatistas have the popularity to be the driving force for the construction of an alternative. The main problem with the PRD - a very familiar one - is that despite drifting to the right and being recently caught up in a major corruption scandal, at an electoral level it is the only credible alternative to the right wing, the PRI and PAN.

Its candidate for president in 2006, the highly popular Mexico City mayor Manuel Lopez Obrador, was the victim of an attempt by the PRI and the PAN to disqualify him because of the PRD’s corruption scandal, a move defeated by a silent march of two million through the streets of the capital. The dominance of the PRD on the left cannot be defeated without building a credible alternative.

How should we assess this new turn, in terms of the task of building a nation-wide left alternative? The Sixth Declaration says:

“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.”

So far, so good. The text continues:

“We are also letting you know that the EZLN will establish a policy of alliances with non-electoral organisations 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 organise 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 organisations, for their methods of struggle, for their ways of organising, for their internal decision making processes, for their legitimate representations. And yes to a clear commitment for joint and co-ordinated defense of national sovereignty, with intransigent opposition to privatisation 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 organise the word of our people. It is like a campaign, then, but very otherly, because it is not electoral."

## Party, Programme, Power

This contains a lot that is very sensible, and it represents a new, giant and exciting opportunity for the Mexican left. Even if the objective were explicitly to build a new left party-type organisation, it would be sensible to start building it from the 'bottom up', by dialogue, alliances and consultation, and not by artificial diktat from above.

However, in Marcos' discourse, and that of his main advisors like former Trotskyist leader Sergio Rodríguez Lascano, there is a constant ambiguity about the notion of parties, programmes and strategy. This revolves around the question of "changing the world without taking power." Are all parties inherently corrupt and manipulative, just because of the party form? Is all participation in elections to be deplored and must the left be anti-electoral in principle? Should the left fight for the workers, peasants and indigenous people to form their own national government?

If the EZLN proceeds by building struggle alliances from below, but refuses to build a national political organisation and refuses to countenance any electoral challenge from the left, it will cede major political space to the PRD and the right-wing, fail in its objectives and lose another major opportunity. This is a political turn that could revitalise the left, or it crumble into nothing.

An intriguing footnote is the EZLN's

promise to build closer links with the left internationally and its offer of material aid to militant activists worldwide. For example, the Declaration says:

"And we are also going to make an agreement with the women's crafts co-operatives 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 co-operatives, 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."

For sure the Subcommandante hasn't lost his sense of humour!



## Venezuela: is socialism possible?

9 July 2005, by **Rolf Bergkvist**

Is it really possible to start a transition to socialism in today's Venezuela? In a period when the US-government through its military domination can start wars and occupy countries with openly false statements about 'weapons of mass destruction', this might seem slightly unrealistic. But to pose the question is not as strange as it may seem.

In his long May Day speech this year, Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez claimed that: "It is impossible for us to reach our goals within the confines of capitalism, and it is not possible to find a middle road...I invite the whole of Venezuela to walk on the road of socialism in the new century. We must

build a new socialism for the 21st century."

The question is thus already asked, not by an academic or theoretical system-builder but by someone who has gotten into the forefront of a revolutionary process. The statement is also not just temporary rhetoric used on the working class' day of commemoration. It mirrors the political radicalisation that has been clear in his statements during the last year.



Already in August-September last year

- after having won the referendum and the confidence to continue as president - Chavez started to say that a 'revolution in the revolution' now is necessary. In several speeches he lambasted capitalism as the most inhuman system in the history of humankind. In this year he has begun to emphasise the necessity to "invent" a socialism for the new century.

Maybe it should also be pointed out in order to make the contrast clearer that it was the same Chavez who, after the presidential election in 1998, firmly asserted that he wanted to take the 'middle road' between capitalism and socialism. The new path would be a 'Bolivarian

revolution', something which was neither the one nor the other.

