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Electoral polarization and crisis of the state

22 December 2005, by **Pablo Stefanoni**

A parliamentary agreement then enabled the president of the Supreme Court of Justice, Eduardo Rodríguez Veltze, to become President of the Republic. This political agreement was the origin of the calling of early general elections for December 18th 2005 [1], and included the convoking of a Constituent Assembly and the holding of a referendum on departmental autonomy in July 2006.



By this agreement, it was intended to put an end by electoral means to the “catastrophic equality” that has lasted for five years now between conservative and progressive forces, five years in the course of which neither the indigenous-popular leaders of the West (neo-nationalists) nor the leaders who come from the private sector of the East (neo-liberals) succeeded in imposing their project of society, each of them settling for putting in check the project of the opposing camp.

In the course of these years of political crisis and social convulsions, Bolivian political life has been marked by the emergence onto the national political stage of peasant and indigenous movements, as well as by the politicization of ethnicity as an element of self-expression of the popular sectors, particularly in the

context of the weakening of traditional class identity, which, in the case of Bolivia, was rooted in the mines (to such an extent that some people spoke of a “miners’ Marxism”).

However, this “ethnic” construction of the people was associated with a - selective - re-appropriation of the old lines of cleavage that were characteristic of the revolutionary nationalism of the 1950s which, once the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) went into crisis at the beginning of the 21st century, remained “available”. Among these cleavages is the classical antagonism between the “nation” and the “anti-nation”.

The Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) is the force that has best succeeded in taking advantage of the deep crisis of the traditional parties which have administered the neo-liberal model since 1985. It is a “New Left”, distant from the traditional Left, both on the level of its discourse and from the point of view of its organisational structure, much more comparable to a “confederation of unions” than to a classical left party.

Today, its candidate for the presidency, Evo Morales, is riding high in the opinion polls, in a context of polarisation with the right-wing coalition, Democratic and Social Power (PODEMOS), led by ex-President Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga, who

is stubbornly waging a “dirty war” of rare intensity against the Left, playing on the fear of “the country being isolated” in the event of a victory of Morales.



Evo Morales with new vice president Álvaro García Linera (right).

This polarisation is condemning Samuel Doria Medina, who is in the cement business, to third place, in spite of his repeated attempts to come across as the representative of a “rational centre”, faced with a Left and a Right whose actions are portrayed as contrary to the interests of the country.

For its part, the MNR, still led by Sánchez de Lozada from Washington, has put its money on a virtually unknown son of Japanese immigrants, Michiaki Nagatani, to try and at least reach the threshold of 5 per cent of the vote. An objective that is very far from the traditional results of this party, which controlled, for more than half a century, the political life of the country.

Despite the scale of the anti-neoliberal social mobilisations, the Right is weakened, but not beaten, which means that a left government must not expect to be navigating in calm

waters. According to the same polls which make Evo the future president of Bolivia, the Right would control the Senate and almost all the prefectures [2], in a context where there are demands for autonomy in two strategic regions of the country: Santa Cruz de la Sierra (in the East) and Tarija (in the South), two departments where the principal reserves of gas and oil are concentrated.

Two “agendas” were imposed in the course of the crisis that began in 2003: the “October agenda”, whose objectives are the nationalisation of hydrocarbons and the calling of a Constituent Assembly, and which is defended by the social movements, and the “January agenda”, whose principal demand is the winning of regional autonomy, and which is carried by the civic committees [3] of Santa Cruz and Tarija.

The nationalisation of gas

The product of social pressure - in a climate that is ever more nationalist - the new law on hydrocarbons was adopted in June 2005. This law increases the taxes that the oil companies have to pay [4], enables the state to get back the ownership of the hydrocarbons “on the surface” and promotes the “re-founding” of the national oil company (YPFB). A year before, in July 2004, Bolivians voted massively in a referendum in favour of more state regulation of the oil industry.

And during the crisis of May-June 2005, the social wave that was favourable to nationalisation spread to the whole country, thus canalising a series of accumulated frustrations, associated with the desire to put an end to the permanent pillage of the country’s natural resources by the multinationals, who only left crumbs, and this in midst of an ocean of hardship and of chronic poverty.

The majority of Bolivians see the regaining of the income from oil as the “last chance” for the country to take

off economically and to accede to a socially inclusive modernisation.

However, in spite of the “moderation” of the juridical norm that was finally adopted, and at a moment when the demands for nationalisation of the exploitation and management of oil were stronger and stronger, the oil companies, the international institutions and the multilateral credit organisms nevertheless opposed these new juridical dispositions, considered as “confiscatory”.

The pressures that resulted - which included, for example, threats of judgements by arbitration tribunals, judgments that were made possible by investment protection agreements - have succeeded up to now in preventing the signature of any new contract between the Bolivian state and the multinational enterprises who profit from this new system of exploitation (however the law established a delay of 180 days for the conclusion of these new contracts).

The demands concerning autonomy

To the demands for nationalisation have been added the demands for departmental autonomy, formulated essentially by the elites of Santa Cruz, elites who nevertheless enjoy broad support among the population.

The inhabitants of Santa Cruz have already obtained the election of prefects by universal suffrage, at the same time as the general elections of December 18th [5], and also succeeded in rallying behind them the departments of Beni, Pando and Tarija.

