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Towards a new, liberating party of the Left

26 October 2005, by **Manuel Kellner**

The big parties were the big losers in the federal elections of September 18th, 2005. Compared to 2002, the Christian-conservative CDU/CSU, with 35.2 per cent, lost 3.3 per cent. The SPD dropped by 4.3 per cent and finished with 34.3 per cent - more than had been anticipated, because the ferociously neo-liberal line of Angela Merkel, the CDU/CSU candidate for Chancellor, led to a loss of votes to the advantage not only of the SPD, but also of the original advocates of unbridled neo-liberalism, the liberals of the FDP, who finished spectacularly with 9.8 per cent. The Greens marked time with 8.1 per cent of the vote. The right-wing extremists made progress, but didn't manage a breakthrough. The big winner, in reality, was the Left Party, supported by the WASG, with 8.7 per cent of the vote, which represents more than double the vote obtained by the PDS, which got 4 per cent in 2002, thus failing to pass the 5 per cent barrier, thereby reducing its presence in the Bundestag to two MPs from Berlin who had been directly elected in their constituencies.



Gregor Gysi, Ulla L  tzner, Oskar Lafontaine

In the old regions of the West, the Left Party - the Left, for short - nearly got over the 5 per cent barrier, obtaining

4.9 per cent (the small Saar region can be declared "eastern", since the Left Party won more than 18 per cent of the vote there!). That is very important and it is linked to the new factor, to the WASG and to the unitary dynamic that generated a lot of hope among the mass of workers and of those who are relegated to the fringes of society. Because previously, in the West, the forces of the Left didn't manage much more than one per cent of the vote. It was in May 2005, in the North Rhine-Westphalia region, that the WASG demonstrated the potential that was there by winning 2.2 per cent of the vote, "a second" after it had been formed, whereas the PDS stood alone at the same election and finished with 0.9 per cent of the vote.

In absolute figures, nearly 4 million people voted for the Left Party, 960,000 of whom had still voted for the SPD in 2002. The Left Party furthermore won over 390,000 voters who had abstained in 2002, 280,000 who had voted CDU/CSU, 220,000 from the Greens and 90,000 from the liberals of the FDP. All of that is as significant as the sociological aspect, because the Left Party's electors are especially workers, those in work and those without. To complete the picture we have to add that the SPD lost 640,000 to the Christian conservatives, while the latter lost 1,250,000 to the FDP! Moreover, non-participation in elections also increased: the CDU lost 740,000 votes

to the "party" of the non-electors, and the SPD a bit more than half a million.

It goes without saying that the class struggle wing of trade unionists acclaimed the victory of the Left Party. But it also has to be said that the official leaderships of the DGB also welcomed it, while pointing out that there was a "left majority" of 51 per cent in the Bundestag against the CDU/CSU and the FDP, therefore against the preferred political forces of the employers' associations. There is the beginning of an important change in the unions: social-democratic hegemony over them is now seriously breached. But if there is a "left majority" in the Bundestag - which is rather doubtful - there will not in any case be a left policy, but very probably a "black-red" (CDU/CSU-SPD) Grand Coalition, with the SPD as junior partner, which will continue more than ever the neo-liberal policies of the Schr  der government. This will accentuate political differentiation within the unions and very probably lead to new waves of social mobilisations and political dissidence.

It is clear that the result of the federal elections of September 18th, 2005 in Germany marks a significant turning point in the political situation in Germany. Fifty-one per cent of the electorate voted to the left of the Christian conservatives and the liberals, which is not the expression of

a clear rejection of neo-liberalism, but is nonetheless a rejection of anti-social austerity policies that were even more brutal than those of the defunct coalition of the SPD and the Greens. The representatives of capital who had campaigned for a "black-yellow" (CDU/CSU-FDP) government were clearly very disappointed after these elections.

Without the good results of the Left Party, it would not have been possible to defeat the black-yellow threat. For the first time in decades, there is now a chance to build a political force in the West and the East of the country which could break social-democratic hegemony in the trade union movement and re-conquer the political independence of the working class. That is giving considerable encouragement to the resistance to neo-liberal policies, to the mobilisations against the increasingly severe attacks on social gains and against militarist and imperialist adventures. One of the consequences will very probably be to make it possible to re-launch, among the broad masses, the debate on the socialist alternative to the destructive and inhuman capitalist mode of production. That is why the ISL has decided to be part and parcel of this process.

But from the beginning, there is a danger of missing the chance by organising a rapid fusion between the WASG and the Left Party, orchestrated from on high. The substantial apparatus of the ex-PDS, by co-opting elements chosen from the leading layer of the WASG, while relying on the support of the parliamentary group, which is on the one hand clearly dominated by members of the Left Party and on the other largely dominated by MPs without clear anti-capitalist convictions, would like to limit the personnel which is going to elaborate the programme, the statutes and the profile of the new party to a narrow leading layer. That can only lead to a simple addition of the members of the Left Party (70,000) and of the WASG (15,000) under the tutelage of a leadership which will more or less rapidly take the road of adaptation.

The ISL, on the contrary, is proposing,

together with a certain number of structures and members of the WASG, and also of the Left Party, to launch a broad movement for the formation of a new left party, calling on everyone to take part in open forums to discuss the programmatic and organisational bases, without excluding anyone, and especially without excluding the anti-capitalist and Marxist currents and all those who fear a fresh disappointment, which would be the result of a triumph of substitutionism and of adaptation to the mechanisms and the consensus of established politics.

The first problem to be discussed is the necessity of freeing ourselves from any co-responsibility for the neo-liberal policies of social democracy. At a federal level, the problem does not seem to be posed at present, because the SPD leadership rejects any idea of cooperation with the Left Party in the Bundestag. But already four Left Party MPs have proposed voting, if necessary, for Schröder against Merkel. They were quickly disciplined: this is no time to do such a thing! Our electoral and party base could only interpret it as supporting neo-liberal policies! Nevertheless, Gysi, Lafontaine and the others constantly repeat that in a few years from now, with a changed SPD, everything could look different...

But there is a very present problem: the participation of the Left Party in regional governments in Berlin and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. And there is a big movement in the Berlin WASG that is opposed to the idea of fusing with a party that is implementing neo-liberal austerity policies at the regional level, as junior partner to the SPD. An animated discussion is taking place around the proposal for an autonomous candidacy of the WASG in the 2006 Berlin regional elections, if the Left Party does not withdraw from the governmental coalition. And there, the question of the rhythm and the method of forming the new party and the question of the content of its policies are closely linked to each other: the leadership of the Left Party wants to rule out the possibility of a rival candidacy in Berlin by a rapid fusion with a WASG whose relatively few members in Berlin will not weigh

too heavily in the balance and will not manage to impose the end of participation in the Berlin government.

An important fundamental problem is the absence of an alternative to capitalism as a social system. The "democratic socialism" in the programme of the Left Party does not signify the struggle for another society, but is a vague ethical reference, quite compatible with a pragmatic politics which does not in any way come up against the limits of the established social order. The programme of the WASG formulates criticisms of capitalism, without having a clear anti-capitalist reference point.

We who are fighting for a socialist democracy, for a classless society on the global scale, know very well that the crisis of credibility of the socialist alternative remains is still very serious. We do not want to impose our vision, but we argue for a thorough debate on the question of the alternative to capitalism, starting from what should be the general consensus: we all want an economic system which is not governed by the race for maximum profit and by competition, but by social needs and ecological responsibility. Such a system can only be based on social ownership of the large-scale means of production, democratically self-managed.

