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The Party of Revolution and Socialism

26 September 2005, by **Stalin Pérez Borges**

The following interview, conducted by Fabrice Thomas and Yannick Lacoste, was first published in the September 22nd, 2005 issue of Rouge, weekly paper of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International).

Can you give us your analysis of the present stage of the process that is underway in Venezuela?

Stalin Perez Borges: The revolutionary process is continuing, but there are contradictions at work and it is being undermined by corruption and inefficiency. In the recent elections for municipal and neighbourhood councils, there were clashes between the rank and file of the 'Chavist' parties and sections of the party leaderships, which bureaucratically imposed their candidates.

For the moment, the confrontation within the revolutionary process with these conservative bureaucratic governmental sectors is essentially verbal. But we think that it can in the future become much sharper and lead, especially if the confrontation with imperialism becomes more tense, to a considerable deepening of the revolutionary situation.

Stalin Peres Borges at May Day rally

What is the situation on the trade union level?

With the crises of the coup d'état against Chavez in April 2002, the oil blockade by the bosses at the end of 2002 and the beginning of 2003 and the open treason of the old confederation, the CTV, the workers understood the need to take their trade union organizations into their own hands.

It is on the basis of this taking place, on a nationwide scale, that anew trade union confederation, the National Workers' Union (UNT) was established. The UNT has been considerably strengthened. It is now the confederation which comprises the majority of trade union organizations in the country.

It is difficult for the moment to give a figure for its real strength, but we can say that we have more than a million members and that the immense majority of unions are affiliated to the UNT. There are four tendencies. We are waiting for the next congress to know whether the bureaucratic sector - a reformist current which includes many corrupt and incompetent leaders - has the majority.

"Bolivarian Workers' Force", which is close to the government and which is also a reformist current. And then there is the "classist current", many of whose cadres have been involved in the recent formation of the Party of Revolution and Socialism (PRS).

Can you tell us a bit more about the PRS?

The formation of the PRS is a consequence of this battle in the UNT. In most of the meetings that were organized across the country, the majority of those who intervened demanded the formation of a force distinct from those which today support Chavez, that is to say the MVR, the PPT, Podemos, the Communist Party and some others.

Seeing this need, we decided to establish the PRS. We think that in the present situation the workers need a political organization which defends their interests, which is for class independence and which has a well-defined anti-imperialist project.

Within our trade union current, some people reproach us for having this project. We have to carry out both tasks; build the UNT as a trade union confederation that is independent of political parties and from the government, and build a political party for the workers.

There is also the current of the

The discussion around the formation

of the PRS is at present being conducted by five distinct political groups. Other organizations will be able to broaden out our political platform, and we hope to be able to announce the official launching of the PRS at the beginning of next year. We want to plan a founding congress. We already have a paper, *Opcion socialista* ("Socialist Option").

This project has involved us in organizing a number of events: on July 9, we held a national meeting which brought together 450 people in Caracas. We have organized and will be organizing other meetings throughout the country to proclaim the need for a new organization. We have produced a political platform to serve as a basis for discussion. [1]

What difference is there between the PRS and the official Chavist parties that exist at present?

The organizations in the leadership of the process are reformist, Stalinist or ultra-left, and

they do not help to fight against the bureaucratic character of the state.

It is necessary to ensure the transformation that the popular masses are demanding, which requires greater participation by ordinary people. The population has acquired - this is a characteristic of the process - a certain amount of power. It is no longer possible for either leaders, ministers or bosses to impose anything on them.

This combat against bureaucracy, against corruption and against reformism is beginning to show results that are significant for the future of the country.

To take one example: co-management, in other words workers' control and direct participation by the workers in the running of a state enterprise or a private enterprise.

Some members of the government

think that co-management is a risk, because enterprises that are strategically important, for example PVDSA (the nationalized oil company), must remain under the control of the country's leaders.

In reality, they are afraid of participation by ordinary people. We are working a lot on these experiences of workers' control. Giving power to ordinary people, that can be the leap forward that is needed for the pursuit of the revolutionary process.

Chavez says that we have to give people power, well, power is controlling your factory, controlling your community and controlling the people you elect. That's why we think that the PRS can have a strong influence on the workers. We are placing great hopes in the building of our organization, in order to enable Venezuela to advance rapidly from pure statements of intention to real anti-imperialist measures.

The evolution of the European radical left - and some current controversies

25 September 2005, by **Pierre Rousset**

In the fourth part, I shall address some of the "burning issues" mentioned in the preparation of this seminar. Rather than starting again from the European framework, I shall look at what we, in Europe, can learn from the Philippine history of struggles.

My contribution surely reflects the experience of one generation (that of May 1968, the equivalent in the Philippines of the First Quarter Storm), in a given country (France) and region (Southern Europe). But no one can speak for a whole generation or even for one given political trend.

This contribution reflects as well my personal experience. For example, I

have been deeply influenced by the Asian revolutions (Vietnam, China, Philippines...), while many of my comrades have been more influenced by those of Latin America. In any case, we have been asked, in this seminar, to freely speak for ourselves. So be it.

I. FROM THE MID-1960s TO THE MID-1990s

A. The context

During the mid-1960s, a new (and plural) revolutionary Left shaped up in Europe. Its radicality is easily

understood, considering the context of the time.

The international context, dominated by the Indochina wars, with the Vietnamese people's resistance to the US unprecedented military escalation. The year 1968 symbolized the worldwide character of struggles with the TÃt offensive in Vietnam, the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, the student barricades and the general strike in France, the student upsurge in Mexico...

The European context. There were still dictatorships in the south of the continent: military Colonel's regime in Greece and two neo-fascist regimes in Spain (Franco) and Portugal (Salazar).

The wave of radicalization of the late 1960s did not concern only the students, but also the (youth of the) working class: in France, in May 68, the student barricades opened the way for the biggest strike ever in the country.

The political context. The youth radicalization in the 1960s expressed itself in Europe in very political terms, and not only "cultural" ("Woodstock") as it is often said. In many European countries, the dominant references among young radicals were Socialist, Communist and Marxist. In the name of Marxism, they challenged the main traditional workers parties: Social-Democracy and pro-Moscow CPs, denouncing their reformism.

The European "new Left" of the time was shaped within this context. It gave birth to a number of new currents (including various Maoist trends). It also gave a new life to older but minority currents (including various Trotskyist and anarcho-communist currents).

B. The revolutionary spirit of the time

Most of the new revolutionary Left currents were ideologically clearly defined. The Maoists hoped that the international communist movement would be reorganized around China. Trotskyists were the children of the anti-Stalinist fight within the Third International, incarnated by the Left Opposition. Each of the political parties which succeeded in consolidating itself, even if temporarily, presented specific qualities. Maoists often proved able to help organize unorganized sectors (such as the migrants). Trotskyists were better able to address the organized sectors of the working class (trade-unions...) and to project a democratic, anti-bureaucratic Marxism.



Paris, May 1968

Ideological labels meant something (Maoists identified with China, Trotskyists with the Third International Left Opposition). But already at that

time, "labels" did not tell you much about the political characteristics of an organization.

There were very different types of Maoist parties - from what we called "Mao-Stalinist" to "Mao-Spontaneist". There were as well very different types of Trotskyisms (ourselves, we were often called "Guevarro-Trotskyists" by others who claimed to be better Trotskyists: no harm in this, we loved the Che). Many organizations were neither Maoist nor Trotskyist.

We all belonged to the new revolutionary Left. We were different from the established Social-Democracy and pro-Moscow CPs. It was not only a question of program. It was expressed in daily practice. Unlike a reformist one, a revolutionary activist found her/himself often forcibly brought to police stations. Time and again, some of us were jailed. Our organizations could be banned (mine was banned twice).

We were also banned from entering some other countries (especially the United States of America), and we had to travel accordingly. We related to underground parties (just beyond the Pyrénées!, in the Basque Country and Spain, under Franco) and we had to take the appropriate measures not to endanger them.

We organized underground soldiers' committees among the draftees in the army (this was a "specialty" of my own organization). There were weekly fights with fascist groups in the student districts and in market places. Our offices had to be guarded in permanence.

We were not engaged in armed actions, but we studied the experience of past and present armed revolutions, as a means to prepare for the future. Actually, some of our comrades, from the same generation in Latin America, were involved in armed actions at the time of the military dictatorship; they were crushed and we had to help them escape when it was still possible.

If I describe all this a bit in detail, it is to show that my generation of activists entered in politics at a time of "revolutionary spirit", and that to be then revolutionary, even in Europe,

could mean something very concrete. It helps also to understand the problems we were faced with, when history turned out differently from what we had expected.

C. The process of selection

The Revolutionary Left of the 1960s-1970s went through four tests, which challenged its capacity to last beyond the mid-1970s. A long and harsh process of selection occurred.

1. First test: from students to class. The first problem was apparent immediately after May 68. The new revolutionary Left was student-based. To last, it had to root in the working class; and it was not easy (in France, we were physically chased out of the factories by the pro-Moscow CP and fired by the bosses). Not so many organizations succeeded in doing so (mostly some Maoist, Trotskyist and anarchist organizations).

2. Second test: from short-term to long-term perspectives. In the late 1960s, most of us thought that class struggles would decisively sharpen in four to five years times. There were many reasons to think so. But in the mid-1970s, it became obvious that history was not shaping up as predicted. The situation tended to "normalize" in Europe. The end of dictatorships in Greece, Spain and Portugal eventually led to controlled "democratic transitions".

Even if they were late in doing so, some organizations could adapt to the new situation. Others could not. A few got involved in costly "private wars" against the state and Capital (or even against the reformist Left), especially in Germany and Italy, where a fascist Right was deeply encroached in the state and had been very active (planting bombs) and provocative. In France, one of the main Maoist parties (of Mao-Spontaneist trend) decided to dissolve itself.

3. Third test: re-evaluation of strategies. No component of the "new Left" could survive without a substantial re-evaluation of its vision, program and strategy. I shall explain this important point later, when I shall present the evolution of my own

current's thinking in the 1980s.

4. Fourth test: sheer survival. From the mid-1980s, the situation became very difficult for the European revolutionary Left. It had to face the new situation created by the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc and the subsequent Capitalist Globalization. Even the parties like ours, which had denounced Stalinism a long way before, suffered from a negative evolution of the relationships of forces between classes.

The bourgeoisie was very much at the offensive and we were really swimming against the stream. This was the first time for my generation. The situation began to improve in the mid-1990s, with early signs of the anti-globalization revolt. But in the meantime, we had suffered bad setbacks (loss of members) and a number of organizations had disappeared.

The end result was a quite weakened revolutionary Left in the mid-1990s. Most of the 1960-1970s activists are no more or only marginally politically involved; and some turned bitter. A number of the most well-known figures happily joined the social elite. But for dozens of thousands of them, something remains of their past experience. Hundreds or thousands of trained cadres still play a significant role in mass organizing, including in the development of "new" social movements.

II. THE BRIDGE: A PROCESS OF RE-EVALUATION

There is no simple way of explaining why some political organizations survived and, more than surviving, are still "alive", meaning still able to play an active role in today's processes of radicalization. For each of them, one can study what helped them to do so in their original program and ideological outlook, or in their political and organizational traditions, in their social roots.

But overall, no ideological trend proved in practice its superiority

versus the other ones. This is especially clear from an international point of view. In France, the only three significant organizations remaining, from the 1970s radical Left (meaning to the left of the French CP, then pro-Moscow), are labeled Trotskyists, even if they are indeed very different from one another. In India, the main organizations to the left of the CPI-M are all coming from the ML (meaning Maoist) tradition - even if they are no less different from one another.

Whatever their political and ideological origins, to remain today alive, organizations shaped by the 1960-1970s experience had to pass through a deep process of re-evaluation. To me, this seems to be one of the main necessary conditions for the long-term survival of any movement (even if it is not in itself a sufficient condition).

To illustrate this point, I shall present the evolution of my own movement, in France, which is of course the one I know the best. Somehow, we were better prepared to face the new world realities of the 1990s, more than many other currents; because our Marxism was anti-Stalinist (there was no idealization of USSR!), anti-bureaucratic, relatively pluralistic and respectful of social movements' own democratic life. Nevertheless, we had to undergo profound processes of re-evaluation, even on our theoretically strongest fields.

Evolutions and re-evaluations are often empirical, little thought of, or even denied in the name of (previous) "orthodoxies". Organizations often have a strong capacity to deny realities! During the 1980s, a number of us had the opportunity to attempt to rethink these over, giving them a conscious, explicit formulation, because of a collective work developed around an Amsterdam-based international activist school and institute.

I wish to outline, in a very synthetic way, the scope of these re-evaluations. The way I'll do it may be quite personal, even if it is the outcome of a collective endeavor.

The "original sin" of my ideological

trend's generation of militants was a combination of "programmatism" and short-term "activism". Our "programmatism" was a legacy from the previous two generations: while we were few with little social roots, we had inherited a full-fledged program for the World Revolution, shaped by the early experience of the Third International and, later, by its Left Opposition and Trotsky.

Let's say that we had a very big head on very small legs. Thus, our viewpoint of politics tended to be rather unbalanced. Things were made more complex because we were also the typical children of our time and milieu, expressing very much the short-term activism of student radicalization. Small, our legs ran too fast for our moves to be strictly straitjacketed by our big head! For a number of years, there was a dynamic tension between our "programmatism" and our "short-term activism".

1. Lessons, yes. But no applicable models

A re-evaluation often happens when a growing gap between over-used theoretical formulas and concrete political or historical analysis can no longer be ignored. This happened to our "models" of revolutionary patterns. The 1917 Russian revolution was supposed to offer us a clear pattern for revolutions in imperialist countries. Problem: this "model" never existed.

The social structure and dynamics of Russia was quite different from the ones of Western European countries. Rather than spreading from the town to the countryside, the revolutionary process combined women, workers, peasants; urban, rural and national upsurges. As well as soldiers' upsurges, who massively went back to their villages and districts, keeping their weapons.

One of the most complex strategic issues (how to arm the people) found a very specific answer, because the context of the Russian revolution was WWI and the decomposition of a huge standing army. Valuable lessons from the Russian revolution are plenty. But how can one speak here of a model, if

its pattern has been so deeply shaped by the world war framework?

A similar question can be raised with the way the Maoist currents built a model out of the Chinese revolution. Maoists tend to refer to the Third Chinese revolution (let's say from the Long March to the 1949 victory), while Trotskyists often studied mostly the Second one (1925-1927).