## The Progress

Without giving too much detail, it may be worthwhile to briefly point out what the government so far has accomplished. It has:

- Started a land reform with redistribution of uncultivated land to poor peasants and agricultural workers.
- Completed a literacy campaign which has taught 1.5 million people how to read and write.
- Introduced free education for poor children from primary to tertiary level.
- Started a comprehensive skills development programme intended to minimise unemployment.
- Built 300 primary health care centres in the poorest communities, providing free health care.
- Introduced price control on 160 basic food stuffs and 60 household necessities.
- Created a supermarket chain where the food prices are highly subsidised.
- Introduced soup kitchens in the poorest communities.
- Stopped all plans to privatise the country's oil industry.
- Created new banks to give cheap credit to small companies, workers and women's cooperatives.
- Introduced a Latin American alternative to the free trade area the large companies of the USA want to establish.

A clear result of these reforms is that faith in democracy has been strengthened. According to one survey, presented by the Chilean firm Latino Barometer last summer, the support for 'democracy' has decreased in the whole of Latin America. It has fallen with 8 percentage points since 1996, down to 53 per cent, on average on the continent.

The only major exception of the survey was Venezuela, where the trust in democracy increased with 12 percentage points to 74 percent. These figures are also corroborated by the increased participation in elections since 1998. In the April 1999 referendum (held on the issue of

creating a constituent assembly) 39 per cent of the country's population voted. In the August 2004 referendum, held in order to confirm or discontinue Chavez's presidency, 75 per cent voted - one of the highest figures in Venezuela's history.

Another clear tendency is the considerable growth in popular organisation. Much of it has emerged the last five years around the initiated social reforms. The free health care centres that have been provided with 12 000 Cuban doctors are financed by the state, but rest on a system where the communities themselves elect a local health committee responsible for the practical management.

The education reforms have to a large extent been organised outside the existing education sector, with volunteers teaching on all levels (from the literacy campaign to secondary and tertiary levels) and include a large degree of collective 'self-tuition' groups. The food of the soup kitchens, which were created to provide the poorest of the poor with one or two meals per day, is paid for by the state, but it is women in the communities who organise the programme.

Distribution of ownership documents to the houses and buildings of the poor has been connected to different kinds of organisation in the communities. In the areas where this organisation is most developed, it has been possible to clean out the criminal gangs that are all too common in the slum districts. Parallel to this housing organisation, a more political organisation has developed. In the months before the referendum in August, 1.2 million people participated actively in the election brigades created to renew Chavez's presidential mandate. In a country with 25 million inhabitants, 1.2 million political activists is a high number.

## The New Trade Union Organisation

Next to community organisation a new, national trade union federation, UNT (Unión Nacional de

Trabajadores de Venezuela), has been created. The founding of the UNT took place in April 2003, and was to a large extent a reaction against the old union federation's, CTV, support to, first, the failed coup attempt in April 2002 and, second, the equally failed lock-out at the state oil company in December 2002 - January 2003.

The leadership of the CTV, which for decades has been tied to the social democratic AD (Acción Democrática), cooperated in both cases with the largest employers' organisation Fedecamaras to remove Chavez through extra-parliamentary means.

To many workers, this was the final proof that a new democratic trade union organisation had to be formed. After only two years UNT has won a larger membership than CTV. According to leaders of UNT, its membership stood at around 600 000 members in the spring of 2005, while CTV had around 300 000 members. These figures are naturally very uncertain: A representative of CTV would probably present different figures.

A more objective measurement of the two unions' relative strength can be the number of agreements each of them sign. During 2003-2004, 76.5 per cent of all collective agreements were concluded with UNT and only 20.2 per cent with CTV. This depends among other things on the almost complete domination of UNT in the public sector. But even in the private sector 50.3 per cent of all agreements were concluded with UNT, while CTV concluded 45.2 per cent.

In figures the trade union organisations are not even near the number of people organized around the reforms I have described above. This is due to the social structure of the country. The majority of the population does not have permanent employment in any private or state company. The majority of the working class survives on some kind of business within the so-called informal sector. Still, this is an organisation of the workplaces and it may therefore play a role which gives the whole movement a revolutionary dynamic. I will return to this further down.

## But Capitalism Stays

The social reforms that have been initiated have had an enormous impact on the lives of millions of people. For example, only during the last year it is calculated that around half of the country's 25 millions inhabitants have participated in some form of education.