It is not a question of discussing this alternative in the abstract. In fact, this question is linked to the problem of concrete demands. Without a horizon that goes beyond really existing capitalism, it will not be possible to be consistent in the struggle for immediate demands that are in the interest of the workers and the marginalized layers in society. Without wanting to go beyond the capitalist system it is not possible to resist the argument of our adversaries: everything which is socially just but not compatible with the race for maximum profit and for the strongest position of one's own nation against all other nations, will be sacrificed to "realism". How can you want to impose a significant reduction of working hours without loss of wages, how can you defend social gains and impose an improvement in the living

condition of the workers and the marginalized layers of society, without being ready to challenge the sacrosanct private ownership of the means of production, the banks and the insurance companies? How can you organize resistance against the orgies of privatisation, how can you fight for a re-civilization of social relations without having in mind the need to reorganize society on new bases, different from those of today, which are dominated by the market, monopoly and the power of the big multinational trusts?

Internationalism must be part and parcel of the new party that is to be built. This begins with the pan-European struggle for a minimum social income and the reduction of working hours without loss of wages, continues with the refusal of military interventions and must be completed by establishing contact with all the forces in Europe that are to the left of social democracy and are anti-capitalist - we do not agree with confining ourselves to participating in the European Left Party.

The orientation and the profile of the party that is to be built are linked to the type of party that we want to build. In our opinion, we have to start by posing the question of why the SPD and so many other parties have become what they are today. One of the big problems is the substitutionism of leaderships, party apparatuses and especially parliamentary groups (not to speak of Millerandist ministers...) which tend on every occasion to depart from the initial emancipatory objectives and adapt to the mechanisms and the pro-capitalist consensus of established bourgeois politics.

In the last analysis, this mechanism is a product of the social division of labour and can only be surmounted by a qualitative leap in the self-activity and self-organization of the masses. That is why it is not enough to ask the members of the parliament of a left party to play the role of a loudspeaker for social movements. We must ask more: that all their activity be directed to encouraging mobilizations, and encouraging self-organization within mobilizations, in other words to the extra-parliamentary struggle. Besides,

our demands have no chance of being realized without a big social mobilization and a confrontation with capital which is the only thing that could really change the relationship of forces in society.

But while we are waiting for these big changes in the social and political climate, we need a party which ceaselessly encourages the activity of its members, therefore a democratically organized party that enables its members to control the leaderships, the apparatus, the parliamentary groups, and to determine the political orientation and activity. It must be a pluralist, open party which does not exclude currents on the pretext that they are too "radical". The debate on the strategic orientation must be conducted over a long period and without exclusives, with the right for everyone - not only for the Keynesians, but also for the anti-capitalist forces - to express themselves and to address the entire party.

Already, the weight of the apparatus and the leadership of the Left Party has proved to be a serious problem and an obstacle to the objective of building a broad new party with a mass base. Before the federal elections, time was short and we had to act quickly. Now the leadership of the Left Party wants a rapid fusion, organized and orchestrated from on high. In the WASG there is resistance to this, and so the leadership of the WASG is expressing the need for an open process which will go beyond just the fusion of the two existing forces, a process with open forums.

In the meantime, the new parliamentary group is preparing its work. It is the members of the central apparatus of the ex-PDS in Berlin who have been taken on as collaborators, while their posts in the Karl-Liebknecht-Haus are going by cooptation to chosen leading members of the WASG. So already the weight of this apparatus, which is difficult to control, is great. And it goes without saying that politically, it is the weight of the partisans of coalition politics at the regional level which is being reinforced.

For the moment, that remains on the

regional level. For the moment, the top leadership of the Left Party, the WASG and the parliamentary group rule out any cooperation with the SPD and reject the idea, for example, of voting for Schröder against Merkel, or for another SPD candidate for chancellor. But in the longer term - and both Gysi and La Fontaine continually repeat it - there is an orientation towards governmental collaboration with the SPD on the federal level too. To this we have to counterpose an orientation towards social mobilizations - without unity of action in the streets and in the workplaces, unity on an institutional level can only accelerate all the tendencies towards adaptation. And the SPD, up to now in any case, is definitely no longer a party of mobilization.

Our approach to the new party that is to be built is not "entryist" in the traditional sense that the term had in our movement. We want to build this party loyally, in an open process and by encouraging a broad and plural dialogue on the orientation to adopt and on how to function. At the same time, within this broad process, we want to push forward the formation of the anti-capitalist and internationalist current, because it seems to us that it is essential for it to be articulated in a way that is comprehensible, credible and strong. Our organisation has no intention of behaving as a "faction" in the process and does not impose discipline on its members within the WASG, the Left Party and the new party that is to be built. In any case, if it did, that could only poison relations with the other members of the new party. But our members share deeply-held programmatic convictions and regularly discuss and decide on the basic orientation around which they work in this broad framework, ready to take on responsibilities and without repudiating their political identity.

We have already learned from practical experience that this approach can pose problems. In the broad framework of the WASG, of the Left Party and of the new party that is to be built, our members can have different responsibilities at different levels of leadership, play different roles, find different allies - people with reformist socialist convictions who

have a strong penchant for "Realpolitik" or people who do not always have socialist convictions, but have sentiments that are emancipatory, democratic and anti-apparatus, for example. That can

create conflicts and it has created conflicts. The only non-administrative way of countering these effects seems to us to be the reinforcing of our organisation as a framework for

discussion, taking a decision when there are differences and formulating our position - without imposing it mechanically on the activists, but stating publicly what is the opinion of our small political current.

Not even 5 percent of aid received!

26 October 2005, by **Farooq Tariq**

A two-member team from one private TV channel GEO accompanying a military relief helicopter in the Neelum Valley showed a glimpse of the plight of the villagers last night on 25th October 2005. The villagers were begging, arguing, fighting, accusing and saying what ever they could say to the military officers to get some immediate relief to save the lives of their children who are not yet dead. One villager said, "17 days gone, we have no team reaching to our village. We have buried 80 from our village, many more are injured, but no help yet has reached the village".



Money collected at the Labour Relief Camp in Lahore, Pakistan....

The so-called LOC is closed by the Indian and Pakistani governments and no one from any country can cross the Line. If the LOC had been open, it would have taken few hours for the Indian held Kashmir people to bring relief. The Pakistani government finally suggested last week to open the Line from 5 different areas. But technical side had to be discussed by the Indian government to agree to the proposal. It has not yet been opened.

Earlier, the Pakistani military government rejected an offer from the Indian government of Indian helicopters for relief purposes. "It was not in our national interest to accept this offer, it raises the question of the security of the country" said one Pakistani spokesperson while rejecting

the offer. Later the Pakistani military regime offered to accept the Indian helicopters without Indian pilots. What more security is in the mind of the Pakistani government while, according to the latest official figures, over 53,000 are confirmed death after the 8th October earthquake. Unofficial figures for the death toll are over 100,000 and more seriously injured.

Pathetic response

There has been a pathetic aid response by the governments of the advanced countries so far. Not even five percent of the total needed for the relief and rehabilitation work has been pledged or sent to Pakistan. The "friends" of general Musharaf have not been pushed properly by the military government to donate and come forward to help in this grave situation. The reason is very simple.

The military government's earlier response was to hide the facts. They tried in the initial period to show minimum losses of lives and property. I heard the core commander of the North West Frontier Province, the real boss of the province, on 9th October, a day after the earthquake "it is the politicians who are making noise about deaths and losses, I have been touring around the whole day, the maximum deaths are less than one thousand" This is a province where there are more than 20,000 confirmed deaths according to the official figures.

OXFAM UK issued a serious warning on 26th October that Pakistan has been abandoned by the industrial

states. It noted that America, Japan, Germany and Italy have donated aid that does not match their financial position. While France, Belgium, Austria and Finland have announced no donations at all.