The Civic Committee - which includes within it a strong business component, but which is nonetheless considered by the population as representative - gained legitimacy for its demands thanks to a massive general assembly organised in January 2005 (which mobilised more than 200,000 people), as well as by a petition carrying 300,000 signatures recognised by the National Electoral Court (CNE), whose

aim was to demand the convocation of a referendum on autonomy by citizens’ initiative.

Many people make the point that during the neo-liberal era, the elites of Santa Cruz controlled the strategic places in the state apparatus [6] (among others, the National Institute of Agrarian Reform), operating directly from La Paz to take advantage of public policies that were favourable to their interests, policies such as the abolition of debts.

Today, these same elites are afraid that the coming Constituent Assembly and a possible triumph of the MAS would lead to the scenario of the “revenge of the indigenous”, which would put on the table a certain number of sensitive subjects such as land ownership (in a region where ownership of land is strongly concentrated in the hands of a handful of people). For this reason, the demand for autonomy can be understood as taking refuge on the “local level”, so as to protect the region from the conflicts that are taking place at national level, and from the potential economic and social transformations that a triumph of the MAS on 18th December could lead to.

Since the 1960s, the economy of the region of Santa Cruz has seen its contribution to Bolivia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increase constantly and today, its economic activity seems more dynamic, more technically efficient, and more open to business and trade, than that of other regions of the country. This economy is characterised by a particularly important service sector and mining and agro-export activities (in the case of soja, for example).

The sociologist and MAS candidate for the vice-presidency, Alvaro Garcia Linera, notes that in recent decades, “the rising economic power has shifted from the West to the East, but the power of socio-economic mobilisation has been reinforced in the West, thus giving rise to a new geographical uncertainty in the country”. And he concludes that “whereas in the West discursive constructions have emerged which have associated the economic crisis with neo-liberalism, in the East -

where the hegemony of a business culture has continued - the difficulties have been associated with La Paz centralism and not with the economic model”.

We should add to this that openly racist attitudes, such as the attempts of the Youth Union of Santa Cruz to prevent, wielding clubs, a peasant demonstration from entering the city in June 2005, have turned regional cleavages into cleavages that are also ethnic, in the absence of national leaderships that are capable of giving expression to the ethnic and social diversity that are, however, constitutive of this Andean-Amazonian nation.

Towards a “Venezuelanisation” of Bolivia?

A few days away from the December 18th elections, it seems obvious that the fall of the neo-liberal ancien regime has allowed some key ideas, of a nationalist bent, to be expressed, but without however engendering a new

national hegemony. The “counter-hegemonic” camp finds itself today accidentally associated with the MAS, but is having great difficulty in imagining a “post-liberal” scenario.

The post-electoral panorama - with a possible triumph of the Right in at least five of the nine departments - underlines the geographical limits of the present cycle of political renovation of the country. Quiroga was sharply criticised when presented his lists of candidates for the Assembly and the Senate, which were immediately seen as a “machine for recycling” the old, discredited traditional politicians. Despite that, the candidacy of the conservative ex-President - who is curiously using a red star as his logo - is condensing the “anti-Evo” and “anti-blockade” vote.

A vote that regroups not only the elites who are reticent to lose the power they have enjoyed since the foundation of the Republic, but also sectors from the middle, and even popular, classes, who are afraid of seeing an indigenous “illiterate” receive the tricolour scarf and the commander’s baton which symbolise the power of the head of the Bolivian

state. Others fear that the aid coming from international cooperation will be suppressed, whereas it has become a vital resource for the economic stability of the country, because of the rickety state that public finances are in today.

In relation to this conjuncture, the challenges that the MAS has to confront are considerable: first of all it has to win the elections, then to guarantee that the country can be governed. Several analysts underline the potential dangers that a government headed by the indigenous Left could encounter, in the event of a “Venezuelanisation” of Bolivia: a coming together of possible sabotage on the part of local elites from the private sector and operations of destabilisation organised by a United States diplomacy that distrusts Morales, who is in the habit of saying that Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez are “the commanders of the liberation forces of the continent”.

Demonstrating an exemplary lucidity, the leader of the MAS has remarked on this subject “that it is a question not only of succeeding in forming a government, but of taking power”.

“If Evo doesn’t nationalize the gas, he will fall like Lozada”

21 December 2005

Felipe Quispe invited you on to his list as candidate for the vice-presidency, which you finally refused. Why?

What Felipe wanted was to appropriate the name of the COB. He didn’t want me to come in my own name. That was a kind of condition for my participation. Now the COB cannot act like a political party, it’s an instrument in the service of the workers and we cannot commit it as such. That’s why I refused.

Alvaro Garcia has revealed that

negotiations had taken place between the COB and the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) with a view to a possible alliance. For your part, you have remained very discreet on the subject...

You have to understand that for ten years, Evo Morales as well as Felipe Quispe have no longer been concerned by the fact that the working class is the vanguard of the proletariat. They would like to lead the COB, but they can’t because it’s called the Bolivian Workers’ Confederation. But they are

only leaders of the countryside and so they can’t claim to lead it.



Jaime Solares (left) with Evo Morales

The COB was created as an organ of the proletariat, whose objective is to defend the workers of this country. Evo, Felipe and now even Alvaro Garcia say: “The COB is now just a small movement with a big history”. As far as I’m concerned, I think they

are making a big mistake, because the working class remains an important social force in the country, even if we are not as numerous as in the past.

So we are not with any political party and we won't support anybody. We don't want to bear the responsibility of having supported a government that will attack the workers tomorrow, even if it's a government of the MAS.