The reforms have still not changed the structure of the society. The country is still to a large extent a capitalist society where the most important means of production are controlled by a small class of domestic and foreign owners. Parts of the heavy industrial sector, almost all of the large mass media and the whole financial sector is owned by this class.

The bourgeoisie exercises its power over central parts of the economy or - as in the case with state companies - indirectly through corrupt civil servants. This means that all social changes that have been set in motion are in danger of being thwarted. The new cooperatives that recently have been formed will have difficulties in surviving when they meet competition on the market.

If they are to survive it is necessary that they can produce their goods and services independent of this market, but tied to new, democratic structures organised to meet the real social needs of the majority.

Financing of health care, schools and day care centres can also in a longer perspective get into open conflict with the private control over the banking system. Even if a large part of these reforms have been paid with the profits of the state-owned oil company, it has not by far been enough. During 2004 the government increased its expenditure with 47 per cent compared to the year before. In order to cover these expenses money was borrowed from the private banks with a high interest.

As a matter of fact, the government has during the last four years heavily increased its debt to Venezuela's banks. Only during 2004 did the

private banks make a profit of 1.38 billion dollars - a little bit more than the year before - mainly by lending to the state and trading with dollar bonds approved by the government (a legal loophole in the control of currency trade that was instituted a few years ago).

This means both a continued income of billions to the owners of the bank, and a possibility for them to sabotage continued reform policies in a different political situation.

Chavez has avoided the problem by starting new companies. The women's bank, Banmujer, has provided favourable loans with low interest, gender education and economic advice to the new women's cooperatives. Same thing goes for a number of new state banks.

The new state-owned supermarket chain, MERCAL - which in just about a year has conquered between 35 and 40 per cent of the market of basic foodstuff - has contributed to a decrease in food prices through subsidies. And in order to be able to counter the monopoly of the private TV-channels over news reporting, a new state-run TV-channel Telesur is being set up, with the whole of South America as its target.

It is not necessarily wrong to temporarily "go around" the basic issue of power the way Chavez has done. At a time when the working class is lacking their own, strong organisations and a political consciousness about the fact that society can be structurally changed through collective, class-based action (as it was in Venezuela in 1998), a revolutionary government might need to "buy time" in order to reach these subjective circumstances.

But it is not possible to solve the problem in that way. If there is anything that time and time again has been confirmed by Latin America's 20th century history, it is exactly this: The large landed properties, the most important industries and the whole financial sector must be liberated from the present class ownership and be placed in the ownership of the society if the reforms are to be permanent.

In all countries where similar social reforms have started - sometimes much more radical than in Venezuela - they have been stopped and torn asunder by the pressure from the capitalist society (Mexico under president Cardenas in the 1930s, Argentine under Peron in the 1940s, Bolivia after the revolution in 1952, etc.).

The only exception that confirms the rule is Cuba, where the reforms that guarantees health care, education and day care have been made permanent only because the means of production have been socialised. And in this sense Hugo Chavez is completely correct; there is no middle way if the reforms are to stay. The question is: What does the road forward look like?

## "Without Workers' Control There Will Not Be A Revolution"

The main slogan of the UNT:s May Day demonstration was: "Workers' co-determination and control over state (and private) companies". A few weeks earlier, the UNT had introduced its proposal to a new law for "workers' co-determination in the companies".

The UNT hopes that the law will be passed by parliament and make directly elected workers' representatives compulsory in the management of state companies, and encourage it in private companies. It is a bill which mirrors some of the victories won by the working class during the last six months - and the new experiences and discussions that emerged.

The workers of the country's largest paper mill, Venepal, won in the end of January a significant victory. After several years of struggle, with recurring occupations of the factory and a nation-wide campaign for expropriation, the mill was nationalised. President Chavez signed the decision to nationalise the day after parliament - including the conservative opposition - declared that this was "in the interest of the



society”.