The United Nation asked for 300 million dollars in emergency relief but only one third of that has materialized. The UN economic coordinator for immediate relief in Pakistan, Mr. Rashid Kalkof, told news reporters in Islamabad on 23rd October that "we did not expect the disaster on that high level. It went beyond our imaginations. That is why there was a delay in the initial relief activities". He said, "according to our initial estimation, over three million people have suffered from this catastrophe".



...food and equipment on its way.

On 22nd October, the prime minister of Azad Kashmir, (Pakistani-occupied Kashmir) said, "do not wait for the death of the Kashmiris, send the helicopters now. The world community should not talk but act. The whole world has not been able to send the immediate required 200,000 tents yet, what is the use of helicopters when Kashmiris are dead". The desperation of the hand-picked prime minister of Azad Kashmir shows the real danger that is erupting to the lives of the refugees who are desperate to get the tents before the arrival of the winter in three weeks time. Already in some areas, snow is pouring down and other areas, the temperature is around zero.

At present, there a total of 46 helicopters helping in the relief efforts, some 30 of them are from the US army. According to a BBC report on 23rd October, half of the helicopters are involved in VIP activities. That mean transportation of the very important personalities or security of these VIPs.

Even General Musharaf had to admit on 21st October that only 620 million dollars has been pledged which is very little. According to the government surveys, the total damage may exceed five billion dollars. The independent surveys bring the total damage to 10 billion dollars.

The World Food Programme appeal for 56 million dollars has met with only 10 per cent success so far. It has been issuing serious warning of more deaths if the international response to this disaster is not in accordance with the needs of the time.

Militarization of the relief efforts

All the action of the Musharaf regime shows the growing militarization of the relief efforts. The military want to control all the incoming aid and want to distribute it without the involvement of the civilians. A major general Farooq Ahmed has been appointed as the relief commissioner. Another general has been appointed for the rehabilitation work. Civilians seem totally outside the network of the official channels of relief and rehabilitation work.

The total incapacity of the military regime to provide any effective help in the first three days of the earthquake has now been compensated by the mainstream media's publicity for the army as the only saviour. Even the main private TV channels are promoting the army relief efforts as the only way forward. During the six years of military rule, most civilian institutions have been headed by retired or serving army officers. Now the relief and rehabilitation work has joined the same route.

The earthquake has raised the issues like occupation of Kashmir by Pakistan

and India and its effect on the people. It has raised the issue of the priorities of the Pakistani state, which has been too busy iarming itself while totally neglecting the defence of civilians in any disaster like this one.

The natural disaster has not been met with the preparations that were needed. The total loss would have been reduced to a large extent if the state had been prepared for such incidents. But the social priorities of the people are the last words in the dictionary of the ruling classes of Pakistan.

Cancellation of the debts campaign

The national assembly of Pakistan has passed a resolution that the debts of the people in the affected area should be cancelled. So was the demand of the members of the NWFP assembly. This is related to the demand of Labour Party Pakistan to cancel the unjust debts of Pakistan. Pakistan owes 34 billion dollars in foreign loans. It pays nearly 5 billion US dollars annually in debt repayments. This is the largest part of the national budget. If the repayment of only year's debt were not paid, it could compensate for the total damage according to the official figures. The irony of the matter is that IMF has announced, not an aid, but a loan on soft terms basis even on this tragic occasion for Pakistan.

The people's response

There has been unprecedented people's response not only in Pakistan but internationally, particularly in those countries which have a large Pakistani immigrant population. According to one survey, over 10 billion rupees (200 million US dollars) donations have been sent to the affected areas by the people of Pakistan. The Labour Relief Campaign in its first four days of campaigning in Lahore raised over 250000 Rupees in cash and over 2 million Rupees worth of goods from ordinary passers-by. This has been the case of many more

relief camps which emerged in every party of Pakistan. There have been the cases all over Kashmir and NWFP affect areas where the first aid came from the people and not from the state.

What is to be done?

The social movement internationally should take the question of earthquake on an urgent basis. It should urge the governments in the advanced countries to do more than they have done so far. It has to take the question to the labour movement and to help the Kashmiri and Pakistani workers and peasants who have lost every thing. The response has to come on urgent basis. More effective measures have to be taken to collect funds for the refugees not only for immediate relief but also for rehabilitation work.

Please visit Labour Education Foundation website for more details of Labour Relief Campaign
www.lef.org.pk

Donations can be sent to the Labour Education Foundation appeal in two ways:

To Pakistan, but which might be very costly:

LABOUR EDUCATION FOUNDATION

A/C No. 01801876

BANK ALFALAH LTD., LDA PLAZA,
KASHMIR ROAD, LAHORE,
PAKISTAN

Route:

Please advise and pay to Citi Bank,
New York, USA Swift CITI US 33

for onward transfer to BANK
ALFALAH LTD., KARACHI, PAKISTAN
A/C No. 36087144

and for final transfer to BANK
ALFALAH LTD., LDA PLAZA,
KASHMIR ROAD, LAHORE,

PAKISTAN

Swift: ALFHPKKALDA for A/C No. 01801876 OF LABOUR EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Or through a Paris-based NGO, the ESSF, which is centralising the transfer of funds:

THROUGH ESSF:

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard de Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

After Gaza

25 October 2005, by Cinzia Nachira

The chorus of approbation for the Israeli government has reached unprecedented levels, much as in 1993 with Rabin. The only voices outside this chorus have come from within Palestinian civil society and politics, whether in the diaspora or in Palestine, and, predominantly in this instance, from within Israeli civil society itself (rather than from within Israeli politics).



The sigh of relief audible across the world on the eve of the evacuation seems to coincide with a sort of burial of this complicated matter.

But if everything is going so well in the Middle East, in terms of defusing the explosiveness of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, if we are progressing towards a chapter of peace, how can some people be sceptical of the process?

Well, anyone not totally taken in by the propaganda can look at the process that has been initiated by the implementation of Sharon's plan and see it for what it is: the consolidation of the extension of the Zionist colonial project, which has as its aim the cantonisation of the West Bank, dividing it into Palestinian enclaves within Israeli territory, and the annexation of the rest of Palestinian territory to the state of Israel. In this

scheme of things, Gaza has absolutely no importance, it is only being used as the justification which the Israeli establishment has used to carry out an old project first thought of many years ago.

Retreat or rationalisation of the occupation?

The removal from Gaza is anything but a novelty. Ariel Sharon, then minister for settlements under Prime Minister Begin, had already drawn up the plan in 1979. In other words what is taking place now is an integral part of his strategy, the rest of which consists of building settlements stretching from the Mediterranean to the Jordan.

Moreover, as should be obvious, the removal of the settlements does not mean the end of the occupation of Palestine, only that of the Gaza Strip. Nothing has been said about a real withdrawal of the army, nothing about what is essential for the survival of the Palestinians in Gaza, which will be run by the Palestinian National Authority; and nothing about Israel's frontier with Egypt, the customs posts, the transfer of individuals, whether into Israel or Egypt, or the control of water resources.

This silence on Israel's role in Gaza since the disengagement means, in

other words, that unless there is an agreement with the Palestinians over the Israeli conditions, all the lines along which this area develops will continue to be determined by Israeli legislation, with predictable consequences.

Carrying out the project of unilateral withdrawal which as such is not negotiable, and which cannot be controlled jointly with any other parties -whether the Palestinians or other international forces - is the final phase as far as Israel is concerned, stamped on every other possible process of dialogue and compromise with the Palestinians. Is saying this an expression of extreme pessimism? No, just of the brutal reality.

There will be no reconsideration, even in theory, or any calling into question as a result of this project, of the plans to consolidate the settlement of the rest of Palestine, starting from East Jerusalem and its suburbs. Already on the day after the removal of the settlements from Gaza the extension of the settlement of Maale Adumin was recommenced, in fact joining East Jerusalem into one with the already existing settlements.