How exactly do you analyse the possibility of an indigenous government coming to power?

If Evo comes to power, he will have difficulties, faced with a tough Right, because he is not a revolutionary but a reformist. If he was a revolutionary, we would be with him. But his perspective is not one of a worker-peasant government working for the revolution.

So we want to maintain a position of observers in relation to an indigenous government, to see how it will evolve. It is obvious that if Evo doesn't nationalize the gas and the hydrocarbons, he will fall like Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada [7]. On the other hand, we will not obstruct the action of a government which satisfies the demands of the people, even though we may stand aside from it.

Is it the breaking of the Pact of Revolutionary Unity of March 2005 that is the cause of this situation?

In March, we committed ourselves before the people to proceed to nationalize hydrocarbons, without compensation for the oil companies. When the MAS demonstrated in May, it was not around this demand but for a modification of the law on hydrocarbons that did not call into question the illegal contracts linking the state to the oil companies. Subsequently, it was the first to defend the idea that the only way out of the crisis in June was through elections, whereas what was really at stake was the gas!

It was a betrayal, because he did not respect the pact. He did not want this nationalization. The proof of it is that in the course of his campaign, he has already explained that he would not expel any oil company. Now, what we

agreed on was a programme with a revolutionary orientation. And he, like the good reformist he is, is finally proposing to cohabit with private foreign capital.

Today, many unions belonging to the COB have allied as such with the MAS for these elections. What is the impact of that at the trade union level?

Each person knows what they are doing. Within the COB, we have a line and we will maintain it. If there are trade unionists who want to support this or that party, it's their problem, not ours. The COB cannot ally with the MAS.

What are the relations between the two CSUTCBs and the COB today?

For us the leader of the CSUTCB is Felipe Quispe. Evo has nothing to do with us. Quispe has an organic relationship with the COB. Roman Loayza has never done anything on this level. He has always devoted more of his life to his party than to his union responsibilities.

There has been talk for some time of establishing the COB's own political instrument...

This instrument has already existed for several months already, following a decision taken during a general assembly of the COB. It represents the political arm of the COB in order to take power and its provisional name is "political instrument of the workers". Our political work will consist of consolidating this instrument around a revolutionary programme based on the nationalisation of hydrocarbons without compensation and the establishment of a revolutionary and indigenous Constituent Assembly where representation will be through organisations and not constituencies, which would be an approach in conformity with the bourgeois parliamentary model.

It will also be necessary to reinforce the Indigenous Popular Assembly [8] that came out of the May-June crisis, as a form of popular self-organisation that will make it possible to lay the foundations of a worker-peasant revolution of a socialist

character.

Wouldn't a better coordination of the workers and peasant movement be achieved through a more realistic representation of the peasants within the COB?

Yes, that's the argument of the MAS for taking power within the COB! Because the present statutes indicate that the vanguard of the proletariat is the miners, and we must maintain that because our organisation is a workers' confederation. The United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB), as far as I know, doesn't mention workers! They are the proprietors of their confederation and they are our allies.

What is at stake in the Workers' and Peoples' Summit in January and the COB congress in February?

The Summit will have, among other things, the function of preparing the congress of the COB. What is at stake in this congress is to confront the divisions that affect many sectors: the peasants, the miners, the oil workers, the departmental confederation in Cochabamba, where Oscar Olivera [9] has been ousted from the executive committee.

It will also be a question of discussing the attitude of certain unions who collaborate with the employers, as for example in the departmental confederation of Santa Cruz [10]. Faced with this serious crisis, our guiding line is the class struggle orientation of our confederation. The COB no longer sells itself to successive governments, as it did in the past. Today the COB is poor, but it is honest.

Certain media accuse you of having called for a military coup d'etat during the May-June crisis. Can you clarify what your position was?

Ninety-eight per cent of the media here belong to private groups, which have deformed what I said as much as they could.

I never called on soldiers to carry out a coup d'etat. I simply said that if a soldier who was patriotic and

committed to the people, like Chavez in Venezuela, took power in Bolivia, I would be the first to support him, to end social injustice and dire poverty. All that is nothing but a campaign of slander against me, which Evo Morales has an unfortunate tendency to repeat.

For some people, there is a kind of coherence between such an attitude and the suspicions that hang over your so-called past as a paramilitary working for the regime of general Luis Garcia Meza.. [11].

This campaign of slander that is conducted against me serves the interests of imperialism and all its lackeys in Bolivia. Luis Garcia Meza, who is today imprisoned in Chonchocorro, says that he remembers me.

But he obviously has a selective memory, because when he is asked where he buried the victims of his regime, he says he cannot remember, not even in the case of Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz [12].

Several sources affirm that 10,000 dollars was given to Garcia Meza to formulate these accusations against me. When he said that for the first time, the prison authorities and the press put on a real media show.

It is a real manipulation whose only aim is to put me out of action. All those who know me laughed on hearing the news. As for my comrades in the COB, up to now they are supporting me in spite of the slanders, because I defend a correct line for the workers.

Historic Victory of the MAS and Morales

21 December 2005, by Herve do Alto

These were the first words, on Sunday evening, of the new Bolivian president, Evo Morales. Someone who in the course of his life has been a lama breeder, a trumpet player and a coca grower, became, on this 18th of December, the first indigenous person to accede to the office of President of the Republic in the whole of Latin America.