Almost immediately after this victory a group workers in the privately owned company CNV reignited their interrupted workplace occupation with demands of nationalisation and workers’ control. CNV produces high-pressure ventilators for the state-owned oil company PDVSA and has - like Venepal - been declared bankrupt by its owners. With a new, formal declaration from parliament about the “interest of the society” in an expropriation, CNV was nationalised in the end of April.

The issue of “co-determination” or “workers’ control” was raised already during the lock-out in the oil company PDVSA in the end of 2002. Against management’s decision to close down the company (to create an economic crisis that would force Chavez to resign), groups of workers tried to keep the production going.

After the failure of the lock-out, the most radical workers used the slogan about workers’ control, as the only effective way to prevent further sabotage from the management. But in reality, almost nothing was achieved. Today, union leaders explain this lost opportunity by recounting the weakness of their organisation and a lack of understanding of what the slogan meant in practice.

Despite the fact that several private companies were occupied during the summer of 2003, and despite coordination between the workers’ groups in open struggle against the capitalist owners, the struggle did not lead to any substantive success. These factory occupations - with the exception of Venepal - were slowly fading away.

The victory of the workers of Venepal stimulated at the same time workers of state-owned companies to renewed action. During March and April, the workers of the aluminium company Alcasa and the electricity company Cadafe elected new managements.

It is in these two companies that the discussions and practical initiatives seem to have developed most in April 2005, and though it must be noted that these radical trade union leaders

hardly are representative for the whole trade union movement, it may be interesting to briefly describe their current perspective.

In an interview made in the end of March with union leaders of Alcasa by the Chilean journalist Marta Harnecker (at the time when the workers elected the new management) the union chairperson, Trino Silva, introduced three important principles regarding the workers’ control in the company: 1) The workers who are elected to the management shall continue to receive the same salaries as before. 2) The state-owned company does not belong to the workers of Alcasa but is the property of the whole people. 3) Therefore the “organised society” must elect representatives to the management.

At an international solidarity conference in mid April - where several of the union leaders from these two companies participated - Joaquin Osorio, leader of the electricity union of Cadafe, explained that they do not strive for the kind of “co-determination” that trade unions have in Spain, Germany and Argentina, since it “generally is an attempt to assimilate union leaders into the machinery of the capitalist companies and integrate them into these [structures].”

“We can learn from these models but what we want to develop is a completely new model which will function in the building of another societal structure, what we at Cadafe have called Bolivarian socialism, which transforms the capitalist relations of production and where we workers have the power.”

An alternative to this radical perspective seems to exist amongst the workers of Venepal. After the nationalisation in January, the paper workers have closed down their trade union, since “the workers now control the factory, no union is necessary.” Active unionists in other factories have openly criticised this decision and expressed concerns over the narrow company perspective that obviously lurks behind.

Even if the UNT as a national organisation use the slogan of workers’

co-determination in the companies, this hardly signifies a unified view on what this means or a common long-term perspective. The different currents of the union organisation are at the moment interpreting the slogan in different ways.

## The Bourgeois State Apparatus

The continued power of the capitalist class over the economy of Venezuela means that the state apparatus is dominated by these class interests. The “business idea” behind the bourgeois state is to guarantee a continuous transfer of material value to the capitalists.

The state apparatus expresses the existing class society in its totality and can therefore never be “educated” or “reformed” into something else. These three sentences can be expressed in a much simpler and clearer way. Of the 800 000 civil servants in different levels, which make up the actual state apparatus, the absolute majority is in complete opposition to the revolution initiated by Hugo Chavez. Some in this bourgeois bureaucracy try to with all means actively sabotage the social reforms, while others passively blocks democratic decisions.

In order to illustrate these “state-directed” acts of sabotage, it is enough to mention the lock-out of the state-owned oil company PDVSA, which in 2002-2003 was organised by the top management and civil servants (and the bureaucracy in the union organisation CTV).

That event was planned by the most important management organisation in the country, but practically organised by these civil servants.

Even more striking is the fact that the initiated reforms are largely realised outside of the really existing bourgeois state. The literacy campaign, the education reforms, the health care, etc. have been made possible by the creation of new, parallel institutions and with the help from Cuban doctors, dentists, nurses and pedagogues. Without the practical support from

Cuba, none of the social reforms in Venezuela would have been possible.