But this is not all. The project being carried out today in Israel fits perfectly into a strategy which is basically that of not giving up on the plan for Transfer of the Palestinians to Jordan, where since they would be the majority, they would be free to destroy

the Hashemite monarchy in order to create a Palestinian state for themselves. This is a very old strategy, but it has one fault, or, expressed in the discourse prevalent amongst the Israeli political class, will meet a certain obstacle: how to make the Palestinians accept mass transfers? Decades of resistance have shown that they have no intention of abandoning their land. To carry out this project, which goes back in an unbroken line from Ben Gurion to Sharon, the international context has to be such that there can be agreement to ethnic cleansing on a vast scale, even worse than that which led, between 1947 and 1949, to the expulsion of 800,000 Palestinians.

As events have unfolded since September 11, 2001, the international context has already allowed Israel to achieve many objectives, above all the delegitimisation of all forms of armed struggle and resistance to military occupation, which has subsumed the official designation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into the more general term of "worldwide preemptive war against terror". This is not a minor point in the analysis, but the basis on which an important fact rests: from September-October 2001 until today, including the withdrawal from Gaza, the agendas of western imperialism, especially that of US imperialism, and that of Israeli imperialism, have increasingly coincided with one another. But those agendas are not identical, and even if there is not the slightest friction within this imperfect identity of interests, and even if it is not in contradiction with the one-sided support offered the Israeli state, still it does not guarantee the total impunity of Israel if the latter were forced to choose generalised violent expulsions, which would inevitably be accompanied by large massacres.

One of Sharon's characteristics, as of many Israeli leaders, is always to have two plans, linked as far as possible, but slightly different, in order to be able to make the maximum gains even if the whole project cannot be carried out. The Separation Wall, and the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and from the four colonies in the north of the West Bank, are all the focus of the backup plan which for the moment

will be satisfied by settling and annexing more than thirty percent of the West Bank, keeping them out of the most densely populated Palestinian zone.

According to Israeli intentions, this will make it possible to write the epitaph on Palestinian aspirations for an independent state on the 22 percent of historic Palestine represented by the territories occupied in the 1967 war.

Frontline Palestinians in retreat

The Palestinians living in Gaza will certainly breathe a sigh of relief when the settlers and the army finally leave, but they will still remain shut in an immense prison, surrounded on every side and at the mercy of arbitrary Israeli power. The Palestinians of Gaza will not be free, from today onwards, to move freely anywhere outside the Gaza Strip. This means that as before, all forms of economic activity will be dependent on Israeli permission. For example, the torment endured by the workers who commute (most of the Palestinian labour force of Gaza) is not over, and in fact will probably get worse. Actually for many years, since the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987, Israel has implemented a policy of substitution for the Palestinian workforce, using migrants from other countries. So in reality Israel has an ever decreasing interest in workers from Gaza being able to enter the country.

Without a shadow of doubt the period ahead is a very difficult and complex one both for the Palestinian National Authority and for the Palestinian population.

The difficulties come from various directions, above all from the fact that in Gaza in particular Israeli repression has struck fiercely, practically decapitating all political leadership, whether of the Palestinian National Authority or of the Islamic organisations, or above all, of the secular and progressive political opposition. This more than anything

that today in reality the political class in Gaza is out of control. Is there the risk in Gaza of a Somalia-type situation? As we do not have a crystal ball we cannot give a definite answer, and we certainly are not predicting it.

What we can say, as it is vouched for by the history of the resistance of the Palestinian people both in and outside Gaza and in the West Bank, is that they have shown a surprising collective political ability to reflect and to mobilise around their own national objectives, even in the worst periods - of which the present is clearly one. The assassination of Musa Arafat (cousin of Yasser Arafat and former head of internal security for Gaza), and the brief but bizarre abduction of Lorenzo Cremonesi (correspondent for the Italian newspaper "Corriere della Sera") are episodes that have

Amongst the things that have emerged in these years of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, which broke out in 2000, is that the contest is not one between the PNA and Hamas. In this sense the real test of the Palestinians is not how far they are able to shake the Israelis' complex plans (which could even provide for the dismantling of other West Bank settlements if that turned out to be useful), but what capacity the PNA and the other political, social and cultural forces will have to head a movement that will not just accede to a tactical rearrangement of the occupation but will once and for all throw into crisis the instruments that the Israeli state possesses besides the Wall. As Bashir Abu Manneh, a Palestinian intellectual who lives in New York, observed:

"In this way Sharon has obtained a fourfold result from the Plan for Dispossession: to deny the rights of the Palestinians as well as refuse any real dialogue with the Palestinian Authority that was born out of the Oslo process; to control dissent and the process of internal fragmentation; to push aside international diplomacy; and to relaunch the image of Israel as a strong, cohesive and proactive state, and to weaken the pressure on the state and on Israeli society from the messianic wing of Zionism.

This is another problem for the

Palestinians, as their internal debate shows clearly: it seems that Sharon's results could be turned to their favour and that this would happen above all via a reconstruction of the forms of struggle and social and political reorganisation in order to face the new situation. But the risk is that the withdrawal from Gaza would turn itself into a worse trap than the illusions occasioned by Oslo.

Another challenge for the Palestinians, definitely posed more sharply now than in the preceding years, is to engage in a dialogue with Israeli society, essentially in order to profit from its contradictions.

Israeli society and the settlers

The contradictions within Israeli society are numerous and some of the most disenchanted Israeli Jews have for some time been sounding the alarm about their sharpening. Some, without putting a date to it, are talking of an urge towards suicide, and denounce what they call the "Masada syndrome", of a society which is searching for normality, and wishes to be normal, but is not, and cannot become so until it finds a balance in its relations with the Palestinians, whose population it holds under military occupation and which it represses socially, politically and culturally, exploits economically, and whose land it expropriates.

It should be said clearly that these contradictions cannot be seen as the result of the removal of the Gaza settlements. They had already been weighing heavily upon Israeli society, not because the majority of Israelis had started to discuss the concept of the settlements on which their existence as a state depends, but because of the resistance of the Palestinians of Gaza, their remaining after the air raids and not fleeing, after the demolition of thousands of houses, the uprooting of thousands of fruit trees, olive trees, and the destruction of hectare after hectare of cultivated land had forced home the message that military tactics do not pay.

None of this gainsays the fact that the army needed many thousands of soldiers to defend the 7,500 settlers of Gaza, and that these soldiers had started to ask themselves "Why are we doing this?", understanding at a very basic level that the equation "occupation equals security" does not work. In some cases, not many, but significant ones, soldiers from units deployed in Gaza have denounced their own brutality and the fact that they had been obliged to follow orders that were completely ridiculous and cruel. They used to find that the best way to stop children from going to school across a piece of land that had been shut by military order was to fire their own machine guns using remote control targeting.... many dozens of Palestinian children have been killed because a commander bored with hours of guard duty would point a gun at them and invoke "the need for security in the face of kamikaze attackers".

They were often exercised by attempts to foresee violent actions on the part of the settlers who would be "obliged to abandon their own homes that they had built", on other people's land, razing to the ground the houses of another people....

When the moment for evacuation came, the army was sent against unarmed settlers, and were ordered not to use violence: "Remember that they are your brothers...", completely hypocritical words from a leadership that without ever striking a blow itself has for decades ordered massacres, expulsions, and mass round ups of defenceless and unarmed people. Only fools would believe in a change of spots on the part of the army that embraced those same fierce settlers who, assembled in the synagogue of Neve Dekalim, had greeted them (literally) with vitriol.