In fact, one of the main keys to understanding the concrete pattern of the Chinese revolution is the link between these two periods. The Red Army came out of massive popular upsurges and broad rebellions in the army, not from small armed propaganda groups slowly growing into guerrilla forces: it was 300.000 strong at birth! And the Long March was an attempt to save as much of it after the crushing defeats of 1927-1930. Lessons of the Chinese revolution are also plenty. But how can we make a model out of such a specific experience?



European Social Forum, Florence 2002

We can of course construct theoretical "models" to reflect on the variety of revolutionary patterns. It may be useful to do so (I am not so convinced about it). But it has to be clear that such models are abstractions, and are not directly applicable. Which leads us to a second field of re-evaluations: the issue of strategy.

2. The concrete character of strategies

The other side of the "revolutionary model's" coin was the question of strategy. The Russian model was identified with the formation of councils (workers, peasants and soldiers) leading to the Soviet system of power (a reality of the Russian revolution). For quite good reasons, it was seen as a key goal: a way to give life to socialist democracy.

Thus, we applied what I call a "programmatic determinism" in the definition of our strategy: the strategy should fit the (unfortunately non-

existent) Russian model to fulfill our programmatic aim, socialist democracy. Surely, the choice of a strategy is influenced by one's program; but it depends also on many other factors (including, most importantly, the result of previous periods of struggles).

Maoist organizations developed what I call a "sociological determinism". A Third World country being by definition "semi-feudal, semi-colonial", protracted people's war was necessarily the chosen strategy. To build such a general, abstract, model, they had to empty the Chinese revolutionary experience from much of its richness. Too bad for the lessons.

It took quite a while for us to really break away from an abstract definition of strategies, while it should have been obvious from the start that in a given country, several successive strategies had to be applied from the 1930s to 1975. I find the case of Vietnam especially telling on this matter, because of the length of a continuous struggle (from the late 1920s to 1975).

We always understood that the definition of tactics needed a concrete analysis of the concrete situation. We eventually understood that, at its own level, it was also true of the strategies. A concrete strategy is generally combining elements of various "models" of strategy; and evolves in accordance to changes in the correlations of forces. We then reached the notion of "concrete, combined and evolving strategies".

3. Lessons from the women and ecological movements.

Re-evaluations also happen when an organization is faced with the development of new fields or forms of struggles. For my generation, in the 1970s, it was especially the case with the women and ecological movements. Few of us were originally involved in the emergence of the ecological movements.

Quite a number of our women comrades were very much part of the new wave of women struggles, at all levels: political as well as theoretical

elaboration. Nevertheless, the organization (male-led) as such was confronted with these new developments rather than being an organic component of them at the start. It took a long time, with much turmoil, to integrate these dimensions better -with an uneven success.

Both the women and the ecological movements forced us to think anew the linkages between class society and patriarchy; between modes of production, human societies and nature.

4. Can politics be based on predictions?

Repeated mistakes should and sometimes do lead to re-evaluations. It is what happened to us on the issue of "predictions". Time and again, we based a policy on a prediction, which time and again proved false. The most famous one concerned the previous generation: the coming of the Third World War. There was nothing ludicrous about such a prognosis, made at the time of the Korean War.

The problem is that, very concrete and sharp political decisions were applied based on this prediction, and that these policies were maintained long after it became clear that WWII was not anymore on the agenda. As mentioned before, my generation made its own errors of prediction, especially concerning the rise of class struggles in Europe in the mid-1970s.

Prediction is not only difficult, because so many factors are involved in the evolution of situations. Middle- or long-term prediction becomes also impossible, because future evolutions depend on the results of ongoing struggles which, by definition, cannot be known in advance (they will be determined by the struggles...). We can brainstorm on future evolutions to open our minds to a range of possibilities. But not to the point of determining a concrete policy on guesses, instead of on actually emerging trends.

We tend to replace the "art of prediction" by what we called in the 1980s "conscious empiricism". "Empiricism" because the aim is to feel as early as possible new emerging

trends, new emerging possibilities, for the organization to react quickly to the changes and make the best of them. "Conscious" because program and theory are strongly needed to "read" social realities. It is not to diminish the importance of program and theory, but to stress that politics is based on existing changing realities, and that knowledge is also empirical.

5. A deeper understanding of pluralism

Most of the issues mentioned above concerned fields where we were (relatively) weak, notably because of our "original sin". What I find especially interesting is that we had to re-evaluate our conceptions even on some of our (relatively) stronger points. This is the case of pluralism.

Contrary to a number of other currents in the 1970s, we always recognized the plural character of the Marxist and labor movements. Our program on this matter borrowed from original Marxism, the early century European socialist movement, Bolshevism and the anti-Stalinist fight of the Left Opposition. Our references were many.

There was a common stock of "classics", often quoted and whose selected or collected works always could be found on our bookshelves: Marx and Engels; Rosa Luxemburg; Lenin, Trotsky and several other Bolshevik thinkers, Che Guevara, etc. There was also a wide range of other references, more personal, from Gramsci to Lukacs, from Jose Marti to the Sandinistas. And I was not the only one to read as well Mao or Le Duan.

We thus always considered that several workers' parties could (and indeed did) exist, and that there was a dynamic variety in Marxist thought. We also favored democratic space in our own organizations, including rights of tendencies or fractions. It was one of our qualities. But one day, faced with the Salvadoran experience of a united front between revolutionary organizations, we realized that time and again we were using the formula (inherited from the previous generation): "several workers' parties and one revolutionary party". Then only did we integrate

further the notion of pluralism, stating that several revolutionary parties could (and indeed did) exist.

6. A significant change in our global outlook

The deepening of our understanding of pluralism corresponded to a more general modification of our outlook. We had inherited from the previous generation a schematic vision of the international socialist movement as organized around three "poles", two of them reformists (Social-Democracy and Stalinism), the third one being "Revolutionary Marxism" (which essentially meant us). Between these three poles, various types of "centrist" currents were oscillating. With the help of historical experiences, independent centrists currents and the left wing within Social-Democratic and Stalinist parties would radicalize, "discover" the truth of our program and join ranks.

For sure, this is an oversimplified presentation of the 1950s' legacy, but I think that it touches something essentially true. Many of us were never very happy with this historical schema. Two of the three "poles" mentioned were physically very strong, with a powerful force of attraction.

The force of attraction of Revolutionary Marxism was essentially "programmatic": it did not operate within the same level as the first ones. The notion of "centrism" had proven quite useful in some circumstances. But it lost meaning once it was applied to a too wide range of parties, including parties which were very coherent in relation to their own struggle, like the Vietnamese CP.

The plurality of the revolutionary movement was then not fully recognized or was seen as a transitory stage. Our vision changed precisely on this. The revolutionary experience is very complex. Too complex for the "truth" of one given program to be obvious. The plurality of the revolutionary movement is now seen as a lasting reality, to be addressed positively and not as a lesser evil. It does not mean that we should not fight for the unification of revolutionary forces. It means that the

way we understand relations between radical parties, or the functioning of one unified party, should effectively take into account this question.

7. The notion of "open history"

Our vision of history changed too. We learned from the previous generation (and from Marx!) the criticism of the "linear conception" of history and of the dominant discourse on this question developed by Social-Democracy and Stalinism alike.

But somehow, even if we did not say so, my feeling is that we considered the pluri-linear character of history a fact of the past. Human societies followed several lines of development, as shown in the discussion on modes of production, and the European one was not universal. But did not imperialism and the unification of the world capitalist market open a new era?

During the 1980s, we went beyond the discussion on modes of production. We integrated a broader notion of "open history", where the future is not given; where, in times of crisis, "historical crossroads" open a (limited) number of possibilities; where strong constraints do exist (socio-economic, ecological...) but where social struggles play their role in determining which of these possibilities will become reality; where revolutionaries look at such possibilities rather than at an abstract historical "necessity"...

Intertwined with the vision of history, helped by gender and ecological thoughts, we integrated, as well, a criticism of the traditional conception of "progress"; or of values imposed by capitalist relations of production and power.

8. Which Marxism, which politics?

A general trend clearly emerged from these various re-evaluations (and others I did not mention here).

In the realm of theory, we attempted to develop, even more than before, a dialectical, "non-reductionist" conception of Marxism. This does not mean to "water down" Marxism and class analysis. My friend Daniel Bensaïd, with regard to the rise of

anti-Marxist theories in the name of “modernity”, claimed its right to an “open dogmatism”: to defend basic lessons of Marxism while opening it to a wide range of realities.

In the realm of action, we realized how much politics cannot be simply deduced from theory or program. How much politics has something to do with consciousness. How much the mediation of the “concrete analysis of a concrete situation” (a Leninist motto, of course) was a vital necessity. In the 1960s already, we considered that knowledge came from “praxis” (social practice). This conviction gained in depth.

In some twenty-five years, we changed a lot. Other revolutionary movements too. It would be very useful to compare how we changed -or how we understand the changes we went through (which is not necessarily the same thing). I would be very happy to share on this.

Of course, some organizations will pretend that no change ever occurred nor was necessary. The “right line” being eternal, it was theirs thirty years ago, it is today still theirs. It may express a lack of reflection on its own history. More probably, such certitudes hide a negative process of political impoverishment and sectarianization.

The re-evaluations mentioned here remain controversial. They have been unevenly integrated by my own generation. More problematically, they might be ignored by the new generation of activists, because it asserts itself in a very different way from ours.

III. FROM THE MID-1990s TO TODAY

My generation of activists, which emerged during the period between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s, continued to shape politics until the mid-1990s (to the growing irritation of those who became active during the 1980s). A radical change of generation occurred since the mid-1990s.

Differences are many.

Politically, it has not lived the Cold-War period; it is a child of the post-Soviet bloc disintegration era and of capitalist globalization. Its references are no more ours: events from the Russian to the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions are facts of history, not part of their own (imagined) history and identity as was the case for us. Except for a tiny minority, traditional ideological “labels” have lost most of their (always relative) relevance.

A. Changing relations to politics

I do not know to what extent what is true for France (and surely a number of other countries) can be generalized. But as a whole, the relation between present activists and organizing is different from what it was for our generation (taking of course into account that there is no uniformity in one given generation).

In the 1960s-1970s, all types of organizations (from trade unions to political parties) recruited and grew in the same way that mobilizations expanded. This is presently much less true. Many young activists keep contact through more informal networks and, when they join parties, they tend to protect other sectors of their lives from the dictates of politics (while for us, every sphere of life came within the framework of our political engagement).

It is today difficult to speak of revolutionary organizations in Europe in the same way that we did thirty years ago. Today, the daily life of a member of a radical party is not so different than the one of a member of a reformist party; she/he is simply consistent and coherent in his fight against neoliberal and war policies (while reformists are not at all).

Things are beginning to change with a trend to criminalize radical trade union activities and with the quick erosion of what is left of civil liberties in the name of anti-terrorism. But still, state violence is mostly turned against urban poor youth rather than against political activists (with exceptions: see Berlusconi’s bloody repression of the Genoa anti-G8 mass mobilization).

B. Addressing the issue of strategies

Since the start, my generation entered head on into the debates on strategies. Old and new organizations confronted each other at this level, and not only about current politics.

We often started our political involvement by taking sides in these disputes. It is not the case now. The concrete lines of demarcation operate at another level than strategies per se: should we confront globalization or give it a social touch? Should we enter into center-Left governments, or build an independent Left radical pole?

It does not mean no re-evaluation is presently thinkable insofar as strategy is concerned. With the development of the Global Justice Movement, it is possible to think anew certain elements of a strategy like the plural character of the revolutionary subject and the combination of struggles which can initiate a revolutionary transformation of societies.

This is quite important in itself. But to fully reopen the debate on strategies, issues like property and state have to be squarely addressed. The issue of property has begun to be broadly dealt with, especially on question of “common goods” and public services. But the matter is much more difficult as far as the question of the state and violence is concerned.

This last issue was central to our own radicalization. After the 1973 Pinochet coup d’état, for example, discussion raged on the class nature of the state, the need to break down the state machinery -versus attempts to reform it. It is hardly debated presently beyond parties’ educational sessions.

Or it is approached in a typically escapist way, often by rather old figures like Tony Negri... This situation reflects of course the fact that we have little new to say on the question of state power and the disarmament of the ruling classes. To go beyond speculations regarding this field of re-evaluation, we probably still need some new historical experiences -and not only from a few Third World countries under US military occupation.

Here is probably one of the last responsibilities of our old, declining, generation: to prepare the ground, as quickly as possible, for issues of strategies to be assimilated again by the movement as a whole. It is not an easy task, because this field of thought has to be truly updated.

C. A period of refoundation

How to update? We are not only going through a period of reconstruction, after the downturn of the 1980s-early 1990s. Because of the depth of the crisis of the socialist reference (due to the failures and betrayals of Social-Democracy and Stalinism), we are going through a period of refoundation of a radical (and potentially revolutionary) project in Europe. This is surely true for a number of other regions (see Latin America...).

For sure, many old truths are still valid nowadays. Capitalism is very much at work, which means that its Marxist criticism remains very much valid. But a process of refoundation is deeper, more complex than a process of reconstruction. Old truths have to be re-assimilated in new ways. And the “new” has to be discovered as well. Refoundation is not only a matter of pedagogy (to give again life to old truths). Rethinking is an essential element of it.

Our chance is that the growth of the anti-liberal, anti-capitalist globalization and anti-war movements helps us to do both: to rebuild and to rethink. It represents for new generations a common, world-wide, “founding experience”.

It is rich, because it is socially more broadly rooted than the 1960s-70s radicalization (even if May 68 in France gave birth to the biggest general strike ever in this country and even if a number of Third World struggles were deeply rooted). New relationships, more equal, between parties and social movements are being tested. New ways of bringing together a variety people’s struggles are being attempted.

The Global Justice Movement has created a framework, notably through the social forum process, within which

the 1960s-1970s generation can encounter the new one. It is a space for dialogue and exchanges, as well as for collectivizing struggles and campaigns. It is one of the many reasons for which the radical Left should be fully part of these processes.

IV. ON A FEW OF THE PRESENT “BURNING ISSUES”

The organizers of this seminar listed a number of “burning issues” to be discussed throughout the agenda. I would like to come back on some of them, even if briefly. All the more because the historical record of the revolutionary Left need to be looked at in a sharp and self-critical way. This is true for all ideological trends of the radical Left, including mine.