The simplest way to 'solve' the problem with an obstructing bourgeois state apparatus is naturally to send into pension (or, to be blunt, dismiss) all the 800 000 civil servants. The glitch of course being that it will not solve the problem.

After the oil lock-out, at least 18 000 bosses and civil servants of the state-owned PDSVA were dismissed. Despite this, the company is at large as corrupt as before. This is the same also for other state companies. The problem can only be solved if the present apparatus is replaced by a totally different kind of administration, controlled from below.

## People's Power

This is where the experiences from and the discussions around workers' control over production can be key to opening up the doors to an extended democracy and the growth of an alternative popular power arrangement on national level.

At best, they could contribute to a connection between a democratic organisation of workplaces (control committees, workers' councils or large-scale assemblies of the unions) and the community-based self-organisation that has emerged within and around the reforms.

In order for the social reforms to survive, the present company managements (state and private) and their civil servants in the bourgeois class-based state have to be replaced with an organisation of democratic control and an overarching planning by the working population how to use resources.

Then it is not enough with a narrow co-determination at company level or limited local community organisation. Then this direct democratic organisation will have to lay the basis for a power apparatus where the representatives on all levels of society are elected and can be recalled - from the local control committee at a workplace to the president of the country.

The referendum of last autumn, where 60 per cent voted to keep Chavez in office, was - even if it took place within a bourgeois democratic framework - a good pedagogic example of what this may mean: It must be possible to recall anyone from office - without exception! In today's Latin America there is no neo-liberal government which is prepared to hold a referendum of the kind that took place in Venezuela. Instead they are being overthrown by popular revolts in Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentine, Peru, Paraguay...

The main obstacle to necessary connections being established is the bureaucracy within the movement itself. During the last year open criticism has been directed from the grassroots against leaders within Chavez's own party. And, even if Chavez seems to have taken at least parts of the criticism serious, probably some of the continuous struggle will be against this bureaucratic layer.

## The Deadly Threat and the Living Possibility

The military is the only part of the state that Chavez has utilised fully. Both soldiers and officers from the four service branches participated actively in the literacy campaign. They were responsible for the logistics of the campaign and participated individually as educators. Military vehicles often transport food to the MERCAL stores. In some slum areas with very high levels of crime, soldiers guarantee security in and around the stores.

The regiments have opened up classes for adult learners as well as for small children. When I visited Forte Tiuna - the largest regiment in Caracas - in November 2004, I drove for over an hour together with lieutenant colonel Rafael Angel Studro between the new education centres which had been opened up for courses in the huge exercise area: Vegetable planting, pig and chicken breeding for agricultural collectives, restaurant and catering education for women's cooperatives.

The examples of the "war on poverty" which the military has been ordered to fight by the former paratrooper Chavez are many. At least partly this also means that the traditional walls between the military regiments and the surrounding slums have been torn down.

The social constellation of the military is a common explanation to why the majority of both soldiers and commanders on the operative levels so far have been loyal to Chavez. A large part of the army has been recruited from the lower middle class or poorer groups. Only a limited number of higher-rank generals participated in the coup attempt in 2002 which was met by the poor population, in their tens of thousands coming out from the slums in order to re-establish democracy.

The generals who participated in the coup were completely without troops. This does not make the army immune against corruption or other countries' (read: USAs) governments' attempts to make useful contacts for the military incursions that have already begun. A current example from the year-end illustrates this.

In the middle of December the FARC representative Rodrigo Granda Escobar was kidnapped in central Caracas. He was taken to the border and handed over to Colombian police. The kidnapping was carried out by Venezuelan police, who were bought for the illegal operation with a large sum of US dollars. One has to be more than naïve if one does not realise that the intelligence agencies of the USA are actively looking for similarly corrupted people to use for infiltrating the army.

The conclusion can only be drawn that the poor population itself must get organised to also militarily defend their newly won reforms. In the face of increasingly stronger verbal threats from the USA government, Chavez has during 2005 introduced a new military strategy to defend the country from a possible military attack. Next to the traditional military apparatus a popular home defence unit is being organised.