These embraces between brothers were the nth blow for those of the Israeli soldiers who are familiar - when things are going OK - only with the butt ends of rifles, and with incomprehensible shouting in the strange jargon of the occupiers, which is not intended to be understood by Israelis, let alone by Palestinians.

Even this was an integral part of the

grand theatrics, aimed less at a domestic than at an external audience. The aim was to show that in the last analysis, while Israel "the only democracy in the Middle East" can succeed in managing such a vital transition by means of song, collective prayer, and only a few insults, albeit strong ones, on the other side are the barbarians, whom they shoot at. How much contempt and racism is hidden in the words: "A Jew does not expel another Jew" [settlers' slogan]. This means believing in genetic superiority, the sovereignty of a people of bosses in the name of God. But it was a Jew that assassinated a Jewish prime minister, was it not?

These are not the words of a Palestinian but of an Israeli called Avraham Burg, a religious Jew, former Labour president of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) and of the worldwide Jewish Agency. They were published in "Haaretz", the most important Israeli paper, on 18 August.

Referring to the much heralded meeting between secular Israelis and religious nationalists, Burg continues:

"When the settlers threaten me with a "fratricidal war" I say "Stop!" Are these people my brothers? No! My only biological siblings are my two sisters. I have brothers and sisters who share values and the same spirit with me. But a wicked man, a whining oppressor or an occupier armed to the teeth are not my brother, even if they keep Shabbat and all the other religious rules. And if a woman wears a scarf to show that she is pious, but with the head underneath the scarf regards "Jewish soil" as more sacred than human life, she is not my sister but my enemy".

Avraham Burg's words clarify several things.

One of the most widespread and durable stereotypes is the one that sees Israeli society and Israeli Jews in their vast majority as cohesive, socially, politically and culturally homogeneous, straining to build an ethnically homogeneous state in the name of Zionism, religion and the myth of security.

What has emerged in the last twenty

years on the contrary shows that Israeli society is quite a varied and complex phenomenon. It is not possible to go into this aspect of the subject in as much detail as it deserves in this article.

But it can be said without any doubt that for some time Israeli society has been on the verge of an internal collision. It is no great novelty when a Jew kills another Jew - the history of the construction of the state of Israel is littered with episodes of this sort.

The crisis is a deep one, and also bears on the discovery that it is not the Palestinians, who are ready for compromise, as shown by the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993 and after, who initiated a civil and cultural (rather than a social and political) war.

After the failure of all the agreements, the Israeli political leadership is trying to resurrect the old myths. When Ehud Barak said in 2000-2001 that "We shall be a villa in the heart of the jungle", he was attempting to totally absorb the blows of the preceding period.

The villa is modernity, comfort, civilisation, culture. The jungle is barbarism. The jungle is by definition a rogue state. "We live in the heart of the jungle" means to be able to survive inside the Arab world, and also inside the Muslim world, it means that what surrounds us is an immense sea of barbarism while we are the only place that is civilised in the jungle, that we are threatened by barbarism. So, as we are a villa in the jungle we are allowed to do anything. When you are confronting the jungle, it is not

possible to engage in negotiations or dialogue. Coexistence does not exist because the jungle will invade us, it is permanently in action with the aim of choking the villa. For those who are permanently at war, a general preventive war is needed against this jungle so that the villa is not choked.

These words below too are not the words of a Palestinian, but of an Israeli Jew, in every way a son of the diaspora and of post 1967 Israeli society, Michel Warshawski, who says bitterly of his own society:

"The violence that has been put in train in the last four and a half years in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is literally unprecedented in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is not just a quantitative difference but also a qualitative one. It is a violence that dehumanises the enemy. In the eyes of the Israeli soldiers, young men of 18 or 19, they are no longer men, women, children, old people, but a terrorist threat that must be rooted out (...) What has become the code for how to behave or how not to behave towards the Palestinians is little by little becoming the code for how to behave inside [Israeli society]. It is becoming a brutal, vulgar society, a society in which every idea of civilised living is disappearing.

It may be asked: "What does this have to do with the unilateral withdrawal?" It is, together with the international situation described above, the element which has allowed this process to be carried out.

In this brief analysis which began with the removal of the settlers from the Gaza Strip, we have tried to go beyond

the common positions which make the present more acceptable but make it impossible to face the future. In this sense it is clear that neither crisis, that of Israeli society or that of the Palestinians, can be resolved by the unilateral removal of the settlements. Many scenarios can be envisaged for the future, some of them completely negative ones, but all of them more or less possible.

Ariel Sharon's declarations, on the day after his speech at the UN meeting, in which he threatened to block the Palestinian elections, planned to take place in January 2006, if Hamas puts forward candidates, shows even more clearly if possible, that it is in Israel's interest for there to be a total implosion of Palestinian society. The Palestinian sociologist Jawad, from Bir Zeit University, speaks of sociocide. An ugly neologism, but one which does however make the terms of the matter clear: the question is whether Israel's interest lies principally in the destruction of every possibility, present or future, of political, social, economic and cultural organisation by the Palestinian people.

In this sense, the Palestinians are facing a great challenge, to face their own internal crisis without following the path to which Israel wants to confine them: either civil war or collaboration; but to experiment in the very near future with a strong movement to democratise their own structures, both in Gaza and in the West Bank. This is the only antidote to chaos and corruption.

To develop the social and political dialectic is not a luxury but an unavoidable necessity for the Palestinians at this moment.

Islam and the left

25 October 2005, by **Salma Yaqoob**



Salma Yaqoob

"It is really odd time for me to be at this meeting. I thought we would be celebrating all the fantastic achievements of the anti-war

movement and Respect we have had over the last year. But, of course, the recent bombings in London have changed that.

As I watched the events unfold on my TV I recalled how I had felt on September 11 2001 watching similar events unfold. And in comparing my reaction to both situations I realized how much I have changed - a change in me that cannot be separated from your impact on me.

After September 11 2001 I did not know where to put my fear. I felt a deep pessimism about the future. Among my friends we started discussing whether as Muslims it would still be safe for us to stay in Britain. And if we were to go, what other country could we go to? Even though I considered myself a relatively integrated person, being a psychologist, having gone to university and having various non-Muslim friends, I started to question how many non-Muslims really understand us, trust us, would defend us? While everybody grieved for the victims of 9/11 somehow my grief, as a Muslim, did not count as much as the grief of a non-Muslim. I knew I would be forced to condemn the bombings again and again in a way that my fellow citizens would not.

After the 7/7 bombings, there were many similarities in the manner in which the Muslim community was demonized as after 9/11 but there was one important difference. This time I did not feel alone. This time I did not feel the same crushing pessimism. This time I knew that there would be tens of thousands of people who would understand that if our government is explodes bombs in other people's countries, we increase the likelihood that somebody explode bombs on our streets in retaliation. The fact that the Guardian opinion poll showed that two-thirds of Londoners saw a direct connection between the London bombings and the invasion of Iraq, despite Blair's desperate denials otherwise, is testimony to the work of anti-war activists in shaping and informing the political culture in this country. The fact that the tide of racism in the aftermath of the bombing has not been as bad as it could have been is testimony to the work of the anti-war movement in helping to strengthen anti-racist barriers in this country. All that, and more besides, is testimony to the work of ordinary anti-war campaigners up

and down the country. Because of the work between the left and the Muslim community in the anti-war movement you have given me hope again and I thank you for it.

I have spoken many times about the relief I felt when I came across socialists campaigning against the war. It marked the beginning of a new journey for me. But that journey has not been without its ups and downs.