How to learn from experience? I find it especially interesting to study successes, when odds were so big that the struggle should have failed: this is, for example, the case of the Vietnamese resistance against the French and US invasions (it is as well the case at various turning points of the Chinese revolution). I also find it especially interesting to reflect on our own failures, when setbacks came from ourselves, rather than from the strength of the enemy.

I have attempted, until now, to present faces of the European radical Left and its evolution. I would like, in the last part of my contribution to the seminar, to explain how much we learned from the Philippine experience. And to share with you reflections on some of the most burning of the “burning issues”.

A. Forms of struggles

If this contribution had been given in the early 1980s, it would have been centered on the many “positive” lessons we learned from the Philippine people’s struggles. It proved for us all the more interesting because it was a contemporary experience, rather than a past one, where one could learn from direct interaction, rather than

from history books. Thus, together with Latin American contemporary experiences, the Philippines became part of the collective work of re-evaluation engaged in our Amsterdam-based international school.

This point concerns of course, among others, the debate on the changing articulations between forms of struggles, or various experiments in sectoral organizing and program (agrarian, urban poor, etc.). It includes key issues, which I find relevant for European countries as well. Here are two examples.

1. Territorial forms of mass struggles

There is little tradition of “territorial” stoppage of work and territorial-based forms of mass struggles in European countries (at least in France). Trade unions are not used to link with social and civic movements outside the companies, while the need to develop such forms of organizing and struggles is becoming acute.

Local social forums offered a framework for tying links between TUs and a wide range of movements. But it is in the Third World that one can look at full-fledged experiences in this field, like in India or in the Philippines, notably with the *welgang bayan*.

2. Inter-communities solidarities

In the framework of capitalist globalization and the crisis of the unifying socialist perspective, new divisions are emerging between popular “communities” in France. To this extent, it is a very new problem we are facing.

Even when legitimate, some issues are beginning to divide the progressive movement itself, to the point that it has become sometimes difficult to organize one common demonstration against all racisms (anti-Arab, anti-Black, anti-Jew racisms). As if, for some, a hierarchy had to be established within the anti-racist movement, pitting one community against the other one. Mindanao offers many examples of how “tri-people” solidarities can be tried between communities, in a much graver

context.

This contribution being given in 2005, we are unfortunately obliged to learn from the darkest sides of the Philippine revolutionary struggle, and not only from its brighter ones.

B. Issues raised by the 1980s purges

The communist (Stalinist) movement has known many bloody purges; they were fractional, politically motivated, often socially rooted (bureaucracy), reflecting power drives. The specificity of the purges, which occurred in the 1980s within the CPP, is not their scope, but their nature: paranoid and self-destructive. There are probably other similar cases (in Vietnam in 1945, on a smaller scale?). Still, it is the first time for many of us to confront this type of internal purges. So, the importance of the question: how was it possible?

Answers to such a question are necessarily multiple. Some of them are clear. In the background, the effects of lasting militarization of Philippine society and the violence of the civil war.

The possibility left by the CPP leadership to use torture in “exceptional” cases: torture became widespread in the search for military agents within the CPP ranks and it explains to a large extent how the purges mushroomed and thousands of good-standing militants were killed. The very fact that torture could be used shows also how much the universal character of basic human rights was not truly recognized within the CPP tradition.

The easiness with which a party member could become a suspect shows how much there was a lack of democratic political and organizational culture within the party. Etc.

The danger here is to stop at a first layer of explanation, the one we are the most used to, the one seen traditionally “political”. This layer of explanation is key, necessary, but I do not think that it is the only relevant one. How could decent persons and devoted cadres be compelled to

become torturers? Why did the purges spread down to the mass base and become massive in certain provinces, and not in others even when they were under the same CPP regional commission?

To answer such questions, and many others, we need of course to know the truth about the purges, which is not yet fully the case, and to know their concrete history in various places. For this, Path’s work deserves to be actively supported. We also need to address issues, more “psychological”, introduced by Bobby Garcia in his very valuable book [2].

The nature of the relationship to the party is also part of the overall the picture. When I asked cadres who lived that nightmare the question “how was it possible that orders to implement torture were applied?”, I received various answers: the political ones mentioned above, the atmosphere of collective paranoia, sheer fear (to oppose orders was to become suspect)... but also the following one, which struck me: “To obey such orders was the ultimate proof of our loyalty to the party”. Shouldn’t the ultimate loyalty be to the people rather than to the party? And shouldn’t the loyalty to the party imply a right of rebellion against party leaderships when such orders come? By the way, in certain cases at least, provincial leaderships did refuse to continue to apply orders, beyond a certain point.

C. What has the CPP become?

I dealt with this issue in my answer to Fidel Agcaoili’s “Rejoinder”. The relevant part of my answer is reproduced below in annex. I just wish to underline the following points:

- The post-1992 evolution of the CPP is neither unique nor banal. It is extremely important that we understand the mechanisms and the process leading to this specific type of degeneration. It needs an intimate knowledge of the history of the concerned party and revolutionary struggles. This knowledge cannot be reached in cases like the Cambodian Khmers Rouges. It exists in the case of the CPP. So, the peculiar importance of the Philippine (painful) experience.

- Here too, we should not feel satisfied with a first set of explanations (the Mao-Stalinist traditions of the CPP, the effects of militarization of the society and of the revolutionary movements, etc.). An original in-depth understanding of such a process will have to combine different layers of analysis. We surely need to apply a “non-reductionist” Marxist approach of power relations, integrating elements from various fields of knowledge (as was the case for the gender issue).

- We have lived the degeneration of the original social democracy, leading to the 1914 betrayal; then the post-victory Stalinist degeneration; and now that of the CPP. They nourish one another. And they all show the gravity of the “danger from within”: how social and political counter-revolutionary trends can grow from within the revolutionary movements itself, from within the revolutionary struggle.

D. Back to the classics: revolution as a process of self-emancipation.

In all the three types of process of degeneration mentioned above, the party (or the party-state) rose above its own social base to the point of turning its might against it. So the question is posed: how to keep the revolutionary party under control. One essential answer to that question is to give (again) all its meaning to the classical Marxist conception of revolution as a process of self-emancipation (both individual and collective).

It is important not to take this principle for granted but to look at all its implications, as:

- Party is not governance. It cannot substitute itself to representative people’s organizations.
- Self-determination begins now, in the very way the struggle is conducted. It is not something to be addressed sometime after the seizure of power. This is true for Lumad and Muslim communities, of course.
- Similarly, self-organization is favored. Democratic processes of self-decision are to be enhanced in all sectors.
- Self-defense remains the only source

of legitimacy of revolutionary armed action. When necessary, armed struggle aims at protecting and helping mass organizations and mobilizations; not the other way around. Politically, armed struggle is a subordinate form of struggle.

- Pluralism of the people's movement and of (popular layers) of society has to be recognized as an essential component of people's democracy.

- Revolutionary parties have a specific (and evolving) role. They are not and must not become the leading faction of society (see below on this question).

The hard question is not so much what we mean by defining revolution as a process of self-emancipation. It is how to apply it in very difficult conditions of struggle and repression. The Philippine experience is enlightening in this matter.

E. Responsibilities of Marxists or of Marxism?

For some, including former communists, Marxism and class analysis are to be blamed for the many failures of the socialist struggle and for the crimes committed in the name of revolution. I'd rather think that we have to look at the responsibilities of Marxists, and their organizations, rather than to make the "doctrine" the culprit.

There is now a long history of capitalism, which proves that it is indeed an exploitative mode of production, with deeply inhuman consequences. We do need today, as yesterday, an in-depth critical understanding of capitalism, and a framework to perceive the transformation of societies. Marxism was and remains an essential tool in this regard.

But Marxism was never an "achieved" doctrine and probably can never be one. Some 20th century trends represented a real betrayal of the revolutionary and emancipatory content of Marxism (I think of "modern" social-democracy and Stalinism). But many other trends can be attached to the living history of Marxism.

It is quite important to take into account this diversity of Marxist

legacy, the plurality of Marxisms, when we try to draw a balance sheet and lessons from the 20th century struggles. It may be somehow difficult to do it in the Philippines, so dominant has been the "national-democratic" tradition.

The richness of other trends has been ignored by most. I shall take one example, which is less "exotic" than it may seem (this is added to the contribution I gave at the seminar).

After the seminar, I went shopping at National Bookstore. In a carefully locked cabinet, among books explaining how to enjoy sex, I find Jojo Abinales' *Love, Sex and the Filipino Communists* [3] (Poor one who would buy it, hoping to learn pleasant, special and unknown communist ways to do it!) In chapter 7, Jojo compares the sexual doctrine of the CPP to the ones of other parties in Western Europe and Asia.

All of them are the "official" ones, as if they alone represented "Marxism". Jojo had little time to develop this chapter of his otherwise quite interesting work, but he lost a good occasion to show the depth of the breaks within the Marxist reference, and their meaning.

Among other things, the 1960s movement in France was an upsurge of the youth against the hypocrisy of the dominant morals. We fought, against many odds, for our right to sexuality. The "new Left" was engaged in sharp polemics with the French Stalinist CP for its moralistic, conservative, positions.

If we had been told that a revolutionary movement forbade sexuality before marriage and that one could be sentenced to five years abstinence for breaking the rule, we would have laughed, bewildered. To be politically correct was not to marry. In the 1970s, the women's liberation movement fought head on against the patriarchal family. The right to abortion was still far from being won, and many women of my generation were still paying a high price for its illegal character.

At that time, the new homosexual organizations were also politically

radical, mobilizing against capitalism and patriarchy.

How to win freedom in gender equality? We (males) surely did more than our share of mistakes at that time. It took time for homosexuality to be truly recognized by my activist generation. But these mobilizations of the youth, the women, the gays and lesbians on the issues of sexuality, moral, marriage were components of a global fight for freedom and emancipation; it was seen (and is still seen) by most of us as an integral part of the socialist combat.

The role of the political party was not to rule on such issues, to impose its own norms, but to contribute to create the conditions of individual free choice, of self-realization.

The CPP ruled, in a very moralistic way (I bet that the presence of so many priests in the movement played its part, here). More than this, it organized courtship, married and continuously intruded into interpersonal relations. Doing so, the party went far beyond the role of a political organization. It took over the function of the state, the church and the enlarged family! It is through such mechanisms that a party (leadership) begins to view itself as a leading faction in society (something which goes far beyond "vanguardism").

What type of parties do we aim to build? This essential question comes once more in the picture.

We should not blame "Marxism" for the moralistic inquisitorial behavior of the CPP (leadership) nor for our libertarian traditions. Nor should we reduce everything to cultural differences, even if differences of cultures do exist and necessarily influence political patterns.

Much of the same could be said on other fields of theory and action. We all made political choices. It is time for our generation to re-evaluate them. Then, we may be in a position to draw a more thorough balance sheet of "Marxism" in its diversity.

F. The need to update our thinking on democracy

The party is not the only question that

should bounce back time and again. It is also and especially true of the issue of democracy; or to be more precise, of the way democracy is part of the revolutionary project.

Classical Marxist framework remains true. Socialism will be more democratic than capitalism; or there will be no socialism. Democracy cannot bloom when economic power is monopolized by a ruling minority, and when social inequalities are widespread. Civil liberties and political rights are one condition of democracy; as well as an egalitarian transformation of social and power relations. Democracy has to penetrate the realm of production. Etc.

What is new, then?

First, the failures of the past and the terrible legacy of Stalinism. The democratic nature of the socialist project has to be proven again.

Second, the crisis of bourgeois democracy. Capitalist globalization is emptying traditional bourgeois democracy of its content. For example, the WTO has de facto legislative power, above elected assemblies.

For these two reasons, the democratic issue is more than ever central to our struggle.

Because of the crisis of bourgeois democracy, democratic demands are more immediately subversive than in the past.

Because of the crisis of the socialist project, we have to show more than ever, in daily practice, that we do respect the democratic rights of the population, the rights of the members of mass organizations, the rights of party members. This is surely one of the main responsibilities of today's revolutionaries: to draw all the conclusions of the democratic nature of socialism.

F. In conclusion: Internationalism today.

Lessons from the 20th century revolutionary struggles -and more specifically from the successes and failures of my generation of activists- cannot be drawn from the experience

of one country or one region alone; nor from one political trend alone.

It is one of the many reasons for which we need an international framework of collaboration between radical parties.

This framework does not exist yet. If we think about it, this absence is rather strange. It seems obvious that in times of capitalist globalization, internationalism is more necessary than ever; both to elaborate and to act. Nearly every type of organization is part of broad international networks (more or less bureaucratic, more or less lively): trade-unions, peasant movements, women networks, NGOs, social-democratic parties, etc.

For sure, many Trotskyist organizations belong to an International, a legacy of the importance given to internationalism in their history, their programmatic references and their political traditions. But these Internationals, even the best ones, are too limited in scope to respond to what is today needed.

Some broader regional networks formed around a decade ago, like the European Anti-Capitalist Conference and the Asia-Pacific International Solidarity Conference. It is a valuable progress, but these networks remain regional and are slow in translating their links into a capacity of collective action and common programmatic elaboration.

The most recent attempt is the International Network of Radical Parties, which met for the first time in Mumbai, at the occasion of the 2004 World Social Forum. Here again, the hope in a common framework of collaboration between anti-capitalist political organizations from different continents and ideological trends was clearly expressed. But it seems very difficult to translate this hope into reality.

Without trying to formalize things too much, it seems quite important to do some steps forward in this direction, in the coming period.

ANNEX

Extract from: Pierre Rousset, "Philippines: on the CPP-NPA-NDF

assassination policy, What can we learn from Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder"?", May 10, 2005.

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

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

We are now confronted with a third, different, process. It does not lead to the cooptation in the bourgeois social elite. It does not occur in the framework of a transitional society state. It gives birth to a totalitarian power structure to which traditional class definitions are not easy to apply. The first time I was confronted with this question was in 1975: Pol Pot's Khmers Rouges. This faction shaped and took control of the Cambodian CP (killing all cadres supposedly linked to the Vietnamese) before the seizure of

power. Can we say it was “proletarian” while its first act once in power was to disintegrate the existing proletariat and semi-proletariat? Can we say it was “peasant” when it soon submitted the peasantry to forced labor? Can we say it was “bourgeois” when it destroyed all elements of capitalist economy, including money?