The explicit goal for the "popular

defence units' (Unidades Populares de Defensa, UPD) is that they will encompass a total of 100 - 150 000 armed and militarily trained men and women. Their base will be the workplace or their community and every unit shall encompass between 50 and 500 people. In the case of invasion they will, independently of the regular army, be able to wage a long guerrilla war against the occupiers - an 'asymmetrical war' in military jargon.

## The Plans of the USA

So far, the US attempts to overthrow Chavez, with or without violence, have failed. The result instead is that the allied domestic bourgeoisie has been much weakened. America's support to the failed coup attempt in April 2002 led to the dismissal of several hundred officers who support the US.

Around 18,000 managers and senior civil servants were dismissed for supporting the failed lock-out at the oil company PDSVA.

The petition, financed by USA, which led to the referendum on the 15th August 2004 caused a crushing defeat for the bourgeois opposition (as well as demoralisation amongst the middle class voters who hate Chavez) and the largest political mobilisation thus far to defend the revolution.

At the same time as these attacks have radicalised the revolutionary process, they have also almost extinguished any conservative alternative to Chavez. After the referendum and the election loss in the governor elections in the end of October 2004 there is no longer any collective conservative political alternative.

That Chavez today, according to recent surveys, is by far the most popular president in the whole of Latin America, is only one expression of the political power relations.

This is the reason why the Bush administration since the beginning of 2005 more obviously has started to switch over to a military strategy of attacks "from the outside", in

cooperation with the Colombian terror regime led by Alvaro Uribe. The preparations for this military intervention are already under way. USA and Colombia have during this year reinforced their military bases around Venezuela's border considerably.

Border incursions as 'experiments' take place regularly to test Venezuela's defensive preparedness. They are performed both by regular Colombian army units and paramilitaries. In 2004, six Venezuelan border soldiers were killed during these incidents. In May last year, a group of over 100 Colombian paramilitaries was caught on an estate in Caracas where they were preparing a military terror campaign in Venezuela.

In recent years, the US government has provided Colombia with three billion US Dollars in military support, tripled the country's army (to over 275 000 soldiers), significantly increased its air force arsenal (mainly with helicopters and attack planes), provided it with advanced military technology and several thousands military advisors (official as well as 'hired' contractual experts). The USA has also set up new military bases in Ecuador, Peru and the Dominican Republic, and has held naval manoeuvres outside Venezuela's coast line during the last few months.

A planned, provoked border incident with Colombia is a credible scenario for an intervention. Such an incident could be escalated to an armed conflict where the USA intervenes to 'defend' Colombia through air bombings and artillery fire from battleships stationed outside the coast line, special forces who are put on shore to murder key individuals within the Venezuelan government and the popular movements, as well as a staged uprising of infiltrated paramilitaries backed by an international mass media campaign, financial backers and oil company managers.

But just like the occupation of Iraq in the end was much more expensive and riskier than the Bush government could ever imagine, a military attack on Venezuela will be wrecked by

several problems. Despite intensified terror of the Colombian countryside over the last three years the Uribe government has not managed to extinguish either the FARC or the ELN guerrillas.

To wage a two-front war in this position is not unproblematic for the Colombian government. The concentration of troops at the border that would be necessary could open new geographic areas for the political-military guerrilla organisations to renew their attacks on military and police targets in the largest cities.

This, together with a political radicalisation, which the revolutionary process in Venezuela has contributed to develop amongst millions of poor people in Colombia, may place the US-supported Uribe regime in a literally deadly position. Besides the extreme government of Colombia, there is not one South American government willing to send one single soldier to participate in a USA-led attack on Venezuela.

At the same time, the USA has at the moment small possibilities to participate with a large troop contingent. With 150 000 soldiers locked up in the occupied Iraq and the priority of a new war in that area (Iran/Syria), USA's intervention will be limited to air strikes, naval artillery and special forces. As opposed to the war in Iraq a military attack will immediately serve to mobilise millions of people in an armed, popular defence.

To defend the social reforms under way is something completely different from defending a totalitarian Saddam Hussein dictatorship.