The calm that reigned in the streets of La Paz and El Alto was somewhat deceptive. Because on this Sunday the 18th of December, it really is a historic evening that the Bolivian people are living through.



The unexpected landslide in favour of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) enabled its leader, Evo Morales, to obtain a score of 51 per cent.

This unprecedented result also puts an end to twenty years of "pact democracy": the election of presidents on an indirect second round in Congress, and the obligation to obtain there an absolute majority, had systematically favoured governmental alliances between neo-liberal parties

in the course of the short history of Bolivian democracy.

With a result like that, the MAS is thus sure of being able to govern alone. But that doesn't mean that governing will be an easy thing to do. The Right is in a rout, but for all that it is not definitively beaten.

Certainly, the distance between Morales and his presidential rivals is enormous, and the defeat that it represents for them could very well mean their withdrawal from political life. Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga, the candidate of the alliance of the liberal Right Democratic and Social Power (PODEMOS), received 31 per cent of the vote, a result that is only a reflection of the polarization that Quiroga fomented throughout the campaign.

The centre-right candidate Samuel Doria Medina, of National Unity (UN), seen as a potential winner in August, won in fact only 8 per cent of the vote. For Quiroga and for Doria Medina, the defeat of the Right is above all their defeat, and their credibility is seriously damaged.

The only good news in the camp of the "neo-liberals" is the surprising "survival" of the Revolutionary

Nationalist Movement (MNR), which was however identified as mainly responsible for the massacres that took place during the first "gas war" in October 2003.

With a candidate who was virtually a political unknown, the son of Japanese immigrants Michiaki Nagatani, the MNR won 7 per cent of the vote thanks in particular to a significant mobilization of its historic bastions, such as the department of Beni.

However, these results only appear to be a total defeat, inasmuch as the Right could still have the possibility of "blocking" initiatives of the future Masista government. In reality the MAS only has a relative majority in the Chamber of Deputies. [13] The MNR, with one senator, gives the majority to the neo-liberal and conservative camp.

Finally, the prefectural elections, which also took place this Sunday, only seem to have given two or maybe three departmental governments to the MAS (Oruro, Potosi and Chuquis), the others falling into the hands of the Right. That means that the room for manoeuvre of the future government could be very limited at the regional level, as witness the victory in Santa Cruz of a radical supporter of regional autonomy, Ruben Costas.

"Now, Evo must respect his promises". That is how a militant of the MAS put it in El Alto on Sunday evening. A lot of pressure is coming from the "base" of the party itself, and the newly elected parliamentarians, like Maria Esther Udaeta, stressed the importance of "maintaining a permanent dialogue with all the social movements", whether or not they are members of the MAS.

Expectations are high, in particular concerning the nationalization of hydrocarbons and the election of a Constituent Assembly in August 2006, and it is very likely that the first days of the government will be marked by the adoption of symbolic measures. Thus, for Julio Colque, a former union activist in the mines, "the goal is to put an end to the neo-liberal model and economic globalization.

To do that, we have to do away with decree 21060 [a decree promulgated in 1985, which made it possible to privatize state enterprises] which is nothing but a Trojan horse for it". For Evo Morales himself, who was speaking from Cochabamba this Sunday, the struggle is not only economic. "The election of an

indigenous person to the head of the Republic will only be of use if it makes it possible to put an end to the colonial state in which we live, and for this new state to be a point of support in the struggle against all forms of racism".

The election of Evo Morales represents an important turning point not only for Bolivia, but for the whole of the Latin American continent. According to Morales, "we are in the third millennium, the millennium of the peoples, and no longer of the Empire. Our victory is also the victory of peoples in struggle".

For Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, "the Bolivians have written anew page of their history (...) making it possible to envisage the end of poverty and to enter on the road of development". There is no doubt that the arrival of Morales at the head of the Bolivian state potentially represents a strong reinforcement for Chavez's project of the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA), which for the moment only formally involves Venezuela and Cuba.

On the other hand, many questions

remain concerning the attitude that the United States will adopt towards the future MAS government. For the moment, although the United States embassy has up to now maintained a cautious attitude, the declarations of the former functionary of the State Department Otto Reich reveal the hostility that the Bush administration maintains towards the cocalero leader, whom the United States have often seen as nothing but a "narco-terrorist" because he wants to depenalise coca.

On Sunday evening, Reich in fact said that he hoped that "[what Morales] said during the campaign, he won't put into practice, because that would be very bad for Bolivia. (...) Bolivia cannot live without the rest of the world. (...) The United States puts conditions on its aid.

Now, we are the main donors of aid to Bolivia, and if the government of this country is hostile to individual freedoms, to human rights and to civil rights, the United States will not be able to continue doing that". Quite obviously, the first days of this future government, which comes from the popular and indigenous movements of Bolivia, are likely to be eventful.

"The MAS is of the Centre-Left"

20 December 2005, by **Pablo Stefanoni**

What difficulties emerged during the negotiations with the other components of the Left?

From a programmatic point of view, there is a consensus, from the most moderate to the most radical, on the demands that should be put forward. We were quickly able to reach agreement on a common platform of reforms: nationalization of hydrocarbons, a Constituent Assembly and a new economic model. Where the difficulties appeared was when the time came to discuss list of candidates. However, there are some principles which seem to me to be essential.



Álvaro García Linera

First of all, the respect for the territorial representativeness of the organizations, which is after all an original way to build a social network of electoral mobilization. There is a general acceptance of the principle that consists of leaving each organisation a form of sovereignty in choosing its candidates, and that enabled us to make quick progress.