In the 1970s, we could have thought that the Khmers Rouges phenomenon was unique, because of specific historical circumstances related to the way Cambodia was brought into the Indochina wars by US intervention. But there is a larger trend, probably incarnated by Shining Path in Peru or today’s CPP. With the violence of class domination (national and international) and its consequences (militarization) as background. With armed struggle as framework (control of arms and money allowing the emergence of a new power structure). And, like in previous processes, with social uprooting as one key mechanism changing the very fabric of an organization. But we need to go much deeper in the analysis if we want to understand what happens. Armed struggle is, most of the time, not a “free choice” but an act of self-defense faced with the violence of the dominant classes (this is what gives it legitimacy). Many armed groups did

not degenerate in the same way as Shining Path or the CPP and when they did, they usually turned to banditry — while ideology is still an essential element of cohesion for the CPP.

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

“Classical” Marxism and “class analysis” constitute an essential part of this theoretical framework: the revolutionary transformation of societies is first of all a process of self-emancipation, which implies people’s

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

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



New Orleans - Urban Catastrophe

24 September 2005, by **Robert Caldwell Jr**

Hurricane Katrina was the most awesome disaster that residents of Louisiana have ever seen. But the deadly results of Katrina were as much a produce of human callousness as an act of nature.

The world watched as people were herded into the Superdome stopping for searches only to find themselves in a wretched and unsanitary place without food, water, or proper medical care. Those in areas of high flooding

fled to their rooftops begging rescue helicopters to airlift them to safety. Many died trapped in their attics or waiting to be rescued. Meanwhile hundreds of police were dispatched to protect property from looters.



At least half the city is at or below sea level including the Central Business District and much of the housing stock

of the city. Under normal conditions massive drainage pumps drain rainwater from the city. But even under “normal” conditions, poor areas of the city routinely face minor flooding.

As Hurricane Katrina promises to be the new textbook case for urban “natural” disasters, social dislocation, and (lack of) urban planning, it is important to begin to examine the social dimension of the failed policies

that contributed to such a massive disaster.

Misguided Priorities

New Orleans is a city "underdeveloped" by capitalism. Social services are chronically underfunded, while working people depend on low wage service jobs and send their kids to dysfunctional public schools.

Despite its once massive port, a seventy mile petro-chemical corridor and historical significance, the city has, like third- world Caribbean islands, depended on scraps of the tourism industry for its sustenance.

So it may be no surprise that in the leadup to Katrina flood Louisiana hurricane preparedness was woefully underfunded by President Bush and Congress.

Bush and Congress ignored those who explained that the critical infrastructure that would prevent New Orleans from becoming inundated with flood waters in the event of a levy break. In a 2003 interview of Bill Moyers' NOW, scientist Daniel Zwerdling noted the cutting of Hurricane funding to pay for the war in Iraq.

According to columnist Sidney Blumenthal, "FEMA warned that a hurricane striking New Orleans was one of the three most likely disasters in the U.S. But the Bush administration cut New Orleans flood control funding by 44 percent to pay for the Iraq war."

Congress did authorize \$10.5 billion dollars for Gulf Coast aid, but Florida received \$16 billion when hurricanes hit in 2004. Contrast this amount with the \$162 billion Congress appropriated for the first year of the Iraq war.

At the time of the hurricane, almost half of the Louisiana National Guard was deployed outside the state. Some, like the 3,000 members of the 256th Infantry Brigade were reportedly with critical high water equipment, in Iraq.

The race and class dynamics of a planned catastrophe

The poverty and blackness of those bearing the brunt of the hurricane is obvious to anyone watching CNN. The plight of these victims underscores the existing race and class inequalities in New Orleans but our case also provides a lens in which to understand another facet of the racism that is ever-present in the United States.

Poor people were the most ill prepared for a hurricane. [Malik Rahim](#), Green Party candidate and former Black Panther explains: "The hurricane hit at the end of the month, the time when poor people are most vulnerable. Food stamps don't buy enough but for about three weeks of the month, and by the end of the month everyone runs out. Now they have no way to get their food stamps or any money, so they just have to take what they can to survive."



Malik Rahim

The poorest people were without transportation, food, or resources, but no hurricane preparedness plan and none of the doomsday exercises of federal, state, and local agencies made any provisions for their evacuation. Disaster planning officials know that 112,000 people in New Orleans are without any private form of transportation. In 2003 the Times Picayune produced a five part series that predicted that this segment would likely face death in the event of a category 5 hurricane.

It's not enough to order an evacuation without having policies in place to carry an evacuation out. City and public school buses flooded while residents were stuck in the city with no way out.

In fact many institutions that once provided evacuation (like the dormitories of the University of New Orleans) now expected to fend for

themselves, an unforeseen logical extension of privatization and neoliberal ideology and a continuation of white supremacy.

In an unscripted NBC benefit concert, rapper Kanye West explains: "George Bush doesn't care about black people," ...[America was set up] "to help the poor, the black people, the less well-off as slow as possible." Tulane Hospital (a private hospital) was evacuated by well before Charity Hospital, the region's trauma hospital and the hospital, whose patients are poor, overwhelmingly black. Tenet paid private contractors to evacuate at least one of their hospitals.

Katrina was not the first hurricane, nor the first major flooding disaster to hit Louisiana. During Hurricane Betsy Lower Ninth Ward, an area almost entirely under the poverty line and 99% black, was intentionally flooded to "save" the wealthy white uptown neighborhoods.

Institutional policies favor ruling class interests, but the flipside of these policies is for purveyors of ruling class ideology- including many working class whites to blame the victims hit hardest: poor African Americans, which, in turn, sharpens existing race and class inequalities. According to Malik Rahim, white vigilante gangs were patrolling Algiers, "riding around in pickup trucks, all of them armed, and any young Black they see who they figure doesn't belong in their community, they shoot him."

Blaming Victims

Both FEMA chief Don Brown and the dominant media spin indicate that the high death toll is "going to be attributable a lot to people who did not heed the advance warnings." Brown's comments suggest that hundreds of thousands foolishly "choose" not to evacuate, but the reality is that tens of thousands of New Orleanians did not have the means to comply with an evacuation order.

Reporters and rightwing internet trolls filled news outlets and message boards with racialized stories of

looting, while tens of thousands of the city begged for help. The lawlessness of looting, full of drama and intrigue of savage black people provided a narrative that shifted focus away from the thousands still stuck in the horror and the political decisions that kept them in that hell. Officials comforted tense onlookers with a promise of order: they would use troops to protect stores from looting. But by doing so, they shifted scarce resources away from the search, rescue, and evacuation of residents whose lives they deemed less important.

As convoys of National Guard reinforcements finally rolled into New Orleans, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco used the occasion to warn looters and assure the ruling class that troops were under her orders to "shoot and kill" if needed to restore order. "These troops are battle-tested. They have M-16s and are locked and loaded," she said. "These troops know how to shoot and kill and I expect they will."

Lackluster Response

The response from Federal agencies was too little too late. While the United States has a history of dropping humanitarian relief to famine and disaster affected areas, media reported that supplies were being diverted because helicopters could not land, or because of a report of hostile gunfire.

If the United States is capable of sending planes that can withstand enemy fire to drop bombs in Iraq, certainly they are capable of air dropping supplies into a US city. On NPR's [All Things Considered](#) Homeland Security Czar Michael Chertoff dismissed an NPR field reporter's claim that 2,000 or more were at Convention Center without food or water and in unsanitary conditions.

Subsequent reports verify that 15,000-20,000 were at the convention center in deplorable conditions including dead bodies. The Convention Center was on dry ground and would have been accessible by military

transport ground vehicles of helicopters.

Mayor Ray Nagin blasted the slow response: "They're not here. It's too doggone late. Now get off your asses and do something, and let's fix the biggest goddamn crisis in the history of this country."

An elected official from Jefferson Parish (New Orleans suburbs) suggested that if New Orleans were to secede from the United States perhaps foreign aid would be more timely. On the evening of September 2, 2005 frustrated FOX News reporters called attention to the policies that continued to trap refugees at the convention center.

Environmental Trigger

Looking at this disaster one cannot ignore the ecological component. New Orleans, like many major cities, was built in a place that posed danger, but environmental problems of global warming and coastal erosion have exacerbated the precariousness of the city.

Marshes and wetlands help to slow a hurricane's effect as it approaches the city. But erosion has diminished the size and ability of the coastal marsh and swamp to absorb the hurricane's force. Coastal erosion has two important causes.

One is that the once rich river silt that built the delta is now being directed to deep waters off the continental shelf to allow for easy river navigation. The second is salt water intrusion from canals built for oil and natural gas drilling and pipeline needs.

Global warming has contributed to a deadly hurricane season that is not yet over. Ross Gelbspan, columnist for the Boston Globe, explains that global warming "generates longer droughts, more-intense downpours, more-frequent heat waves, and more-severe storms." While Katrina began "as a relatively small hurricane that glanced off south Florida, it was supercharged with extraordinary intensity by the relatively blistering sea surface

temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico."

Conclusion

The Bush administration fiddled while New Orleans flooded. The administration and Congress failed to provide basic preventative infrastructure and failed to have a rescue plan in place, choosing instead tax cuts for the rich and war spending in Iraq. This is the last in a line of Bush failures, and is seen so by a growing segment of the population as a "war at home" on poor and Black people.

Many hurricane refugees rightly feel abandoned. But the ruling class abandoned New Orleans long before Katrina hit. Racism, environmental disregard and capitalist deference to "the market" for social planning have long been the hallmarks of New Orleans.

Eventually public money will begin to trickle into the state. Hotels, casinos, chain stores and "Disneyfied" developments will compete for the sorely needed money and serve to reinforce a system that was unable to respond to peoples' needs before, during, and immediately after the hurricane.

But New Orleans can be rebuilt with a different ethos, one with environmentally sustainable planning, a vast transportation infrastructure upgrade, including public evacuation plans, a bolstered public works system, creation of stable union jobs, new public schools, a renewed investment in the public healthcare system, and cultivation of participatory neighborhood councils as incubators for a new, participatory, and radical democracy among the working class, poor, and oppressed.

And the people of the United States can help with an alternative vision. First we should demand that troops deployed in Iraq return to the United States, and we should link this return to a change in national priorities focused on focusing on the needs of working and oppressed people, beginning with rebuilding the infrastructure of New Orleans and the US Gulf South.

Progresismo and the neoliberal matrix

23 September 2005, by **Ernesto Herrera**

To accuse Uruguay's "Progresista" government of "treason" would be an exaggeration. It never proposed an anti-neoliberal rupture, nor did it ever advocate "populism". On the contrary, it opposed any proposal of radical dismantling of neoliberal counter-reforms.

It emphatically denounced the "demagoguery" of "easy promises" so as to deflate the "inflation of expectations" and bring popular expectations back down to earth. At best, "progresismo" promised a road of "possible change" while offering all kinds of guarantees of continuity to capitalist forms of production, profit and rule. As the promise has been made, it now has to be fulfilled.

The neoliberal matrix

The economic course has been defined, both in content and format. There is, for now, no "dispute" in terms of an alternative program. Although some grumbling has begun to be heard from the minister of Ranching, Agriculture and Fishing, Jose Mujica (of the former guerrilla movement the Tupamaros). The tensions originate in the refinancing of the debts of "agricultural producers", the credit that the Bank of the Republic should grant for production, and the so-called "exchange arrears" that affect the "competitiveness" of exporters.

Economic policy shows the crudest continuity, with not a centimetre separating it from the neoliberal matrix established by the governments of the right. If anyone doubted it, the President himself has dispelled them.

On May 5, before an audience of 500 big employers, bankers and investor-speculators, meeting in Buenos Aires for the Inter-American Council of Trade and Production, Tabaré Vázquez defended the "free market", offered a basket of opportunities for "associating with state companies" and again stated that in Uruguay "there is no discrimination between national and foreign investment... because public investment is limited". Moreover, he insisted on the "free repatriation of utilities... respect for banking secrecy" and guaranteed that the foreign debt would be "honoured punctually".



Tabaré Vázquez

In spite of all the protests from social movements, intellectuals, left parties and environmentalist networks, the government approved the Ence-Eufores (Spanish transnational) and Botnia (Finnish transnational) cellulose plants; it agreed together with Lula to welcome AmBev, a brewing transnational denounced internationally for its policy of union repression; and it promoted the coming of Movil, a US cell phone transnational, whose owners include the Mexican multimillionaire Carlos Slim Helu, the boss of Televisa. All these companies will benefit either from the Ley Forestal or from the Law on Investment, that is, from tax breaks, subsidies (as much as 50% of costs under the Ley Forestal) and special credit facilities.

As the margin for public investment is "limited", Public-Private Associations between capitalist investors and state companies are contemplated. Such is the case with ANCAP (the state owned

oil company). Oblivious to the popular uprising in the anti-privatization referendum of December 2003, the president of the directorate, Daniel Martinez (Socialist Party), said that the company operates "under the norms of private law" and that he disagreed with the irremovability which employees enjoy by constitutional mandate. [4]

The right applauds him: "That an ex-union leader who has become president of a public company promotes the idea that this company is governed according to the norms of private law and that an end is put to labour irremovability shows an exemplary sense of responsibility in the structure of the state". [5]

For the moment, the plans for "association" are not far advanced except for an agreement with the Venezuelan PDVSA for the purchase of a million petroleum barrels and in the possibility of investment to extend and modernize the refinery.

The government's commitment to capitalist investors is clear on the question of water. The constitutional law voted for by 64.7% of the electorate in the plebiscite of October 31, 2004, which establishes an obligation that this service is provided solely by public bodies is not going to be respected integrally. A decree by the government (May 20, 2005) signed by Tabaré Vázquez and all his ministers, establishes that private companies: "will continue providing these benefits until the completion of the term originally agreed".

The National Commission in Defence of Water and Life, promoter of the plebiscite, has already presented a legal challenge to the decree, called a petition campaign and organized a

protest march of several hundred kilometres length.

It is not by chance then, that the signature of the Treaty of Promotion and Mutual Protection of Investments with the United States has raised so much dust. [6] Tabaré Vázquez and his economic team favour signing it. Other sectors of the Frente Amplio in the government and among the parliamentary deputies criticize it, especially the Movement of Popular Participation, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party.

The March 26 Movement [7]. and some Base Committees reject ratification and propose to discuss it in a National Plenary which has just been delayed.



Agriculture minister JosÃ© Mujica of the Tupamaros (right)

But, surely, sooner or later the Treaty will be ratified. Jose Mujica has already said that he will vote for it, although he does not like it, because it will win markets: "If I have to eat rotten bread I will eat it, but don't expect me to say the bread is rich." [8]

Certified Programme

On June 8, in Washington, the IMF approved a new Letter of Intent with the government of Tabaré Vázquez. A day later, the World Bank approved it. The economic program of progresismo obtained the certification of the employers. Meanwhile, the "productive country" and the "redistribution of wealth" will have to wait for better times.