And, due to the class character of the defence of the social reforms, an escalated military aggression may radicalise the revolutionary process even further: The counter revolutionary parts of the domestic capitalist class who take the side of the military intervention will probably immediately have their companies or estates expropriated.

It is completely possible to make a comparison with the beginning of the Cuban revolution; in order to defend

the democratic revolution against USA's aggression the Cuban leaders had to socialise the economy and expropriate the property of the class in power.

A military intervention in Venezuela will mean a deadly threat to the Bolivarian revolution and to the long run possibility for the Cuban

revolution to survive. At the same time, it will reinforce the political instability that exists all over Latin America, it will undermine the neo-liberal governments supportive of the USA and fan a new wave of anti-imperialist struggle in the whole region.

This deadly threat must be taken serious, but it must not be allowed to overshadow the living possibility that the democratic, "Bolivarian" revolution may grow into the first socialist revolution of this century. There is absolutely no historical law that prevents such a development

*Translated by Linn Hjort*

## Success for March of Women in Marseille

4 July 2005, by **Anne Leclerc**



More than 1,500 women from a numbers of European countries participated in five forums and three spaces organized around five themes:

- work/employment/actualisation,
- violence against women, peace and conflict,
- sexuality/abortion/contraception/health,
- women and men in Europe

and around three spaces:

- for youth, migrant women and lesbians.

Because of lack of space several hundred women were unable to participate in the morning debates, which was frustrating for some who had made long journeys.

In the afternoon a demonstration against neoliberalism and patriarchy attracted around 10,000 people from Belgium (a particularly big delegation), Spain, the Basque country, Italy, Greece, Portugal and Cyprus, as well as around 50 women who had come especially from Algeria.

The meeting resumed on Sunday morning in Chénod park, and proposals for action and campaigning were made. The construction of European networks appears more than ever necessary in order to build a

more equitable relationship of forces.

It was reaffirmed loudly and clearly that abortion should be a fundamental right for women in the European institutions. Six countries do not recognize this right: Cyprus, Poland, Malta, Portugal, Ireland and Andorra.

A European petition was proposed in solidarity with Portuguese women for a change in legislation. In Italy the key issue was the referendum to allow medically assisted procreation, which was defeated with the Vatican and Berlusconi throwing all their weight against the proposal.

On employment and casualization, several campaigning themes were defined:

- for real jobs, an end to imposed part-time working, establishment of a European minimum wage; an immediate wage increase to close the gap in wages between men and women.
- to fight against dismantling of all the public services and for the development of childcare and care for the old and handicapped.

In the violence forum a campaign for an outline law against violence at the European level was decided on, with demonstrations across Europe on November 25, 2005, international day against violence against women.

In the forum on democracy, power and

secularism it was pointed out on the eve of the referendum that the equality of the sexes did not figure as one of the founding values of the Union, that the right to abortion was absent as was any reference to secularism; the place given to religious institutions was denounced.

The peace and conflict forum noted that women were the first victims of conflicts and that there was urgency to mobilize for disarmament. The lesbian and youth spaces worked rather for the creation of broad European networks.

From the migrant women's space several demands were raised: respect for the application of economic and social rights, access to social services and struggle against discrimination, regularization of all illegal and undocumented workers, campaigns against forced marriages and crimes of honour.

The Women's Charter for Humanity was brought on Saturday from the Basque country to France and on Sunday from France to Belgium. In conclusion, Nadia De Mond, European coordinator of the march, reaffirmed the determination of women to fight neoliberal exploitation and the organization on October 17, 2005 of 24 hours of solidarity against neoliberalism and patriarchal oppression which "mutually reinforce each other, lay the ground for religious fundamentalism and generate poverty, exclusion and

violence'. She reminded us of the next event for the "woman of the entire

world" at the same time as the arrival

of the Women's Charter for Humanity in Burkina Faso.