Very early on, when the Stop the war coalition was established, I was confronted by socialists who factionalised in opposition to Muslim participation in the anti-war movement. They would say "we can't have Salma Yaqoob as chair because she has a head scarf,"; that the very presence of identifiable Muslims in prominent positions in the Stop the war Coalition somehow undermined its inclusive and secular nature; that the experience of Iranian revolution proved that Muslims and the left could nor should ever work together. I could not understand their reaction. I thought what has Iran got to do with me? Why are they so hung up about a piece of cloth on my head? Why can they only see Muslims as one reactionary monolithic bloc?

These attitudes were overcome but they did cause damage. Many of the Muslims who came to the first anti-war meetings left when they saw people standing up and saying that they did not want to work with Muslims. They said if you do not want to work with Muslims we do not want to work with you. That was a serious setback, and there are still those perceptions of what it means to work with the left around in the Muslim communities.

I was reminded of that experience just last week I happened bump into Tariq Ramadan. He started telling me about what is happening with Muslims and the left in France - and I really could not believe it. The ideological arguments that are being put forward by people who are not marginal but - very much at the centre of our global movement. People like Bernard Cassen, who is one of the directors of Le Monde Diplomatique, and honorary president of ATTAC. He has actually conducted an attack on the SWP and

on Respect saying that the left is compromising its most fundamental principles by working with Muslims in the way that we have in Britain. Basically saying that we do not want to infect the European side of our movement with the British experience.

I want to address this because I think it is really important that we are alive to the debates across Europe. This one-dimensional presentation of Muslims as a reactionary, monolithic bloc has to be challenged. Like every community the Muslim community is a mosaic of different communities, experiences, political viewpoints. For example when I stood as a Respect candidate in Birmingham the recent general election the bulk of my political opponents were Muslims. There was a Liberal Democrat Muslim candidate, an independent Muslim candidate, and a Conservative Muslim candidate all standing against me. I was also the one who was most attacked by the Muslim extremists who were going around with leaflets at the Mosque and in vans with loudspeakers saying I was no longer a Muslim because I work with atheists and this is haram. On the other hand I was subject to attack from another group of very anxious Muslims who, because they were feeling scared and vulnerable - and understandably so because that is the reality we are living in - are desperate to be accepted by the mainstream. They want to take cover under a big umbrella like the Labour Party and they say people like are increasing the threat against the Muslim community by speaking out in the way that I do.

For example, on the same Saturday that I met Tariq I was speaking as a panellist at a meeting in Oxford University. It was with mainly Muslim panellists, and I was vilified in that room by the other panellists - not the audience who turned out to be very sympathetic - but prominent Labour and Liberal Democrat panellists, all Muslims, saying that I am leading Muslims down a cul-de-sac. That working with these extremists - i.e. leftists - is not what Muslims should be doing right now. We are in enough trouble as it is. So we should not ally ourselves to these other marginal people. I said yes I know we are marginal and they are marginal in

terms of conventional politics but our values are not marginal. Our values of peace and social justice are held by the vast majority of people and it is on these values that we can unite. And anyway, all principled political positions invariably start off as being marginal, on the outside, before gaining wider acceptance. The opposition to Bush's war on terror started with his plans to attack Afghanistan and we were very marginal in our opposition. It was not a very popular position to adopt! But from that politically principled opposition we laid the foundation for a huge global anti-war movement.



The challenge in building stronger social movements and political alternatives is that we never lose sight of what unites us and I believe people like Cassen and others on the French left have become blinded to this elementary point. Our movement across Europe will be strengthened not weakened the more the left ditches some preconceived notions about Muslims and develops the political clarity and courage to engage with Muslims. I think we have made some important steps in this regard in Britain which others could learn from. Tragically, I believe it was the failure of the French left to do likewise that was one the most important reasons why their anti-war movement did not reach the scale of Britain, Italy, Spain or Greece. I don't buy the argument that the fact the French did not send troops was an adverse factor in building a large anti-war movement because that could also be said of Greece yet their movement was among the most impressive in Europe. One of the key issues was a lack of political clarity on how to build principled alliances with Muslims.

When I talk to Muslims I am very conscious that I have to take people with me. To do that effectively you obviously have to relate to people where they are at. And that means being able to talk from a paradigm that they can relate to and I relate to. It means digging deep into Quranic sources, about the Prophet's life, about solidarity, about justice,

because they are all there. Just like in any ideology or religion you have various schisms and interpretations - and as I understand it, it is the same with the left!

Seeing the centrality of the fight for justice to my faith was central to me becoming involved in broader political struggle. The more I read the Quran the more convinced I became that not only was this something I wanted to do politically but something as a Muslim I have to do. That it is not a compromise of my principles but an expression of my principles to work with non-Muslims in this manner. That the most important dividing line is those who stand up against oppression and those who endorse oppression, whether within our family, our community or society as a whole. You are either on one side of this line or the other.

The irony is this that those people who consider themselves as such pure Muslims that we cannot work with atheists have actually have far more in common with those people on the left who consider themselves such pure secularists that they do not want us believers polluting them. So I think that being dogmatic is not just the privilege of religious people.

What is dangerous is that if we put these barriers in our minds, if we become these puritanical ideologues, we will miss the point. Because right now, at the heart of the neo-liberal agenda, one of the things that allows it to advance is the attack on Muslims and Islamaphobia that justifies it.

We cannot ignore that reality. So if the left falls into this trap and gets caught up in this argument about whether we can work with non-secular people - when in reality those are the people being oppressed right now - it will fail. If we want our movement to be strong, if we want to create the biggest force possible against the real enemy right now - then we have to have a united basis for it. This means religious people non-believing people acting together on a clear political platform - I am not talking about a mushy "lets hold hands together" kind of approach.

So now I find myself in the curious

position of having more in common with atheist, socialist activists than with some of some of my own Muslim brothers and sisters. But for me it is not a compromise, for me it is very much an expression of what I understand to be Islamic notions of justice. If you want to call it socialist internationalism and I call it Islamic notions of brotherhood and sisterhood I don't care - as long as it means that we work in solidarity with those who are oppressed around the world.

And you know when I stand here and say I believe that another world is possible I am not just talking about heaven, I am talking about the one right here and now.

I am proud to say that I am one of the founders of Respect - and it is an interesting experiment. I did not know myself where it would go - I just felt that we had to do something like this. I knew I had more in common with trade unionists, with those people fighting for the environment, with those people standing up for working peoples rights, with those people who campaigns incessantly against the war, than those who claimed to speak in my name in the Tory Party, or the Labour Government, or those wishy-washy Liberal Democrat people. This is what Respect has been about. It's for an alternative to the politics of imperialism and neo-liberalism. It has been clear that this is our commonality and what we put aside we put aside in a very conscious way.

This experiment I feel has born fruit. Sometimes it means going into the unknown and what we are creating is a bit unknown. I cannot tell you exactly how it is all going to pan out. But what we should not do is say that the socialist ideal state is that and the Islamic ideal state is this therefore these two can never start working together, therefore Muslims and socialists here do not work. I don't think that is the right approach. And I think by going into the unknown with the clear and principled basis, by stressing our common ground, we start to build real relationships and go forward to forge a real political alternative to the politics of war and privatisation. That is the basis in which we operate in Respect and I believe we have established an

important model of political engagement.

I am going to end with a quote from the Quran: it says "Stand up for justice even if it means going against yourself and your family, be they rich or poor".

What I read into that verse is that it is easy to be just with those people who are like you. The real test is standing up for people who are different from you and may not necessarily believe what you believe. And I hear an echo of that sentiment when I read what Lenin wrote in 1902 when he said that when people stand up for an increase

in wages they are good trade unionists, but when they stand up to prevent Jews from being attacked then they are true socialists.

Our solidarity is our strength.

Thank you very much."