It is a logic that is very different from the one that governed the previous left fronts between parties. But since,

in certain territories, several organisations are superposed, for example in El Alto, it is necessary to achieve a fair balance. And that is where the difficulties appeared.

Did the Bolivian Workers Confederation (COB) want well-placed candidates in return for allying with the MAS?

Alvaro Garcia Linera: All the organisations want that, the COB the same as the others.

Did Jaime Solares want to lead the alliance along with Evo Morales?

Solares wanted the COB to be at the

centre of the initiative, for it to be the entity that coordinated the other movements, and I think that in the period we are living through, no social movement can attribute to itself such prerogatives, because there is no longer a national movement in Bolivia. All the social movements, today, are regional and local movements. There exists in the COB a kind of melancholy, but we are not dealing with the COB of the 1970s.

Where do you situate the MAS from an ideological point of view?

I would situate it on the centre-left, because the project of economic and social transformations that this organisation wants to carry through cannot be described as either communist or socialist or even 'communitarist' [a reference to the indigenous communities as units of economic and social production - translator's note].

Is it your thesis that socialism is not viable in Bolivia today?

There are two reasons why there is not much chance of a socialist regime being installed in Bolivia. On the one hand, there is a proletariat that is numerically in a minority and politically non-existent, and you cannot build socialism without a proletariat.

Secondly, the potential for agrarian and urban communities is very much weakened. There is an implosion of community economies into family structures, which have been the framework within which the social movements have arisen. In Bolivia, 70 per cent of workers in the cities work in family-based economic structures, and you do not build socialism on the basis of a family economy.

In that case, what kind of system does the MAS want to build?

A kind of Andean capitalism.

What is Andean capitalism?

It is a question of building a strong state, which can coordinate in a balanced way the three "economic-productive" platforms that coexist in Bolivia: the community-based, the family-based and the "modern industrial".

It is a question of transferring a part of the surplus of the nationalised hydrocarbons [oil and gas] in order to encourage the setting up of forms of self-organisation, of self-management and of commercial development that is really Andean and Amazonian.



Up to now, these traditional sectors have not been able to develop because of a "modern-industrial" sector that has cornered the surpluses. Our idea is that these traditional sectors should have an economic support, should have access to raw materials and markets, which could then generate prosperity within these artisan and family-based processes. Bolivia will still be capitalist in 50 or 100 years.

Don't you consider that the movements in defence of water in Cochabamba and El Alto are forms of community-type experiences?

They are community experiences socially and economically, but not politically. They are a dramatic expression of the communitarist limits of the present social movement, for example in the domain of the management of new enterprises. But in any case, these experiences enable us to conceive of a political revolution,

in the Marxist sense of the term, which in the case of Bolivia corresponds to the decolonisation of the state.

What differences are there between today's candidate of the MAS and the leader of the EGTK?

There is a line of continuity and a line of rupture. The continuity lies in the conviction that I have, that the indigenous peoples must govern Bolivia, and that this is the only way to overcome the fault line that has existed for 180 years between society and the state, and to end the colonial character of the Republic, which affects just as much the state institutions as the private lives of Bolivians.

The difference lies in the means: fifteen years ago, we thought that it could come about through an armed uprising of the communities. Today, we think that it is an objective that we can attain through a great electoral triumph. The means change, but the objectives remain the same.

What are your principal theoretical and ideological influences?

I will mention five writers. Two classical writers have contributed to my education. They are Marx, but the Marx of Capital, not the Marx of the manuals [the training manuals of the communist parties] and Max Weber. Reading him led me to become interested in the role of the symbolic in political struggles. Another decisive influence in my intellectual formation is undoubtedly Pierre Bourdieu, from whom I inherit my way of analysing fields, relationships of forces in struggles. And I would cite two classical Bolivian writers: Fausto Reinaga and Rene Zavaleta [14].

"I am the bad conscience of Evo Morales"

20 December 2005, by **Herve do Alto**

Herve do Alto: What are your hopes for these 2005 general elections, considering that the polls are giving you a result greatly inferior to the 6 per cent that you won in 2002?

Felipe Quispe: In fact, the MIP has no economic resources. It is an indigenous, native organization whose only capital is the mobilization of its militants. So we don't have campaign offices in the neighbourhoods like the other parties do.



Felipe Quispe

In these conditions, to compete with the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), Democratic and Social Power (PODEMOS) or the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) on a national level is for us mission impossible, all the more so as these parties respond to the interests of the multinationals and of imperialism. We are only the expression of the most oppressed, which doesn't mean however that we start out as losers. We have good hopes of winning elected positions.

Has the division of the United Trade Union confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB) [15] affected your own public?

First of all, you have to remember that those who split the CSUTCB were the MAS. They have their own Movement of the Landless (MST-B) led by Moises Torres, their CSUTCB led by Roman Loayza...Evo Morales is waging war against me, because I am his bad conscience. As soon as he deviates from a line in defence of the peasants, I give him no peace.

He wants to physically eliminate the militants of eh MIP! For example, in this campaign, I can go anywhere in the country, except to Chapare [16] to which I am denied entry. We don't do that. No militant of the MAS has been

denied entry to the Altiplano, even to Achacachi [17].

Alvaro Garcia Linera, your former comrade in the Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army (EGTK) has however invited you on many occasions to join in the MAS's project for these elections, hasn't he?