The minister of Economy and Finance, Danilo Astori, has already said: "Without an agreement with the IMF today there is no change... most of the investment is going to be private and from abroad... for that reason whether or not Uruguayans will have work is going to depend on an agreement with the Fund". [9] And the agreement was made, but without the exemption expected by some government

functionaries and economists sympathetic to progresismo.

The Letter of Intent (which covers the period June 2005-June 2008) is unambiguous. Among other conditions, the chronogram indicates the IMF's priority demands: macroeconomic stability, priority for private investment, freezing of "costs" (i.e. social investment), the "modernization" of public companies to make them "competitive" in the services market, and the "adjustment of public tariffs" to ensure a budget surplus. [10] And "the reform of the Central Bank to increase its autonomy," or what amounts to the same thing, the creation of a sort of "liberated territory" so that the private banks are placed beyond the control of the national government.

The government is subject to a "primary fiscal surplus" of 3.5% (2005), 3.7% (2006) and 4% (2007), which means ensuring a surplus from the national budget to pay interest on the foreign debt and to fulfil the "obligations assumed by the country". In other words, to continue with the transfer of income and national wealth to the "international creditors".

As for the foreign debt, the drain of resources will continue, jeopardizing present and future sovereignty. At the end of 2004, the national debt was US\$13,335 million, or equivalent to almost 100% of GDP. 42% of this debt is with the IMF, the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank. The schedule of payments (interest and amortization) will consume US\$2,000 million in the first years of government (20 times more than the sum devoted to the social emergency) and in 2005 alone, interest payments will absorb 25% of the income of the central administration.

The government's aim was maintaining the "growth of GDP" through reducing the weight of the debt (with the debt-GDP ratio falling in 5 years from 100 to 60%). Neither will happen. The same economic team foresees a fall in the growth of GDP for 2006 (3.5%) with respect to 2005 (6.5%); as for the foreign debt, the "successful" placing of bonds for 500 million dollars and the "fresh funds" to be received from the IMF and the

World Bank will increase medium term indebtedness

Adjustment and austerity

They are the common denominators in the agreement with the IMF. The cabinet has decided that in a "first stage", the economic priorities will be "austerity" and extreme "fiscal discipline". The level of public investment will be as miserable as it was under the governments of the right, 2.5% of GDP.

This will have its correlate when the next National Budget Law is drawn up. The "adjustment in costs" will imply very insufficient increases in health and education. We have already had a taster: on March 28, the government issued a decree that capped investment for the Ministry of Housing, at 1,100 million dollars. This means a cut of 45% in investment, which will deepen the housing deficit (currently 80,000 houses), condemning thousands of families to live in temporary housing. [11]

On wages, the government had made it clear during the electoral campaign that there would be no "salariozo" [huge pay increases]. The recovery of purchasing power is effectively delayed, until 2007, as long as the "growth of GDP" and "increased investment" are "sustainable over time". If everything goes well, we can have a distribution of the cake.

The government has, from July 1, increased the national minimum wage from \$2,050 to \$2,500. The PIT-CNT (trade union federation) had hoped the increase would be from May 1 and the sum would be \$3,000. [12]

The percentage increase (the basis for the negotiations in the Wages Councils between unions and employers) will be between 2 and 4%, to be granted on a quarterly basis. If we consider that over the last three years real wages have fallen by more than 23%, this proposal is less than the minimum that the unions demanded. Pensions linked to the IPC (Index of Consumer Prices) will suffer the same (bad) fate, although an

increase of 6% (to be paid in two stages) has been granted to "submerged" pensions.

In general this increase is no more than \$200 monthly.

Things will not get better for the civil servants, who lost 18% under the government of the neoliberal Jorge Batlle/ The "recovery" will amount to 0.6% and successive wage increases will be tied to agreements of "responsibility in functioning" (a euphemism for "productivity").

In any case, the priority will be for areas like education, public health, justice, policing and the military. In a lunch organized by the Association of Marketing Directors minister Eduardo Bonomi (Tupamaro) clearly expressed the philosophy of the government: "It is necessary to resolve the problems of the people and then those of the civil servants". He added that "there is no productive development without increased wages". [13]

As far as unemployment is concerned the government aims to cut it to 10% by June 2006 (at the moment, the official figure is 12.3%), thus a diminution of little more than 2%. If it is considered that 52% of the economically active population are in conditions of open unemployment, under-employment and precarity (40% of the employed are not registered with social security), the government's aim of generating between 20-25,000 new jobs for 2005 and 30,000 for 2006 is something of a disappointment. [14]

And then? The devaluation of the labour force through "containment" (confiscation) of incomes, and the maintenance of unemployment and massive under-employment, will continue. The famous "redistribution of income" awaits a better opportunity. Wages will continue being the variable of adjustment to pay the foreign debt and maintain the profitability of companies.

Meanwhile, "tax justice" is in the freezer. VAT (23%) hits the workers while income tax means an extra expropriation of \$180 million a year. In fact, the government has agreed with the IMF that it will collect more to pay for the servicing of the foreign debt; while leaving intact the basic

characteristics of unjust taxation. Indirect taxes will continue to have more weight than direct ones, so the taxation system will increase the concentration of income and wealth.

Focused emergency

The successive neoliberal governments have left a lot of victims, with tens of thousands of people surviving in the most dramatic conditions. For that reason, the Plan of National Attention to the Social Emergency (PANES) assumes "top priority".

The last report of the National Institute of Statistics (INE) crudely depicts the geography of poverty in the country. [15] Nearly a million poor (almost 30% of the total population), and 200,000 in the category of "indigent". 300,000 people live in "lasting or chronic", that is, "irreversible" poverty.

This layer of the "excluded" has an income 22 times smaller than those considered poor. Still worse, 57% of children are born in homes with "unsatisfactory basic necessities".

With this basic landscape, the "fight against poverty" is the flag unfolded to the four winds by the government. PANES has been designed to help nearly 40,000 households (200,000 people) in two years. The objective is to "include" the "socially excluded". The budget of PANES is \$134 million annually (100 from the government and 34 from the IADB.).

The amount invested by the government is 0.6% of GDP, a shameful amount if compared, for example, with that destined to the payment of interest on the foreign debt (almost 8% of GDP). It includes a "citizen income" of \$1,360 and diverse "benefits" in health, education, lodging for people in a "street situation", and transitory jobs of four months with a pay of \$1,900.

The "beneficiaries" must fulfil certain "counterparts" (conditions) like going to health centres, guaranteeing the participation of children and

adolescents in schools, and carrying out certain community tasks.

So far, nearly 140,000 people have registered, although only 25,000 have been visited to verify their "real state of poverty". Barely 15,000 people have received the subsidy, leading to protest demonstrations and numerous pickets in the poorest districts. So the announcement that PANES would work quickly in accordance with the gravity of the situation is not going to take shape.

Not only because it cannot rely on the necessary infrastructure or experienced personnel but also because the promised "voluntary" work from the ministry has led to a series of conflicts on information, organization and the payment of travel allowance.

The speeches of the Minister of Social Development (Marine Arismendi, Communist Party) repeating time and time again that PANES is about "constructing independent subjects", able to evolve as "full citizens", clash with the reality of a governmental policy that leaves intact the realities of exploitation and super-exploitation that underlie poverty (injustice, to be more specific) and turns into conditions ("counterparts") what should be basic democratic rights: the right to health, education, housing, work.

Until now, the whole focus of the Plan has been on counter-benefits: demands for attendance of the children of the nuclear family at educational centres and the sanitary control of the family. If the construction of "independent subjects", or "citizenship", or the latent emancipatory potential in "civil society" is reduced to this, it can be affirmed that PANES does not amount to much.

The bourgeoisie are not affected by the "social emergency" because the government has decided on a line of minimal conflict with the propertied classes. Otherwise, instead of a program of greater focusing that by definition is directed at a single segment of the impoverished social layers, they would have focused on the wastefulness of resources by the rich,

very much more significant from the point of view of volume and social justice.

For example, it could have made inroads on the gigantic tax evasion of the great companies, on the scandalous tax concessions [16], on the systematic breach of the labour laws on the part of the employer's associations, or on the thousands of million dollars that the smuggling mafias launder in the banking system. Instead of controlling the poor and sanctioning those "beneficiaries" of PANES that do not fulfil the "counterparts", society (and the government) could impose a greater control on the rich and their wealth on the basis that "who has more, pays more".

Legitimacy

Progresismo enjoys an incontestable political and social legitimacy. Unlike the previous governments, it does not criminalize protests and it appears as more responsive to popular demands. It is a government which extends democratic rights and transparency in the exercise of politics or the handling of public funds. So far, in this last aspect, the government of Tabaré Vázquez and the Frente Amplio is a contrast to the Lula government and the PT.

On the one hand the government takes initiatives that guarantee factory occupations as part of the right to strike, the free operation of community radios, or the elimination of repressive regulations in education, and on the other it goes in a frankly reactionary sense (cozying up to the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, campaigns against the legalization of abortion and "illegal" drug consumption and so on.

This authority allows the government to play the card of the "cursed inheritance" left by the neoliberal governments. Inequality, unemployment and poverty, like corruption, clientelism, the "inefficiency" of the State, "cannot be overcome in a single day". They impose a necessary period of "post-neoliberal transition", slow and gradual development of "small

continuous changes". In other words, to cool, delay, or directly to reduce the intensity and volume of the demands.

The approach rests on two pillars; on the one hand, the credit built up by a mass movement that considers the progresista government as an advance of its conquests; on the other hand, the collaborationism of those sectors of left and the trade union movement that, in spite of contradictions and tensions, speak of "our government".

The government has followed a winding path with respect to the detained-disappeared and impunity for state terrorism in the years of the military dictatorship (1973-1985). It is on this question of human rights that the government faces a political crisis.



Tabaré Vázquez (right) with Lula in Brazil.

The intention "to turn the page" (a euphemism that tries to hide the objective of putting a "full stop") meets obstacles, mainly because impunity enjoys an institutional status (Law of Lapsing of the Punitive Intentions of the State, approved by 52% of the electorate on April 16, 1989). This Law of Impunity allowed the military to enjoy an amnesty and to avoid judgments and imprisonments.

The government has reiterated its will "to fulfil" those articles of the Law that the governments of the right failed to fulfil (for example, to investigate and to judge some cases of disappearances). Tabaré Vázquez hopes the military will provide the information to locate the remains of the disappeared, in particular those of the daughter-in-law of the Argentine poet, Juan Gelman. Despite a persistent media operation around a "historical change" in the Armed Forces results have not appeared. Nevertheless, the government does not abandon the idea of an "institutional pardon" to close this "painful chapter of our history".

The relatives of the detained-disappeared and the human rights movements insist on the search for

truth and justice. New revelations (on clandestine burials and death flights) reinforce the mobilizations, especially those called by the Memory and Justice Pledgery. and increase the perception that it is necessary to relaunch a campaign for the cancellation of the Law of Impunity so that the torturers and assassins go to jail.

Popular hegemony?

The municipal elections of May 8 extended the political-electoral primacy of the Encuentro Progresista-Frente Amplio-Nueva Mayoría. [17] The traditional bourgeois parties, Colorado and Nacional, were swept aside, placing them on the defensive.

The balance sheet for progresismo could not be more favourable. From July 7 and for the next five years, it governs 8 of the 19 departments, including the capital of the country, Montevideo, for the fourth consecutive time. Under its administration are more than 70% of the total population, almost 78% of GDP and the regions that concentrate industrial production, trade, agro-export, services and tourism.

Add to this the majority in both chambers of Parliament, the directorates of official banks, public companies, and the bodies of constitutional control. It will also have the majority in the municipal legislatures (Departmental Juntas). The avalanche of the useful vote "to continue changing", offered Tabaré Vázquez an "enormous accolade" that reinforces his legitimacy over any party political affiliation. According to all the polls taken, the approval rating of the president surpasses 70%.

Nevertheless, does this political map of absolute progresista colour imply the consolidation of a new hegemonic block? For many sectors (Frente Amplio leaders, political commentators and journalists) the perception is that the electoral results are a culmination of the "construction of popular hegemony" that the Frente Amplio has accumulated over three decades. The problem is that almost

all of them do not establish the relation that exists between the ideological, political and programmatic regression of the leading layer of progresismo, and the subordination of that "popular hegemony" to the conditions of economic domination and social exploitation that the possessing classes maintain.

The strategic perspective of progresismo is based on three pillars: 1) a broad "social agreement" that guarantees "governability"; 2) the priority of plans for "fighting poverty" as a way of containing and deactivating social radicalization; 3) the "sustainability of the macroeconomic policy" imposed by the international financial institutions.

In fact, it is about continuity with the matrix of the neoliberal program. It is then valid to affirm that the forces interested in maintaining and reproducing the capitalist order have obtained a sizeable victory, extending their hegemony beyond their traditional base, and forcing left political organizations and currents, associated historically with the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle, to kneel down before the programmes of "free trade" while adapting completely to "electoral democracy".

Radical reforms and transformations in the area of politics and the economy are vetoed. It is for that reason, that the importance "of being the government" and having displaced the right from political command of the state, finds its counter-tendency: this government which emerges from a long trajectory of popular struggles and an anti-neoliberal mass movement, ends up applying conservative economic policies that fragment its own social base.

This generates a crisis of left "paradigms", a backward movement in class-consciousness, frustration and loss of belief that "another Uruguay is possible". Those who believe that the political-electoral changes suggest a "historical defeat" for neoliberalism are deluding themselves.

Far from being defeated, the neoliberal hegemony continues,

impregnating political, programs and strategies of the forces (and governments) that in the popular perception, are located on the left, centre-left and progresismo. Examples are the neighbouring models of Lula, Lagos and Kirchner. The alliances, programmatic pacts, and subordination to "democratic governability", are explained by political, ideological, social, cultural changes that the left has undergone in recent years. This would have to be considered when there is talk of the construction of a "popular hegemony" where, nevertheless, notions as essential as accumulation of capital, exploitation, oppression, the class nature of the state or imperialist domination, appear dissolved in the cliché of a "productive country".

Building alternatives

Does the legitimacy of progresismo imply that the workers' and popular movement has delegated its demands to the government? Reality demonstrates that, in an unequal and fragmented way, the social movements continue with their demands and mobilizations. Still, we are in a time of greater ebb tide of social struggle.