# Mediterranean Social Forum: Womens Assembly meets

## 3 July 2005



A Palestinian woman who works as a psychologist in the occupied territories gave a moving explanation of how the second intifada has worsened the situation of women. In addition to the violence of the occupation, conjugal violence is on the rise, with men, often humiliated by the occupation and their situation (unemployment and extreme poverty) taking it out against women. Another intervention concerned the impact of neoliberalism on the situation of women, particularly in the developing countries with the deleterious consequences of structural adjustment plans in the areas of education and health and for women.

The contradictory character of economic neoliberalism on the situation of women was stressed, in that across the world (apart from sub-Saharan Africa) women have entered massively into the sphere of wage labour, which gives them greater autonomy although they are concentrated in the most insecure forms of work (super-exploitation in the workplaces and development of informal work).

An assembly of women was also held during the FSMed. Several hundred people attended and the organizers were surprised by the high attendance. This exchange was very rich, with women from Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Palestine, Tunisia (and again many who did not get visas to attend the FSMed) discussing their lives and experiences and, for some, issues concerning immigration.

These debates allowed the drawing up of a Declaration of the Women's Assembly of the First Social Forum of the Mediterranean.

A.L.

## WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY AT THE MEDITERRANEAN SOCIAL FORUM

Barcelona, June 17, 2005

Women in the Mediterranean area are victims of violence, poverty, trafficking, wars and systematic violations of the human rights.

In the Mediterranean the women are victims of domination by three powers: patriarchy, neoliberalism and fundamentalism.

These dominant powers support and feed off each other to keep women under unacceptable conditions of life, with lesser rights than those of men in the same society.

The Mediterranean is the theatre of wars which generate violence, rapes, killings, arbitrary detention and unacceptable life conditions and lack of rights, in particular for women.

Many women from the Southern shores of the Mediterranean were not able to participate here because they

were denied visas. This instance adds to the reasons that motivate us to promote with the social movements in Medsf the struggle for the right of free circulation of people.

We, together in the women's assembly in the first Medsf, and coming from all the shores of this sea

DENOUNCE

The militarization of the area, the neo-colonial programs of control of natural resources

The systematic violation of women's human rights and the violence against women

The empowerment of fundamentalism and political currents that deny the equality in rights of women and promote their loss of civil and social rights

The family codes that institutionalize women's subordination to men

The persistence of tolerance towards the so called "crimes of honour"

The market in women's bodies and the existence of women and children trafficking mafias

The enslavement, forced labour and sexual mutilation imposed on women and children

The increasing poverty and precarization of women lives, the absence or violations of our social rights and the lack of free access to education and health

The laws of the market, of neoliberalism, which make women



more precarious and devoid of economic, social and cultural rights

The bilateral agreements between governments in the Mediterranean area which implement regulation with differential status for women and men, unfavorable for the women

The constitution of Europe as a fortress, denying economic, social, cultural and political rights for migrant women

The negotiations undergoing between Europe and the Islamic parties, even with the so-called 'moderate' ones

The persecution of women on the basis of their sexual choices

#### DEMAND

The recognition and support of the social movements, women's resistance and their struggles

The immediate application, without reserve, by governments and the international institutions of all the protocols that enforce women equal rights

The free circulation of women in the Mediterranean

The right to live in democratic and non-religious societies

That the right to be refugees is applied to all women who are victims of sexual violence

#### WE SUPPORT

The Iraqi women that resist the imperialist occupation of the USA and its allies

The Palestinian and Israeli women that work together towards the resolution of the conflict and against the occupation of Palestinian territories

All the women that work for resolution of the conflicts in militarized areas and those who struggle for cultural rights and against authoritarian governments

The women who struggle against the patriarchal family codes

Women that struggle for the right of self-determination in sexual preferences and of their bodies and for the recognition of the right to access to free and legal abortion

#### FOR A COMMON WORK, FOR AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND SOLIDARITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

#### WE PROPOSE

The establishment of a web site of the Women's network to continue and forward the debate and coordinate the struggles

A common day of actions against violence on women every year on November 25. In the year 2005 this day will be dedicated to the Iraqi women that are arbitrarily detained and will demand their immediate liberation

We, women in the Mediterranean wish and struggle for a Mediterranean of peace, de-militarized, freed from violence, with equal social rights, democracy and equality between men and women

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