Alvaro Garcia was indeed our comrade. He was even commander of the EGTK. Where have you seen a commander who betrayed his troops? Before the campaign, I asked him during a meeting if he wanted to be the MIP candidate for vice-president, or for parliament, and he refused. He said at that time that he wanted to be elected to the Constituent Assembly.

In the course of a subsequent meeting, he explained to us that in his opinion the MAS was going to win and that we had to join their lists, in the name of unity of the indigenous peoples, which we refused to do. I was in Venezuela when I learned that he was the candidate of the MAS. So he's a traitor who had one foot in our camp, and one foot in the camp of the MAS, and he went where that suited him best. He's a White, and like all the Whites in the past, he has betrayed our people.

You refused to ally with the MAS for these elections; however you did so in March 2005, by jointly signing the Pact of Revolutionary Unity against President Carlos Mesa.

That's true, but this kind of conjunctural agreement, even between organisations which hate each other, is nothing unusual for us. When I came out of prison in 1997, they practically came looking for me the following year to put me at the head of the CSUTCB, a Confederation that was then divided between Evo Morales and Alejo Veliz [18].

I was a sort of referee, and I had to sign a secret pact with the two of them in order to be installed. We did indeed sign this pact in March, a pact

that was anti-liberal, anti-imperialist and in favour of the nationalisation of hydrocarbons. But in the end it was the MAS that broke it ! We have never been sectarian towards them, since we even supported Evo in Congress to try and help him become president in 2002.

On that question, you have declared in the press that you will not support Morales in Congress for the presidency and that he let his chance pass him by in 2002. Will you stick to this position?

I have to make one point clear here: this electoral campaign is for us a war that we are waging against all the candidates, including the MAS. Everyone is fighting to maintain and enlarge their own electorate. PODEMOS, for example, has the support of AND (Nationalist Democratic Action, the ex-party of Jorge Quiroga)...The MAS and ourselves, with similar electorates, are therefore also engaged in battle in this campaign. Having said that, we will see what we will do after December 18th. We will decide together in the MIP if we will or will not support Evo for the presidency, if ever we have members of parliament elected.

Furthermore, you have not hesitated to indirectly attack Evo Morales by declaring that you only defended the coca of the Yungas, and by openly suspecting the coca of Chapare of supplying the circuits of the drug trade. Is that something new in your discourse?

The coca of Chapare is worthless, no indigenous person chews it. In Chapare itself, the coca growers consume the coca of the Yungas, which tastes a thousand times better. So I'm just asking myself: if the coca of Chapare is unsuited to traditional consumption, what real use is it, if not for the drug trade? As for me, in any case, I will only defend the coca of the Yungas, which is the sacred leaf...

However, the Yungas is a historic bastion of the MAS...

That's true, all the leaders belong to the MAS. But in the past, we were well established there, before becoming victims of a campaign of slander by this party, which spread rumours of corruption about us. We are nevertheless continuing to carry out work in this region, work that we could describe as clandestine, with a long-term perspective, with young leaders.

Why wasn't the candidacy of Jaime Solares for vice-president confirmed?

We are politically close to Solares, there's no doubt about that. But he is a leader who is permanently slandered and who has to face strong internal opposition within the COB (Bolivian Workers' Confederation) itself.

In fact, he didn't have many people behind him. The COB should have had the responsibility of organising the campaign in the departments of Beni and Pando, but the departmental confederations (CODs) didn't want to do anything. Without militants from his side, such an alliance was becoming difficult and we preferred to go it alone. Having said that, I think that with Solares, we've only put things off till later.

Do you hope to bounce back by taking the leadership of social mobilisations in the event of a MAS government?

I don't really see the situation like that. I think rather that the MAS will want to neutralise us or even kill us. Alvaro Garcia knows us well and he has the means to hurt us. We will no doubt have to go underground to be

able to continue to fight against the system. With Alvaro Garcia in it, a MAS government would undoubtedly be our enemy.

How do you explain that Alvaro Garcia, who was for so long your comrade in the struggle, is advocating in the programme of the MAS an "Andean capitalism", whereas you yourself are taking more and more anti-capitalist positions?

Once again, Alvaro Garcia is a White, he is not indigenous. His proposal is totally foreign to our movement. The indigenous peoples are not capitalist; on the contrary they have been victims of capitalism for centuries. We are communitarists. Any practical implementation of Andean capitalism is doomed to failure.

What will the victory of Morales mean?

20 December 2005, by Herve do Alto

The general elections of December 18th, 2005, was a result of a compromise between President Rodriguez and the social movements at the end of the crisis of May-June. Calling the election was key in getting the mobilizations called off.

They have now led to the victory of the president of the MAS-IPSP (Movement Towards Socialism-Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples), who embodies for many people the social struggles that the Republic has experienced since 2000 and the "water war" in Cochabamba.

If the victory of the MAS means the coming to power of a Left that has been excluded from it since the failure of the government of the UDP (Popular Democratic Union) faced with the economic crisis of 1985, it is nevertheless a Left whose background, sources, traditions and contemporary reality are complex and varied.

The MAS-IPSP, a party at the crossroads between the indigenous, left and nationalist traditions

The electoral successes of the MAS at the general elections of 2002, then at the municipal elections in 2004 (in spite of not winning control of any major city), although they expressed the undeniable popularity of Evo Morales, were also and above all the symbol of the irruption into the political field of a peasant and indigenous movement that is consolidating itself.