Political Declaration of the Party of Revolution and Socialism

21 October 2005, by National Constituent Committee of the PRS

We, the workers, peasants, students and inhabitants of the neighbourhoods and rural communities of Venezuela, are conscious of the great advances and successes won through tenacious struggle over the past six years of the revolutionary process.

We are conscious of the meaning of the Missions [1] the broadening of democratic liberties, as well as the content of social and economic inclusion of the "leyes habitantes" [2].

On the other hand, it is also clear that there is still much lacking in providing a structural response to the serious problems existing in the poorest sectors of our country.



The highest level of available oil resources in our history, in the hands of a government that counts on the sympathy of the great majority of our people, has not been enough to resolve the problems of poverty and exclusion, nor has it freed us from imperialist subjection and the power of the big monopolies.

There is no socialism without expropriation of the big private means of production.

The oil money alone cannot resolve the problem of capitalist exploitation, the origin of all our evils. To overcome it, the economy should cease to be in the hands of a handful of rich bosses, the conspiratorial oligarchy [3] and the multinational monopolies, and pass into the control of the workers and the people in power; it is necessary to take the step of expropriating the big companies which are in the hands of the bourgeoisie and imperialism. There is no socialism without expropriation of the big private means of production.

None of the parties which currently have ministers in the government or members of parliament have shown themselves ready to guarantee until the end the struggle for the Second Independence [4] in the face of imperialism, through the liquidation of the social relations of capitalist production and through socialism as a regime of ownership and collective government of the workers and the people.

Their practice is reduced to introducing timid reforms inside capitalism, or conjunctural policies, which have not resolved and will not resolve the problem of exploitation and oppression. They maintain intact the real centres of power and economic control of the oligarchy and imperialism in our country, and at the

same time they show a clear tendency to engender new and corrupt bureaucratic castes in the state apparatus that they lead, opening the way to the reinstallation of the old elites, bogging down the revolutionary process.

It is clearer every day that under the leadership of these parties the revolution will be frozen and we will not advance towards socialism.

Facing this crossroads, we the revolutionaries must assume the unshakable commitment to envisage and propose to the workers and the people, a political alternative which gives free course to the most dynamic, progressive and combative forces of the organized people, in the perspective of fighting for socialism with democracy, without exploiter bosses, nor bureaucrats embedded in the state.

It becomes urgent to offer the popular sectors, workers, women, peasants, students, indigenous communities and middle layers of the population who sympathize with social change, a project of socialism, without ambiguities, which breaks with capitalism, the exploitation of man by man, and which fights for the definitive liberation of the human species from any form of oppression and exploitation, under the

government of the workers.

While presenting this political alternative, it is also necessary to envisage the construction of tools that can win these basic changes that Venezuelan society and the world as a whole require.

The workers have advanced in building the UNT; the popular sectors, neighbourhoods, peasants and students organizing themselves in fronts and associations, and diverse forms of popular organization continue to proliferate.

They lack only the construction of the political tool of all these sectors, which organizes and strengthens, on the basis of a revolutionary programme and a political discipline, revolutionary militant activity towards socialism. It is necessary to build a party of the workers, the popular and revolutionary sectors, which on the basis of national and international experience and in agreement with the short, medium and long-term demands of the people, elaborates a Transitional Programme to advance towards socialism.

This political party must necessarily be new and different from those that exist. Through the revolutionary experience of recent years, the people have broken definitively with AD, COPEI, MAS, Causa R, Bandera Roja, Primero Justicia, Proyecto Venezuela, and so on [5], which it has recognized as oligarchic, putschist and pro-imperialist political structures.

But it has also come to the conclusion that the parties of the Fifth Republic are electoral apparatuses, that reproduce the old vices of the politicking of the Fourth Republic [6] and which do not have as their perspective the struggle for socialism without bureaucrats or bosses.



It should be genuinely democratic and organize inside it the best fighters and activists of the revolutionary process. It should have as final end popular and workers' mobilization and the struggle for the conquest of power for the workers and the people. A

revolutionary party which:

- fights for socialism, shows solidarity with the struggles of the people, defends national sovereignty, confronts imperialism, demands non-payment of the foreign debt and fights for a general increase in wages.

- confronts day after day the bosses and the exploiting and oppressive landowners. Which has the internationalist vocation that the liberator Simón Bolívar bequeathed to us. A party that is in the front line of support for the expropriation of the companies so that they are controlled and administered directly by the workers. A party that fights for a new society, free from exploitation and humiliation, that fights for socialism and democracy.

We should help the people become conscious of the fact that the problems that face us are insurmountable if we do not put an end to capitalism and private ownership of the means of production and fight for social revolution on a world scale.

Socialism is incompatible with the idea that there are national or international bosses involved in the development of the nation. We cannot conciliate the interests of the exploited and the exploiters; by this road we will only arrive at a caricature of revolution. This strategic difference with the reformist discourse of class conciliation justifies the construction of the revolutionary party.

But it is also necessary to signal that beyond this difference, we are committed to defend to the end the government of president Chávez from any coup attempt or destabilization by imperialism and the Venezuelan bourgeois opposition. We will defend, at the sides of the Bolivarian people, as we have done on April 13 [2002] and during the oil sabotage [7] the government of president Chávez against the putschist conspiracy of the oligarchic right and US imperialism, as well as all the democratic conquests won through the process of the Bolivarian revolution.

We will accompany the workers and the people in the experience with this government but in seeking the

perspective of the development of workers' and peasants' power, popular, participatory and active, until government is directly exercised in a democratic manner by the workers to adopt, without vacillation or bureaucratic obstacles, the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist measures capable of leading us towards liberatory socialism.

This is the right time to launch the challenge of building that organization. The public meeting that we have organized on July 9 in the Teatro Imperial in the city of Caracas, in which delegations from all over the country and of diverse origins and political and organizational experiences participated, confirmed to us that hundreds and thousands of activists were seeking a revolutionary and socialist political structure that responds to their expectations and demands.

As a consequence of this reality, we have come together in the city of Valencia to set up the National Constituting Committee of the PARTIDO REVOLUCIONARIO Y SOCIALISMO (PRS), and to discuss the characteristics of the political conjuncture and stage that the country is going through, and have reached the following accords:

POLITICAL ACCORDS

- We support those who struggle

We demand an immediate solution to the various conflicts which Venezuelan workers are currently experiencing. In particular those of Chrysler in Carabobo; those of the Social Security in Barquisimeto; the workers in the hydrologic sector, the mining industry and at Sidor in Bolívar state; the shipyard workers in the state of Sucre; those of the agri-foodstuffs company Guaica in Guárico; those of the multinational Coca-Cola in the state of Táchira and so on.

We support the thousands of peasants who mobilize before the Palace of Miraflores to demand that president Chávez applies the agrarian reform that finishes with the latifundio, and the investigation and punishment of the backers of the bands of thugs who wish to eliminate the most prominent

peasant activists.

We are at the sides of the indigenous communities that oppose the development of coal in the sierra of Perijá, which degrades its territories and violates the ancestral traditions of the communities.

Together with the revolutionary youth we repudiate the vile murders of students by police bodies that maintain an authoritarian and repressive presence, typical of the Fourth Republic. We demand investigation and punishment, while favouring the democratization of the police bodies, in a way that ends their vertical character and allows the election of commissioners by the communities and the police to organize unions to defend their economic, social and democratic rights.

- We propose an emergency economic plan

For a better use of the resources coming from the bonanza in oil prices, we propose that a National Plan of Public Works and Housing is developed that generates employment worthy of the name for millions of Venezuelan workers.

We demand that president Chávez extends in the same proportion to all the workers and employees of the public and private companies the wage increase granted to the components of the armed forces. We oppose the payment of the fraudulent foreign debt and pronounce ourselves in favour of the realization of a National Referendum through which the people can pronounce themselves democratically on the foreign debt and the international reserve surpluses.