Nevertheless, to exert pressure to produce changes in the governmental policies, to face the employers power that continues generating conflicts, dismissals and ignorance of labour rights, means extending and fortifying popular organization, so the resistance maintains a thread of continuity.

The mobilizations of COFE (civil servants), the resumption of the struggle for respecting of the plebiscite on water, the marches against the cellulose plants, the occupations of leather, refrigerators and wine-product factories, the protests against the soldiers and functionaries of the last dictatorship, the demands of the cooperative sector, neighbourhood demonstrations for services, protests of small debtors and so on, combine with a significant growth of urban and rural unionisation in recent years. [18]

There has even been a general work stoppage of three hours, although with the obligatory explanation that "it is not against the government". All this at a time of increasing "interest in politics" and the revitalization of debate and mobilization around the question of human rights.

These "contradictions" make up a process of a final, conflicting, opening of the class struggle. Where the decisive word is with the social resistance, the popular movements, the classist and combative left. A process where demonstrations of criticism and protest also appear in militant sectors of the Frente Amplio (Tupamaros, Communist Party March 26) and some rank and file committees; not only on the economic policy of the government, water and the cellulose plants, but also against the Treaty with the United States and any attempt to assure impunity.

The breach can be deepened, slowly but surely, to the extent that there is a popular movement that demands "solutions". It would be false to think that a government like that of Tabaré Vázquez (inheritor of the socio-economic crisis and the loss of credibility of the bourgeois parties) can maintain in a prolonged form and without tensions "democratic governability".

But the neoliberal economic policies of progresismo can aggravate the social fracture and the weakening of the possibilities of answers on the part of the wage earners, the unemployed, and the impoverished.

Developing an alternative policy to the program of progresismo constitutes a social and political urgency which must go beyond a resistance based in the reduced sectors of the social movements, because what is needed is a broad social convergence to defeat the economic policy of the government and the IMF. Indeed, if that (social and also economic) alternative is not satisfied centrifugal political dynamics will increase weakening the social fabric. That could leave the scene free for the return of the dominant elites and their servants.

This is the basic (strategic) question posed for a radical and anti-capitalist

left that, beyond its tactics of "accumulation of forces" and its horizon of "regrouping", has been incapable of building an alternative and unitary politics, as much to overcome dispersion as to promote action and popular mobilization. Here

is the greater deficit.

The radical left is on the defensive and atomized in a dozen groups with militant volume and diverse social implantation. Some spaces of political

coordination have begun to develop [19] in the unions, the neighbourhoods, the fight against impunity and, mainly, in the movement for the defence of water. That is, in the area of social resistance and the most urgent popular demands.

When the Â« Nee Â» almost won.

15 September 2005, by Andrie Theis

Though the "Yes" finally won with 56.52 per cent of the votes cast, against 43.48 per cent for the "No", the Christian Democrat-Socialist coalition government seriously feared, right up until the result was announced, a possible victory of the "No". Like France and the Netherlands, Luxembourg, in which the "No" campaign from the left progressed.

Whereas the "No" was being credited with 17 per cent at the start of 2005, the energetic groundwork for the "No", as well as the results of the French and Dutch referendums, changed the situation in this little country of 450,000 inhabitants (including 38 per cent of foreign residents).

A social vote

As in France and in the Netherlands, the social polarisation of the vote was clear. Sixty-nine per cent of self-employed people, 60 per cent of those with a university education and 51 per cent of white-collar workers voted "Yes".

The "No" vote came especially from the lower classes and from young people: 67 per cent of manual workers voted "No", as did 62 per cent of those under 25 (Eurobaromètre poll, July 18th, 2005). The geographical map of the vote follows in its main lines income levels and property prices.

The "Yes" vote was particularly massive in the zones where property prices have reached record levels: in

the city of Luxembourg (62 per cent) and in the "fat belt" of rich suburbs that surrounds it (Strassen, Mamer, Hesperange, where the vote was over 60 per cent).

The results of the "Yes" were slightly lower in the rural regions of the East and noticeably lower in the agricultural North of Luxembourg, where they were around 55 per cent. The "No" was in a majority in the urban working-class areas of the South of the country: Esch-sur-Alzette (53 per cent), Differdange (55 per cent), Schiffange (53 per cent), Rumelange (56 per cent), Pétange (53 per cent), Kayl 53 per cent) and Sanem (53 per cent).

These areas, formerly centre of the mining and steel industries, are the historical strongholds of the political and trade union Left. Probably the "No" vote would have been even higher if a substantial part of the social layers most favourable to the "No" had not been excluded from participating in the vote because of their nationality.

The vote of Portuguese (14.5 per cent of the total population) and Italian nationals (4.1 per cent of the total population), who are often manual workers or employed in low-level white-collar jobs, would undoubtedly have increased the score of the "No" vote.

After the vote, political leaders and journalists put forward the supposed xenophobia of the "No" supporters as the key element in explaining the "No" vote. These insinuations, inspired by a

scarcely veiled class hatred (workers=idiots=xenophobes), were disqualified by an opinion poll conducted for the European Union after the referendum: 37 per cent of the "No" electors cited the risk of negative effects of the Constitution on the job situation, 23 per cent criticised the bad economic situation and 22 per cent thought that social Europe was not sufficiently developed.

Only 17 per cent cited opposition to Turkey joining the European Union as a reason for their vote (Eurobaromètre poll of July 18th). Although the social situation in Luxembourg is still more advantageous than in the other countries of the European Union, the country has experienced a noticeable increase in its rate of unemployment. It is today 4.4 per cent according to the official figures and 6 per cent if you count those people temporarily engaged in state-sponsored employment schemes.

Social discontent has also been fuelled by the privatisation and deregulation of a series of public services (post and telecommunications, rail, energy, local government public services) and by threats of relocating industry (Arcelor, Goodyear).

An eventful campaign

The particular social and political features of the "Luxembourg model" made the contest difficult for the supporters of the "No". The culture of political consensus remains strong in

Luxembourg: political life is organised around the indestructible Christian Democratic Party (which has been in power since 1945, except for a five-year interruption), which chooses alternately the Socialists or the Liberals as coalition partners. As for the management of industrial relations, it is done in a "tripartite" framework that brings together the government, the employers and the unions.



Luxembourg Premier Juncker with World Bank president Paul Wolfowitz

All the parties represented in Parliament - Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, Liberals, Greens, and, at the start, the populist Right [20] - approved the European Constitution. The leaderships of the Socialist and Christian Democratic trade union confederations also came out in favour of the Constitution, as did the employers' organisations.

The Prime Minister, Jean-Claude Juncker threw all his capital of popularity into the balance by threatening to resign if there was a victory of the "No". The icing on the cake of the Euro-sanctimonious unanimity was the contribution of Grand Duke Henri and of 98 of the country's 118 mayors.

The "No" was represented by forces that were in a minority on the political scene - De Lenk and the Luxembourg Communist Party [21] - as well as by personalities such as the former MP of De Lenk, André Hoffmann, the president of the Socialist rail workers' union, Nico Wennmacher, and a celebrated local lawyer, Gaston Vogel.

A Committee for the "No" to the Constitution, regrouping individual militants, members of ATTAC Luxembourg, of the student union UNEL and of De Lenk, conducted a massive campaign of fly-posting and distribution of leaflets, without receiving any public financing. Unlike in France, the absence of a political or trade union apparatus, or part of an apparatus, in the "No" camp limited the scope of the action of the

opponents of the Constitution.



The leadership of the Luxembourg Socialist Party was homogenous in its support for the Constitution and the reticence of the militant Socialist rank and file was initially only expressed in private, before becoming public in the last two weeks before the vote.

Part of the middle cadres of the Socialist Party (in the South at least) were for the "No", but blind obedience to the leadership of the party predominated, and this was reflected by the most loyal layers of the Socialist electorate in particularly among older voters. It probably had hardly any effect on young electors.

The OGBL trade union confederation, linked to the Socialist Party, was more in tune with its members and its middle cadres: it finally abandoned the idea of a public campaign in favour of the Constitution. The leaders of the Greens conducted an aggressive campaign in favour of the "Yes", which ran counter to its historic base, which had remained loyal to pacifism and to the left ideals of the party's origins, but without leading to the emergence of a Green current in support of the "No".

In the context of the absence of representation of the "No" in the country's parliamentary institutions, the action of the Committee for the "No" was decisive: seen as a citizens' collective, without hidden partisan designs, it was able to crystallise part of sympathetic public opinion in the "No" vote. After having approved the European Constitution to start with, the populist Right, organised in the ADR, launched a late campaign for the "No", which did not have much real impact, because it was seen as too obviously motivated by opportunist considerations.

Economic nationalism

The omnipresence of the supporters of the "Yes" in the media and the country's institutions, the benefits that

Luxembourg draws as a financial centre, as well as the presence of European institutions (Court of Justice, departments of the European Commission, Audit Office.) led at one point to fears of a pro-Constitution landslide. But the campaign of the "Yes" supporters and the text of the Constitution proved to be the best allies of the opponents of the Constitution.

The "Yes" supporters first of all wanted to have only a governmental campaign, financed by the taxpayers' money, vaunting the merits of the European Union and accessorially of the Constitution. But this campaign was countered by the work on the ground conducted by the Committee for the "No" and also by the importing of the French debate on the Constitution. Social discontent, which exists in Luxembourg, but in a latent state, was thus able to be publicly expressed with a virulence that the institutional parties had not anticipated.

From the moment that popular discontent with European policies became obvious, the supporters of the "Yes" had great difficulty in defending a text which basically proposed continuing and aggravating the policies that had been implemented for twenty years.

As the campaign progressed, the opponents of the Constitution succeeded in dictating the terms of the debate through their closely-argued criticism of the text, putting the supporters of the "Yes" on the defensive, in particular during face-to-face televised debates.

Whereas the "Yes" campaign was showing obvious signs of panic a month before the referendum, in particular by a chaotic debate on whether to maintain or cancel the referendum (three weeks before the date it was due to take place), it was put back on track by the intervention of the Prime Minister, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the entry into the campaign of the apparatus of the Christian Democratic Party in the final two weeks.

The political line of the "Yes" campaign was redefined around a fundamental nationalist axis: national

unity around Prime Minister Juncker, depicted as a victim of the perfidy of Tony Blair during the abortive European Council of June 17th, 2005 on the budget of the European Union, as well as the defence of the fiscal and social advantages of Luxembourg. The question of Luxembourg's banking secrecy, which is usually skirted round, was highlighted: the opponents of the Constitution were daring to demand fiscal harmonisation in Europe!

The slogan of the Christian Democratic Party in the final phase of the campaign clearly revealed this nationalist accent: "The European Constitution: good for Europe, good for Luxembourg". One of the key points of the Christian Democratic propaganda material became the argument (partly true and partly false) that the Constitution would guarantee a weak Europe which would leave to

the national states competence over social and fiscal policy.

The relative success of the nationalist "Yes" campaign was demonstrated by polls conducted before the vote: 68 per cent of the supporters of the "Yes" declared that they had determined their position above all in relation to Luxembourg's place in Europe and 88 per cent of them thought that the "Yes" vote would strengthen Luxembourg's position in Europe. On the other hand, 71 per cent of the supporters of the "No" declared that they had determined their position in relation to the text of the Constitution (ILRES poll of July 7th).

In the context of an all-out campaign by the "Yes" supporters and of the exclusion from the vote of an important part of the lower classes, the 43 per cent for the "No" is seen as

a good result by the Left of the Left in Luxembourg. The referendum campaign in Luxembourg demonstrated, as had already been the case in France and the Netherlands, the gap between on the one hand the establishment and the political party machines and on the other the working class and young people who suffer from neo-liberal policies.

It is now up to the protagonists of the "No" campaign to continue the mobilisation. It goes without saying that this work cannot be confined to the narrow limits of Luxembourg. Contact with other progressive forces at a continental level will be decisive.

The European Social Forum in Greece next year and the stages of the coming mobilisation against the liberal directives of the European Commission will be the first steps in this battle.

For the right to organise and against neo-liberal policies

14 September 2005, by Pierre Rousset

In spite of the end of the military regime a decade ago and the country's entry into the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1996, the right to trade union organisation has never been fully recognised in South Korea. Trade unionists are regularly sued for "obstruction of business".

Filling for damage compensation and provisional seizure of wages and property because of union activities continue: as of January 2004, they amounted to 110 million US dollars across 41 workplaces! Trade union leaders are thrown in prison and the police harass the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), the confederation that emerged from the anti-dictatorial struggles of the 1980s. 121 workers were indicted in 2004.



In several sectors, free trade union organisation by workers remains forbidden or impeded. This is the case with government employees and migrants, among whom struggles have been developing for months, in the face of severe repression.

Repression of the KGEU

In November 2004, the KCTU confederation and the KGEU (Korean Government Employees' Union) organised a general strike in opposition to the Bill on the Public Officials' Trade Union Act, a law concerning government employees

and containing anti-trade union clauses. Starting on November 9th, arrest warrants were issued for Ahn Byeong-Soon, the general secretary of the KGEU, and Kim Young-Gil, its president. Police were permanently stationed around the KCTU's headquarters in Seoul, to arrest the leaders of the Government Employees' Union and block its activities.

The general secretary of the KGEU was arrested on March 17th, 2005 and released on April 28th, after being detained for 44 days. He was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment, the sentence being suspended for a probationary period of two years. As for the president of the KGEU, Kim Young-Gil, he was finally arrested on April 8th, 2005, after being hunted for 150 days. He was released on June 24th, after 75 days' detention, and condemned to

one year's imprisonment, also suspended for two probationary years.

The repression of the KGEU did not only involve the arrest of its leaders and did not stop when they were freed. On June 21st and 22nd, the union organised several rallies, demanding that the government put a stop to the repression and engage in negotiations with its branch in Wonju City in the province of Gangwon.

On the second day of the mobilisation, 126 members of the KGEU were jailed, and released on June 24th. Although the rally had been legally announced, anti-riot police attacked the demonstrators, ejecting them violently, one by one, from the demonstration.

Two women fainted and one of them was left for 40 minutes without medical attention, in spite of repeated requests by her colleagues. A man who had had a back operation was manhandled, although he had informed the police of his condition. As a result he had to have six weeks of medical treatment.