This movement, born at the beginning of the 1990s, is in a certain sense the

result of a process of the creation of a "political instrument" that made possible the direct representation of Bolivian peasant and indigenous organisations [19].

The unions of coca growers, engaged since the end of the 1980s in a conflict with the Bolivian Army, which has the support of the American DEA (Drug enforcement Agency), were among its founders.



Evo Morales

The aim of this "political instrument" is among other things, to favour a representation that is called "organic" of these union militants, through the collective adhesion of their organisations. The establishment of such a structural mechanism can be interpreted, in view of the history of this movement, as a double precaution. First of all in relation to

the Katarist movement.

Katarism, in reference to the indigenous leader Tupac Katari who led an uprising around La Paz at the end of 18th century, is a current that contributed to the renewal of a peasant unionism that had up to then been allied to the military regimes. Its leaders sought to fight against the cooptation of union leaders and to elaborate an Indianist ideology which they could use as a support for struggles. [20], initially a cultural movement which emerged at the beginning of the 1970s, whose main objective was to rehabilitate an indigenous identity that was perceived to be oppressed and denied.

The Katarist leaders, among them Genaro Flores and Victor Hugo Cardenas, succeeded in making peasant unionism a bastion of the resistance to the military dictatorships, whereas up till then it had been one of their most loyal supports [21].

However, after democratisation, the entry into politics of the Katarist leaders led to a continual division of this movement and only generated a long line of small, sectarian political parties, whose forces were infinitely smaller than those of the United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB). Ideologically influenced by Katarism, in particular in its defence of a multi-ethnic and multicultural Bolivia, the leaders of the MAS never ceased to consider this current as a negative example from the organisational point of view.

The other decisive factor was the desire to build up a relationship of forces with the Left, which saw and still sees the peasant movement as a stepping-stone to its own emancipation. This virtually systematic disdain for a movement considered to be incapable of leading the social struggles of the country is illustrated by the statutes, still in force, of the Bolivian Workers' Confederation (COB), which attribute the leading role of the trade union entity to the miners, enthroned as the vanguard of the Bolivian proletariat (see the interview with Jaime Solares in this issue).

This is a paradox, when we know today that the miners, crushed by the neo-liberal reforms of 1985, have been reduced to a shadow of their former selves, while the peasants, reinforced numerically by the coca growers of whom many come from...the mines, have a representation within the COB that is inversely proportional to their weight in the political arena.

The virtual absence of a party apparatus, desired and theorised by the leaders of the "political instrument" in the name of the "organic" relations between the MAS and the organisations that are part of it, had however unexpected consequences on the social composition of the party and its leading bodies. As the general elections of 2002 approached [22] the lack of political cadres as well as the desire to attract the votes of the "urban middle classes" pushed Evo Morales in person to launch numerous invitations to intellectuals who came from the Left.

As a symbol, he chose Antonio Peredo, journalist and former Guevarist of the Communist Party, brother of Inti and Coco Peredo who had taken part in Che's guerrilla movement, as candidate for the vice-presidency.

The success obtained in 2002 (the MAS won more than 20 per cent of the votes and 35 members of parliament, thus becoming the second biggest party in Bolivia) therefore had the unexpected consequence of pushing into prominence personalities from the classical Left, foreign to the indigenist currents, within a party which mixes together in an atypical way two political traditions that had up to then carefully maintained independence from each other.

These two traditions nevertheless remain solidly attached to each other by a strong nationalist feeling, born among the peasants from opposition to the interference of the United States in Bolivian political life in general, and on the question of coca in particular, and coming from the anti-imperialist tradition within the Left.

In a certain fashion, the MAS took over the "revolutionary nationalism" that was defended for many years by

the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) up until its conversion to neo-liberalism in 1985, while expressing Katarist and to a lesser extent, Marxist ideas [23].

The social movements are still divided as the elections approach

Despite the preponderant weight of the MAS in the field of left politics, the Bolivian social movement remains strongly divided, in particular because of corporatist logics linked to local issues, and some of them sometimes appear to be radically critical of the party of Evo Morales.

However, it is the unity of the social movements, through the signing of a pact of revolutionary unity regrouping the MAS, the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP), the COB, the two CSUTCBs [24] and the organisations of El Alto, in March 2005, that was at the origin of the fall of the government of Carlos Mesa [25].

This unity quickly broke up, because of dissensions concerning the nationalisation of gas (the MAS was for a long time favourable to a "50-50" solution, before becoming a late convert to nationalisation) and from the traditional competition between leaderships that is so characteristic of Bolivian social movements.

To confront this problem, Evo Morales thought he had found the candidate who would make it possible to draw towards him the last movements who remained reticent, in the person of Alvaro Garcia Linera. This sociologist, who had become popular thanks in particular to his television appearances as a political analyst, is in fact a former comrade in struggle of Felipe Quispe, the leader of the MIP, who was imprisoned at the beginning of the 1990s for his activities in the Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army (EGTK).

Since then, he has basically confined himself to academic activities, while maintaining contacts with all the Bolivian social movements, without exception. When he agreed in mid-

August to be the candidate of the MAS, it was with the ambition of regrouping on the same list, but behind Evo Morales, all the movements, with the aim of guaranteeing the broadest unity of the working-class, indigenous and intellectual Left.