We urge president Chávez to institutionalize the Missions and to urgently resolve the grave crisis in the systems of health, social security and national education. We oppose the use of the Missions for clientelist ends by the mayors, governors or parliamentary deputies and to the attempts to use the Missions as a means of introducing greater flexibility among the work force.

We support the projects of indigenous

development as self-managed experiences of the community with the active and decision-making participation of the people, to supply the basic and urgent needs of thousands of families who are excluded by capitalism. We demand the granting of cheap credit and technical assistance to communities and peasant organizations to develop agricultural projects.

We fight for the elimination of the supposed "autonomy" of the Central Bank of Venezuela. We demand the nationalization of the private banking sector and the creation of a big national bank that concentrates all the resources originating from exports, renationalization of the banks currently in the hands of the transnational groups, with workers' control and investigation and punishment of the financial groups and entrepreneurs that promote currency flight.

We fight for the calling of an Oil Constituent Assembly that allows discussion on cargo oil policy, the portfolio of businesses of the PDVSA and the cancellation of all the concessions granted to the multinationals.

We fight for revolutionary co-management, workers' control and socialism. We understand co-management as a transitional stage towards socialism, during which the workers, in a free, democratic and revolutionary fashion, gain experience in administering public and private companies; advancing towards workers' control of production, the accountability of enterprises and the elimination of the social relations of capitalist production, to replace them by those of the socialist model.

We pronounce ourselves in solidarity with the workers of the electric sector, Alcasa and other companies, where the experience of co-management has gone furthest, so that this experience is genuinely democratic, reverses the techno-bureaucracy and aims at workers' control and socialism.

We fight for the re-opening of any company closed in an arbitrary fashion by the bosses and we demand from the government its expropriation and

restitution to the workers so that they can administer it and recommence production.

We are with the UNT and we support the Corriente Sindical Clasista, Revolucionaria y Democrática. We recognize the UNT as the trade union structure that is the most representative and most in accord with the interests of the Venezuelan workers. We place ourselves at the side of the class-conscious and revolutionary sectors that fight against the parasites and the new bureaucracy that seeks to crystallize inside it.

We fight for the autonomy and full political independence of the UNT, with respect to the bosses, the state and the government. We demand that the workers and the communities are consulted for discussion and the adoption of laws. We pronounce ourselves against the restriction of the right to strike contemplated in the partial reform of the Penal Code.

We fight for unity of action, through the Fronts of Struggle of the workers, peasants, students, housewives, the rural and indigenous communities, to defend the rights of the people or the conquest of new demands.

We defend the free right of trade union organization and support the indefinite extension of the Decree of Labour Irremovability and its application to all workers and employees who earn less than a million Bolívars as salary.

We condemn the employers' repression and demand exemplary sanctions against the heads of companies who violate the rights of workers and do not respect the standards of the Ministry of Labour.

We support the proposal of the UNT in the state of Sucre, where it demands that the state issue a certificate which attests that the private companies respect the rights of workers.

We support the self-organization and self-determination of the population. The communities and the workers have understood that to deepen the revolutionary process they must set up their own organizational tools,

democratic, autonomous and sovereign. As revolutionaries we commit ourselves to push forward and develop all the forms of self-organization adopted by the people to deepen the revolution.

We are in solidarity with all the fighters and activists, who declare themselves in rebellion against the orders imposed by the "political directors" including against the "benevolent finger" of the President, which has been used to justify corrupt and bureaucratic practices, in opposition to the right of the people to determine its political and electoral choices, as in the current electoral debate.

We give our support to those who, having won popular support in the internal elections of the parties, have presented their candidacies on an individual basis to respect the self-determination of the people.

Destitution and prison for the corrupt.
No to impunity

We repudiate corruption and all the negligent practices that waste the national patrimony. We demand the immediate dismissal and imprisonment of any public or private functionary involved in fraudulent practices.

We cannot turn the page if the human, political, economic and social wrongs that the putschist company bosses and imperialism have inflicted on the people by constant conspiratorial and counter-revolutionary actions go unpunished.

Investigation and punishment of the owners of the private media who promoted the putschist actions of April 2002 and the oil sabotage. Updating of the details on the terrorist action that led to the death of Danilo Anderson [8]. Public judgment, with the participation of the trade union leaders and revolutionaries against the putschist Carlos Ortega. [9]

- We are internationalists

In insisting on our internationalist conviction we pronounce ourselves in

solidarity with the peoples of the world under attack from imperialist military brutality, in particular with Iraq, Afghanistan and Haiti; in the same way that we are in solidarity with the just struggle of the Bolivian people.

We reject the pragmatic diplomacy of the government concerning the revolutionary processes in Latin America. We are for the support to all the processes of struggle and mobilization of the peoples, respecting the rhythms, dynamics and perspectives that their protagonists trace

Our methods of action: democracy and mobilization

All these demands can only be satisfied if we, workers and people, mobilize ourselves in a unitary and massive fashion to demand basic solutions to the problems that Venezuelan working people face today.

We distance ourselves totally from terrorist methods and call on the mobilization of the masses at national and international level to confront the enemies of the workers and peoples of the world who fight for their liberation.

We fight to democratize the professional, trade union, community and political structures that the workers and people adopt. Our commitment in relation to the rank and file is to struggle so that they decide.

Organizational accords

1. To set up the National Constituting Committee of the new political organization, to which we give the name PARTIDO REVOLUCIÓN Y SOCIALISMO and the acronym PRS.

2. To publish from August onwards a national bimonthly newspaper, which we call OPCIÓN SOCIALISTA.

3. To hold regional meetings in August and September, leading to the setting up of state committees for building the

Partido Revolución y Socialismo.

4. To form activist nuclei of the PRS in all the towns, neighbourhoods and workplaces.

5. To distribute the draft Political Programme and Statutes of the new organization among the activists and adherents of the new organization.

6. To hold a National Ideological Seminar on October 20, 21 and 22 so that the activists have an initial discussion to precise, complete or amend the draft Programme and Statutes and define the parameters for the drawing up of the Political Theses and Platform of Struggle of the new organization.

7. To ensure full autonomy and political independence, the new organization will not depend on any institutional or enterprise financing, so we are launching a National Financial Campaign, through which affiliates, sympathizers, friends and people in general, can give us their support and solidarity.

8. To hold a National Constituent Congress in early 2006 to adopt political and organizational theses and the programme and statutes of the new party.

- The National Constituting Committee of the PRS is made up of four national coordinators - Orlando Chirino, Gonzalo Gomez, Miguel Angel Hernandez A. and Stalin Perez Borges - and some state coordinators: in the state of Anzoategui - Jose Boda, Luis Diaz; in that of Aragua - Emilio Bastidas, Richard Gallardo, Humberto Lopez; in that of Bolívar - Edgar Caldera, Jose Melendez, Orlando Perez; in that of Carabobo - Jose Barreto, Ismael Hernandez, William Porras, Americo Tabata, Jesus Vargas; in that of Caracas - Roger Bonilla, Marco Tulio Diaz, Tony Leon, Jose Mendoza, Franklin Zambrano ; in that of Falcon - Victor Garcia, Horacio Medina ; in that of Miranda - Armando Guerra, Yan Marcano ; in Tachira - Vilma Vivas, Javier Arellano; in Vargas - Antonio Jaspe; in Yaracuy - Hernan Brito, Oswaldo Villegas.

Crisis and rebirth of the Left

20 October 2005, by **François Sabado**

Although this crisis has been accelerated by the scandal of the buying of parliamentary votes by its leaders, which broke out last June, the roots of the crisis are to be found in the rapid change in the identity of the PT. [