The KCTU denounces the government's "reforming" claims, which are contained in the "guidelines" on the status of government employees. It points out that the KGEU was never consulted on proposed new laws concerning them and that 1,400 employees of government departments were dismissed or penalised after the adoption of new legislation in December 2004, because they were fighting for their rights [22]

Repression of the MTU

The fight for the right of migrants to organise is particularly hard, because it is more difficult to popularise than the government employees' struggle. The Migrant Workers' Trade Union (MTU), which also belongs to the KCTU, was formed on April 24th, 2005. It is fighting for the legalisation of non-documented workers and for the labour rights on the shopfloor, focusing on legalization of non-registered migrant workers.

It is calling for international solidarity and proposes to exchange experiences and information about how the defence of immigrants is conducted in different countries.

The MTU came from the regroupment of several trade union branches and immigrants' associations in Seoul, Incheon and Kyongido and from these workers' readiness to fight for their rights. Already in 2001, the "migrant" branch of the Equality Trade Union Migrant Branch (ETUMB) had been set up to combat the discrimination and the abuses that foreigners were victims of at work, as well as the immigration policy of the South Korean government.

The ETUMB organised in 2001 a 77-day long sit-in demonstration in front of the Myongdeung Cathedral in Seoul. Two leaders of the union went on hunger strike in the Hwa Sung immigration detention centre, after they had been arrested for their activities. In 2002, more than a thousand immigrant workers took part in a rally against the government's policy.

On July 21st, 2003, the South Korean government adopted a new law known as the Employment Permit System (EPS). This law, which came into force in August 2004, puts migrant workers at the mercy of the bosses; it has been denounced as a new system of slavery. The ETUMB organised a new sit-in, which this time lasted for more than a year: from November 15th 2003 to November 28th, 2004!

"Through these actions, notes the KCTU, migrant workers who were 'invisible and voiceless' were finally able to have their issues to the forefront of South Korean society. More importantly, it led to the formation of the Migrant Trade Union, an independent union organized and lead by migrant workers". [23]

The South Korean government has always refused to recognise immigrant organisations. In 2003, Sam Thapa, one of the main organisers of the ETUMB and of the Myongdeung sit-in, was kidnapped in broad daylight by the Immigration Department and subsequently deported. The government likewise refuses to accord

any kind of recognition to the MTU. It has publicly affirmed that this union could not benefit from three fundamental rights at work: the right to organise, the right to strike and the right to collective bargaining.

The police have filmed trade union militants in order to put them on file and harass them. On May 14th, 2005, Anwar Hossein, the president of the MTU, was brutally arrested by more than thirty police officers as he was going home. With head and hand injuries, he was incarcerated in the Chungjoo detention centre (south of Seoul). The KCTU has launched an international campaign in defence of the MTU, of Anwar Hossein and of the around 400,000 migrant workers in South Korea.

Neo-liberal reforms

The South Korean presidency of Roh Moo-hyun is reputed to be "reformist". It has engaged in a dialogue with North Korea (a very important question for the Korean Left). It is under attack from the conservative parties, heirs of the period of military dictatorship. It has drawn in many former militants, students and trade unionists, as well as representatives of moderate NGOs. But the period is nevertheless one of the radical implementation of neo-liberal policies.

To impose these counter-reforms, fighting trade unionism has to be muzzled and investors guaranteed social peace. It is in this framework that labour legislation is being "reformed" and that the Korean government promotes its so-called "Roadmap", its "Improvement of Industrial Relations" and other bills.

According to the KCTU, "The most serious problem of all is the abrupt flexibilization of the labour market and the problems resulting from it. During the last few years, 56% of the workforce has been turned into irregular workers, such as fixed-term, short-term, dispatched, contract or specially employed workers". [24]

What attitude should be taken towards such a government? The Federation of

Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), the only confederation that was recognised at the time of the military dictatorship, has consistently participated in the "tripartite" dialogue with the government and the employers. In the KCTU itself there are important differences on this question and its national leadership has more than once been modified.

As an indication of the tensions that exist, the KCTU thus held three congress sessions in two months, at the end of 2004 and the beginning of 2005. However on July 14th this year, during a meeting of its Central Executive Committee, it decided to withdraw from various committees affiliated to the Ministry of Labour in which it had participated and to demand the resignation of the minister, Kim Dae-Hwan. This decision was taken in order to exert pressure on the government so that it would abandon its neo-liberal policies [25]. Joint protest actions have also been led by the presidents of the KCTU and the FKTU, and the two labour centres have issued common press statements.

In South Korea, as in many other countries, the government of Roh Moo-hyun has launched a frontal attack around the question "irregular" workers, of casual, temporary and part-time work. It announced in September 2004 a series of measures, in particular extending the length of temporary work from two to three years and leaving employers almost total liberty concerning casual work.

The workers concerned have engaged very hard battles, often lasting several months, against these projected laws. Three trade union leaders from this sector "occupied" the top of a giant crane opposite the Parliament. They were arrested after a week.

The KCTU points out that the discrimination exercised against "irregulars" weighs particularly heavily on the shoulders of women. In this sector, a man earns on average only 57 per cent of the salary of a "regular" worker, but this percentage drops to 43 per cent for women. Which, as the KCTU stresses, reinforces the need to organise these "irregular" women workers much

more than is the case today.

The strong reaction provoked by these draft laws on irregular work has been such that the government has had to abandon the idea of having them adopted. But it is obviously only being put off till later. Today the KCTU has to face a real political and media campaign of denigration. The aim is to weaken fighting trade unionism in order to clear the way for the pursuit of neo-liberal measures.

Against the WTO

A confrontation is also building up in relation to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). On July 27th, on the occasion of the meeting of its General Council, various Korean organisations announced the setting up of "People's Action Against Neo-liberal Globalisation". The aim is to widen the front of resistance to the WTO, to free trade agreements and other measures of liberalisation, and to give more unity to all the initiatives that are taken in an uncoordinated way on these questions.

Along with the KCTU, the coalition involves in particular the Korean People's Action against FTA and WTO (KoPA), the Korean Peasants' League (KPL), Korean People's Solidarity (KPS), the KGEU federation and many other mass and activist organizations, sectoral coalitions.

The central slogan is "No to the WTO! Stop the Doha Development Agenda Negotiation". And the coming main international rendezvous is the conference of the World Trade Organisation next November in Hong Kong: Korean militants will be there in strength to unite their forces with those of very many Asian and international movements.

APPENDICES

1) Some background on the KCTU

The KCTU was officially formed on November 11th 1995, with 862 unions and 418,000 members. But its historic and symbolic roots go back 25 years earlier, to the beginning of a very hard struggle to organise the working class

in South Korea under a regime of military dictatorship. On November 13th, 1970 Chun Tae-il, a textile worker, committed suicide by setting fire to himself, in protest against the banning of independent trade unionism.

Then, through their stubborn struggle, the women workers of the light export industry established the first foundations of the modern trade union movement. In the 1980s heavy industry developed. In 1987 it was the scene of a vast workers' mobilisation whose impact was very profound. Faced with repression, the militant trade unions began to coordinate, overcoming divisions between different industries and provinces.

The struggles of the working class and the students contributed largely to bringing an end to the military dictatorship in the 1990s. In 1996, South Korea was admitted to the OECD (a). On December 26th that year, the KCTU began a month-long general strike, which "catapulted it into the centre stage of Korean society and politics", and "paved the way for the powerful entry of workers into national life after more than thirty years of exclusion" (b).

a) OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, which regroups the industrialised countries.

b) "The KCTU", <<http://kctu.org>>

2) For further information

The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) publishes an electronic bulletin in English, KCTU Monthly News. Its Internet site also provides information in English. To find out more, visit the site or contact:

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The split in the AFL-CIO

13 September 2005, by Joshua DeVries

Fallout from the late July departure of three of the AFL-CIO's largest unions - Service Employees (SEIU), Teamsters (IBT), and United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) - has yet to be sorted out. The new Change to Win Coalition (CTW) and the AFL-CIO continue to react and counter-react to each other's thrusts and parries.



Mainstream AFL-CIO leaders, including President John Sweeney (left)

But what is clear is that the drama of the split has generated a good deal more focus, attention, and (more) talk about the depth of the crisis of U.S. unions than the so-called Great Debate about strategy and structure mounted over the last year. Labor activists' and rank-and-file members' reactions range from concern or anger about the split's dangers, to a hope that finally something is going to shake up labor's out-of-touch leadership, to a simple shrug of the shoulders.

Active members report a great deal of buzz about the split, even among members who are not usually interested in union affairs. Dan Campbell, Teamsters Local 200 representative in Milwaukee and a member of Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), says, "The split has generated more talk about labor than any other in recent memory. You know the Change to Win Coalition has certainly raised right issues. I'm just not sure [the split] was the right response."

SHAKE UP?

Though SEIU President Andy Stern defended the need to split from a federation he described as "pale, male, and stale," many members and observers are confused about what differences exist between the two sides. Newly-adopted programs about mergers, leadership diversity, political mobilization, and industry-wide bargaining/organizing strategies sound virtually the same from both sides.

Bob McNattin, a ready-mix concrete driver in Minnesota and Teamsters Local 615 member, points out the irony of the Teamsters acting as a force for change in the labor movement. He compares CTW's actions to the kind of dissent and forced accountability that reform groups like TDU force on their unions.

"They are doing what we always do—hold their feet to the fire," says McNattin. "It will make for an interesting time for us in TDU this year. [The International] has always branded us as the 'dissidents' and 'splitters.' Now what are they going to call us?"

Leaders on both sides are eager to portray themselves as the voice for change and reform.

In his acceptance speech for his (uncontested) nomination as AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer, Richard Trumka evoked his old ties to the union reform efforts of the Miners for Democracy caucus and its murdered leader Jock Yablonski, who, he said, "died fighting for...a more democratic union."

But questions remain about how this talk will translate to action. Will union

leaders be open to local members' efforts to democratize and revitalize their unions? Will new programs build enough power and leverage to fight concessions? How serious are leaders about pushing the pace and scale of change?

PARTNERSHIP

Recent remarks made by CTW and AFL-CIO leaders add to the confusion by emphasizing the need for both aggressive new organizing and greater cooperation between unions and employers. In a post-split interview with CNBC, Stern remarked that, "we need to build a new, dynamic, modern, flexible, innovative labor movement that can be good partners with our employer and we started down that road last week [with the split]."

When asked about the difference between CTW and the AFL-CIO Stern replied: "Our labor movement was built around an industrial economy back in the 1930s. It was sort of a class struggle kind of unionism, but workers in today's economy are not looking for unions to cause problems; they're looking for them to solve them."

AFL-CIO's Organizing Director Stewart Acuff zigged and zagged in the same interview. While criticizing CTW for taking a more cooperative tack with Republicans, Acuff went on to praise labor-management cooperation at Southwest Airlines as an example of how unions can have more peaceful relations with an employer. According to Acuff, problems in the airline industry (which is currently wracked with strife over how to mount an effective fight over

concessions) “[have] a lot more to do with the cost of fuel than it does [with the] relationship between the employers and the employees.”

ONE PROGRAM, TWO FEDERATIONS?

Weeks before the convention, the AFL-CIO Executive Council put forth proposals similar to the core principles floated by CTW, in an effort to stave off the split. Many of these were voted up, with little amendment, on the convention floor, despite the absence of many representatives from CTW unions.

CTW spokespeople continued to emphasize the differences, claiming that the AFL-CIO’s new planks were merely lip service or “too little, too late.” One SEIU local staff person commented more candidly that “it was more like [CTW was] moving the goal posts each time [the AFL-CIO] got close.”

One amendment created new bodies, Industry Coordinating Committees (ICC), to address the lack of coordination and unity between unions in particular industries (or at a single large employer or in an occupation).



Split leaders James Hoffa Jr (front) leader of the Teamsters and Mike Stern

The ICC’s will be charged with building joint bargaining and organizing strategies across multiple unions in an industry-supposedly regardless of national affiliations. Under the plan, unions that undercut other unions in the industry with “substandard contracts” will be penalized.

Stern had called the freefall of the heavily unionized airline industry the “prime exhibit” for the lack of a strategically oriented labor movement. He contended that an industry divided among crafts and subdivided among a dozen unions, without a coordinated

strategy to deal with employers, is a major factor in the hundreds of millions of dollars of union concessions made since 2001.

Joe Uehlein, a former staffer for the AFL-CIO Strategic Approaches Committee, agrees that a breakdown in industrial focus and unity has factored into labor’s decline. Uehlein believes that the ICC’s represent “a serious effort.”

Other planks lifted from the CTW playbook (if tweaked) were resolutions and amendments for industry-wide strategies, strategic voluntary union mergers, joint organizing initiatives, and a new political program. The political program would move away from bi-annual “get out the vote” and candidate support (in the main for Democrats) to a year-round mobilization effort focused more on legislation.

FLASHPOINTS

Many leaders and activists express concern that the split will cripple Central Labor Councils (CLC), state federations, and other local and regional bodies.

While some CLCs and state federations do little more than mobilize union members around political campaigns, some activists worry that the split will undermine the coordinating role that these bodies can play around local strikes and workplace campaigns.

SEIU, the Teamsters, and the UFCW attempted to stay in these local bodies after the split, only to have the AFL-CIO Executive Council forbid CLCs and state feds from allowing the participation of disaffiliated unions.

This ban raised the hackles of many local leaders. Some convention delegates stated that they would defy the ban by setting up bodies that would allow the full participation of all local unions, regardless of affiliation.

The AFL-CIO Executive Council reversed its position in early August. Its new proposal allowed now-independent local unions to affiliate with CLCs, which would issue special

“solidarity charters.”

The local would then have to pay dues plus a 10 percent “solidarity bonus” to help offset the cost of services provided by the national AFL-CIO. This money would go into the special fund set up at the convention to help local bodies hurt by the split.

One of the terms of the proposal was that the reaffiliated locals would have to pledge to work to reaffiliate their internationals with the AFL-CIO. This provoked a sharp response from CTW Chair Anna Burger, who stated that the proposal “uses the rhetoric of unity, but is designed to provoke unnecessary division.”

Since that rejection, a number of CLC leaders are now shifting their anger back to CTW. Jeff Crosby, president of the North Shore Central Labor Council in Massachusetts, said that “Burger’s tone was a slap in the face to central labor council leaders wanting to keep this whole thing together. If this continues it will be more and more difficult to keep CLCs together.”

Another fear is that the split will lead to wide-scale raiding across the new divide. few instances have already become flashpoints, fueling the anger of leaders on both sides.

A dispute around the United Domestic Workers, an AFSCME affiliate, stoked conflict as early as the convention itself (see page 8). An AFSCME delegate received a standing ovation by angrily responding to a letter from Andy Stern that stated SEIU no longer was bound by the anti-raiding rules of the federation.

Reformers in the Teamsters also point to the danger sign contained in a directive from the IBT International. The memo discourages locals from raiding, yet sets forward a procedure for locals to raid if a union in a particular industry has a “substandard contract.”

UNITY FROM BELOW

While the rift at the top widens, awareness of the need to strengthen

joint activity and solidarity seems to be growing at the grassroots. Organizations and campaigns that pull members in across union lines may play a greater role in keeping linkages alive.

Sensing the danger of a divided federation, Jobs with Justice issued a national statement before the split: “[JWJ] will continue to commit to building power for workers and communities. We will continue to work with any and all organizations that support these principles.”

This article was originally posted at [Labor Notes](#)

APPENDIX

BEHIND THE SPLIT IN THE AFL-CIO

Chis Kutalik

Behind the war of personalities and the big ideas of the dueling AFL-CIO and Change to Win (CTW) leaders, a story emerges that portrays the split as a play for power as much as it was about differences between the two camps. The keys to the split were dues rebates and presidential succession. In an internal memo to the staff of the AFL-CIO, Robert Welsh, executive assistant to AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, shines light on the backroom conversations that were happening in the leadup to the split. While Welsh may have had political reasons to circulate the memo, it provides a glimpse into the high-level pre-split negotiations.

Welsh wrote that there was “little or

no difference in the final positions” between AFL-CIO and CTW leaders, except for two sticking points. The first was Teamsters President James Hoffa’s insistence that the per capita dues paid by the Teamsters (IBT) to the AFL-CIO be cut by no less than half.

NEW PRESIDENT

The second was about who would succeed Sweeney. Many do not expect Sweeney, who is 71, to finish the full term he was re-elected to, and say that the real fight was over his successor.

Steelworkers President Leo Gerard told the Cleveland Plain Dealer that when the CTW wanted a 50 percent dues rebate, Sweeney supporters countered with an offer of 25 percent. Gerard said that the CTW was “willing to take a smaller rebate if they could pick Sweeney’s successor.”

According to Joe Szczesny, who writes about labor for the Daily Oakland Press, CTW leaders had agreed to back Sweeney’s re-election before the convention, but balked at allowing his successor to be chosen by the AFL-CIO Executive Council. CTW leaders saw this as a maneuver to ensure that Richard Trumka, the current AFLCIO secretary-treasurer, would become the next president. CTW argued for a weighted vote that would give larger unions a greater say.

NO RANK-AND-FILE INPUT

Members in unions on both sides have raised questions about how top leaders handled decision-making around the split. Many key decisions were made with little to no consultation with members.

“Something had to be done to shake up this thing we call the labor

movement,” said Scott Schroeder, a rank-and-file member of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 588 in California. “Not one time did reps come into stores telling members of the plan to exit the AFL-CIO—no letters, nada.

“Most members had no clue any of this was even happening until they received their after-the-fact letters from [Local President] Jacques Loveall.”

In the pages of their newsletter, Teamster Leader, IBT officials stated that their decision to withdraw from the AFL-CIO “was reached as a matter of principle, after a lengthy and thoughtful process.” However, reformers are raising sharp questions about how long and how thoughtful this process was.

LENGTHY PROCESS?

Indeed, the Leader itself noted that on the day of the split, the IBT Executive Board met at 11 a.m to approve Hoffa’s motion to disaffiliate. At 11:45 Hoffa announced the disaffiliation to IBT delegates, and he was at the CTW’s press conference announcing the split by 1 p.m.

Sandy Pope, president of Teamsters Local 805 in Long Island, New York, circulated an open letter calling on the board to reverse its decision until there was a “broader discussion.” Pope wrote that: “The AFL-CIO is not just a national body. Many [IBT] locals and joint councils are affiliated with state and local labor councils. Any move that could seriously jeopardize the cooperative relationships needed to conduct strike support, coordinated bargaining, and political action deserves consideration by a wide range of local officers and concerned members.”

A Revolution Betrayed

10 September 2005, by Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski

"A revolution can be led to defeat in two ways - by being crushed or by being betrayed. The tragedy of the Polish Revolution of 1980-81 is that it lost twice over. It was first of all crushed, then betrayed. It was betrayed by those who among today's political elites, claim as theirs August 1980 and their 'genealogy of solidarity'. By restoring capitalism they have betrayed the social interests of which this revolution was the expression and they have turned their backs on all these aspirations." That is what I wrote in **Robotnik ĄlĄski** on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of August 1980 [26].

"Today, in the context of a general falsification of the nature and the history of August and of the events of the sixteen months that followed, they are trying to present it as a "national anti-communist élan" with which it has nothing in common. At the same time they are effacing all the traces that it can (fortunately many of them cannot be effaced), that would indicate that what happened was a typical and classical proletarian revolution. For more than 150 years, in other words since the establishment of capitalist domination, such revolutions have occurred from time to time across the world, made by workers in the name of the defence of their rights, their dignity and the interests of their social class.



Lech Walesa addresses Gdansk shipyard workers 1982

"The fact that these revolutions were aimed against capitalism, whereas the Polish Revolution of 1980-81 was directed against a regime that pretended to be socialist does not change anything. So-called "really existing socialism" appeared as a result of a double process - on the one hand the overthrow of capitalism and on the other hand the monopolisation of political and economic power, which should have belonged to the

working class, by the parasitical bureaucratic layer.

"It dominated this class and lived by exploiting its labour, although - unlike in the capitalist system - the relations of exploitation no longer had social roots in the relations of production." [27]

There was a chance to overthrow the bureaucratic dictatorship, while preserving the nationalised and planned economy, and on this basis to establish working-class power and start to build a socialism of the workers, self-managing and democratic. That is the truth that they are trying to hide today. Why then is NSZZ Solidarność today identified with restoration of capitalism, which started ten years after August 1980 and which has brought the working class increased and brutal exploitation, corresponding once again to the relations of production, an absolute dictatorship of capital, under which it is even possible to not pay workers for the work they have done, the loss of all social conquests, mass unemployment and pauperisation, the perspective of emigrating in search of work and bread?

Solidarność transformed

No one asks whether there is a continuity between the Solidarność that appeared following August 1980 and the Solidarność of today. However there is nothing obvious about that. There is a form of continuity, but also a glaring discontinuity. The essential question is, what is dominant? And the answer is discontinuity. That is why the Solidarność of today on the one hand lays claim to its genealogy and on the other is totally incapable of presenting the real history of the Solidarność of 1980-81, and falsifies this history.

That is why the commemorative ceremonies of the 25th anniversary of August, which the media are pushing

so hard, are taking place with so few participants, why the overwhelming majority of the militants of Solidarność of that period are not taking part in them and why the overwhelming majority of the working class is indifferent to them. That is why those trade unionists and the solidarity committees with Solidarność in Western Europe, who during the state of siege [28] came to help it, risking their own security, driven by class and internationalist, and not anti-communist, motives, are not taking part.

Destroyed by the state of siege, Solidarność was never able to be reborn as a mass movement of working-class autonomy and workers' democracy. What happened to it is not difficult to explain. During an impetuous rise of workers' struggles such a movement can develop by itself for a certain time. But to survive after defeats and to be capable of rebuilding itself - without even speaking of the possibility of a decisive victory, which can only be the establishment of workers' power - it absolutely needs a party, capable of preserving its political gains and of guaranteeing its class independence and able to arm it with a corresponding programme and an effective fighting strategy.

The outline of such a programme - of an anti-bureaucratic revolution, working-class and based on democracy and workers' councils - appeared in Poland 15 years before August. I am thinking of the **Open Letter to the Party** written by Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski [29].

After March 1968 [30] the opposition grouped around them, and the authors themselves, discreetly abandoned this programme, and with it Marxism.

The programme of the "Open Letter" was already foreign to the militants of the KOR [31] when they gained influence among workers. In the autumn of 1980 Kuron, questioned on Marxism, settled the matter by affirming that it was "a philosophy of

the social movement of the 19th century, which has been outdated for a long time". At the end of his life, attacking the consequences of the restoration of capitalism, in which he had largely participated, he again asserted that he was a Marxist. In the recesses of the programmatic commission at the First Congress of Solidarność, Kuron called me "someone nałzve, who still believes the stupidities that Karol and I wrote in the Open Letter."

If we look at the "democratic opposition" from a historical perspective, we are struck by its instrumental attitude towards the working class, which sharply recalls that of Pilsudski [32] and his supporters. By defending in the Polish Socialist Party the idea that "the independence of Poland is for the working class", Kazimierz Kules-Krauz warned against those who in reality considered that "the working class is the instrument of independence".

These people wanted to use the working class as a striking force in order to open the way to the construction of a bourgeois state. That is the origin of the famous remark of the Pilsudkiites about the red tram. "The shadows of famous ancestors", called on by Adam Michnik, were a precedent that served as an inspiration [33].

Experts in capitalism

The programme abandoned by Kuron and by the oppositional milieu grouped around him was not taken up again by any political organisation or group. This is a paradox: in general major class struggles have a reviving programmatic and political influence on left circles. They lead to the development of existing revolutionary organisations, to the birth of such organisations where they do not yet exist, to the radicalisation of the left wings of reformist parties. December [34] was such a shock that although Edward Gierek, the new leader of the PUWP, succeeded in lowering the tension - only relatively, as the Lodz strike demonstrated - it

should have at least led to the emergence of a radical left opposition, if not the nucleus of a revolutionary party.

But nothing like that happened. It was the same after June 1976, which should have been interpreted as a forewarning of a great storm. Even worse, August 1980 did not lead to a change in this respect.

It is true that the left opposition was subjected to intensive control by the political police and to repression. The trial of Kuron and Modzelewski and the "trial of the three Trotskyists", like the repression of the supporters of the Sino-Albanian schism during the 1960s, clearly demonstrated that.

That lasted until the end, as is shown by a report that was made by the (Polish) Ministry of the Interior in 1987, which was preserved in the archives of the (East German) STASI. It indicates that the means and the forces used to pursue the Trotskyists were out of all proportion to their number and their influence and that even a conference of the special services of the "fraternal countries" held in Moscow had been devoted to them.

But there was something else much more important. It was that the "Marxist-Leninist ideology" of the regime, identified then by almost everyone in Poland with Marxism, was totally void of class content. It could not serve to elaborate a programme of immediate or transitional demands that could be used by a real movement of working-class autonomy, nor to help work out its tactics and strategy. It was therefore necessary to break with this ideology and rediscover Marxism - as a theory of the conditions, the forms and the consequences of the class struggle and as a political programme.

March 1968 had had a very important effect in the long term, which is not generally noticed. During the whole post-war period, basing itself on the agreement between Piasecki and General Sierov [35], the nationalist-clerical Right had disposed of a legal institutional and organisational base.

Moczar's campaign in March 1968

had allowed it to become active and to extend its influence. In the ideological climate created at that time, this Right had also grown in the ranks of the opposition, often moreover maintaining numerous links with its representatives on the side of the regime.

The new profound crisis of "really existing socialism" in 1980 had reinforced the restorationist tendencies within the bureaucracy, in particular its economic wing, and among a section of the intelligentsia. Numerous restorationist elements among the intellectuals oscillated between the bureaucracy and Solidarność, advising both of them to adopt market-oriented economic reforms. They were influential on the level of the national leadership - and in particular in its apparatus and its agencies - which the workers had much more difficulty in democratically controlling than they did with workplace commissions or regional leaderships. At this level the advisers and the experts gravely abused their functions in order to determine the policy of Solidarność.

Democracy stifled

The impetuous development of independent working-class self-organisation and activity, the progressive accumulation of experiences in the domains of workers' democracy and of the class struggle, the development of consciousness, the growing aspirations for workers' control of enterprises, for workers' self-management and democratic planning - that was one side of the coin. The other side, which as time went by threatened more and more to lead to an impasse, was the lack of a political party of the working class.

This side could not remain a vacuum and by the force of events the vacuum was filled by political currents that represented other social interests. During the national congress there was a subterranean struggle, which rarely and briefly broke into the open, between the current of the KOR, the nationalist Right and the elements who were orienting in function of their class consciousness or even simply

their class instinct, much more numerous but atomised; between the radical current of the self-management movement in the workplaces and those elements who were not only conciliators towards the bureaucracy, but who also represented more or less crystallised restorationist tendencies, even though they were masked; between the partisans and the opponents of workers' democracy, of independence from the Catholic Church, of the struggle for workers' power.

In general, on the essential questions, the "classist" tendency carried the day. But when the questions passed from the hands of an assembly as democratic as the congress of delegates was, to the national apparatus, the worst was to be feared. Undoubtedly the sharpest fight had been conducted during this congress over the laws that had just been adopted by the Diet on self-management of enterprises and on state enterprises. Disavowing the compromise that had been concluded behind its back by Lech Walesa with the Diet, the congress voted that it "decided to submit to a referendum in the workplaces the passages in the two laws that went most flagrantly against the union's position and consequently threatened self-management."

The same congress specified that the union "in the struggle for workers'

self-management and socialised enterprises will continue to act in accord with the wishes of the workers" and called for the "creation of genuine workers' councils according to the principles and in accord with the position of the union" and not with the above-mentioned laws. After the vote, which the majority of delegates had applauded, Jacek Merkel, one of the principal Walesaites in the Presidium of the National Council (later to be one of the liberal leaders of Gdansk) said to me: "You've won, so what? After the congress we'll bury the referendum in any case." Which was done, in defence of the compromise.

In spite of the vote by the congress, it was necessary to pursue the internal struggle on this question. If it had not been for the state of siege, there was that a strong probability that we would have won the day, because in Solidarność it was not easy to go against the workers of the big enterprises. Those who had their support could easily win, including against Walesa.

Against the interests of the workers

When the state of siege crushed the mass movement of the workers, everything changed. Very quickly their

wishes stopped being taken into account, ceased to be decisive. Solidarność underwent a fundamental metamorphosis. A mass organisation gave way to small groups and structures, which to a large extent allowed themselves to be driven back on the churches and which were invaded by right-wing political groups, conservatives, clerical-nationalists and liberals. Their common programme was anti-communism, the alliance with imperialism and the restoration of capitalism.

Solidarność, which was rebuilt on such bases, lost its class independence. Entangled in interests hostile to those of the workers, it could only simulate a defence of them, all the while selling them out, playing in this way the shameful role of a trade union cover for the capitalist and neo-liberal transformation. So there is nothing surprising about the fact that it has ceased to be the organisation of the majority of the working class and that it only counts in its ranks a small minority.

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