Today this attempt by Alvaro Garcia and Evo Morales seems to have only half succeeded. The alliances achieved by the leadership of the MAS do in fact go beyond the traditional allies of the party: thus, among them we can count the Movement Without Fear (MSM) of the mayor of La Paz, Juan del Granado; many small left parties such as the Democratic Socialist Party (PSD) or the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Bolivia (PCMLB, Maoist) which has a base in El Alto, and working-class sectors like the Confederation of Pensioners of Bolivia, the National Confederation of Micro and Small Businessmen (CONAMYPE) and also the co-operativist miners (FENCOMIN).

However, although this electoral unity of the Left is undoubtedly the broadest since the unity achieved by the UDP in 1982, the most important social leaders have remained outside it. Felipe Quispe is standing again for the MIP, but without much hope of repeating the result he got in 2002, 6 per cent. The division of the CSUTCB seems to have considerably weakened it, and Roman Loayza now comes across as the legitimate leader of the peasants, including in the Altiplano that was traditionally loyal to the "Maliku" [26].

As for Jaime Solares, the executive secretary of the COB, he almost became the vice-presidential candidate of the MIP, but the risk of losing his position in the Confederation seems to have convinced him to change his mind. Furthermore, he seems to be aiming to build a "political instrument of the workers" attached to the COB and the workers' movement, considering, following a very orthodox Marxist vision, that "the working class remains the only class capable of leading the Bolivian people towards its emancipation, not the peasantry" [27].

Both of them were approached by

Alvaro Garcia to join the MAS lists. But the failure of such an alliance does not have the same causes according to each side. While Quispe and Solares stress the differences that were expressed during the May-June crisis, Garcia speaks of a simple problem of positions on the lists...A version that does after all remain quite credible, when you see how the negotiations with the Regional Workers' Confederation (COR) and the Federation of Neighbourhood Committees (FEJUVE) of El Alto, which were largely commented on by the media, failed [28].

Whereas they almost stood for the party of Evo Morales, the leaders of the COR and the FEJUVE are now launching more and more criticisms of the MAS, reproaching it in particular with not according sufficient importance to the creation of a Constituent Assembly. This attitude is not understood on the side of the MAS, as the member of parliament and candidate Gustavo Torrico explains: "a law to convoke the Constituent Assembly that was drawn up by the present parliament would in all likelihood favour maintaining the presence of the most conservative sectors of society in the seats of power".

The incessant criticisms against the MAS have even led certain leaders to relativise the opposition between Evo Morales and the candidates of the Right, Samuel Doria Medina (National Unity UN) and Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga (Democratic Social Power, PODEMOS), in this way giving the impression that the radicalism of their discourse is not necessarily followed up by a consistent attitude in practice. Such is the case of Edgar Patana, leader of the COR of El Alto, who will vote "neither for Tuto nor for Evo. Both of them will have to prove themselves".

This position is not however shared by everyone, as is demonstrated by Jaime Solares, who, although not supporting Morales, nevertheless declares that "the main enemies of the Bolivian people are the neo-liberals and the pro-imperialists, represented by the candidacies of Doria Medina and â€˜Tuto' Quiroga".

An electoral programme with ambiguous outlines...

If Alvaro Garcia failed somewhat in his attempt to win the favours of the leaders of the most significant social movements outside the MAS, on the other hand he succeeded in what was in a certain fashion the second objective of his candidacy: to involve the intellectuals and the "urban middle class" in the campaign of the MAS.

Around Alvaro Garcia a team of economists and sociologists has taken shape (Carlos Villegas, Juan Ramon Quintana, Elisabeth Salguero...) responsible for drawing up the most important parts of the MAS's programme, under the leadership of the vice-presidential candidate. So although they are integrated into the working commissions on the programme, it is not the principal leaders of the party who have taken charge of this task.

Thus, the phenomenon of "delegation" of political work to individuals whose origins are foreign to the party, which was already present in 2002, seems to have become further accentuated on the occasion of this 2005 campaign. There are very few "organic intellectuals" who come from the peasant and indigenous movement.

On the other hand, the inflow of intellectuals, some coming from the Left like Alvaro Garcia, is tending to modify, sometimes substantially, the programmatic orientations of the MAS, often giving them a "technocratic touch". We cannot however conclude that there is a kind of "sleight of hand" on the part of intellectuals who are taking over the party. It's more a question of what you might call a "reciprocal exchange of legitimacies": Evo Morales, who in his speeches, unceasingly celebrates "the alliance between the peasants and the intellectuals" is trying in this way to make credible the perspective of a MAS government; for the intellectuals, it is a question of legitimising in the

political field a learning that is often purely “technical”, because it is often disconnected, as a result of their own lack of militant experience, from any political involvement (in particular in the economic sphere).

The programme of the party takes up many of the aspirations of the majority of social movements: convocation of a Constituent Assembly, nationalisation of hydrocarbons and natural resources, defence and industrialisation of the coca leaf, definition of policies, national as well as foreign, independently of the United States (a demand that is expressed in the slogan: “nationalise the government!”). All of these are points that, as such, conflict with the interests of the North American neighbour, as they conflict with those of the multinationals involved in the business of gas, wood or water (in particular the French companies Total and Suez-Lyonnaise des Eaux).

However, in spite of this apparent radicalism, the MAS is constantly, in the person of Alvaro Garcia, bringing nuances into the positions it takes and frequently proclaiming that no one need fear a Masista government, “except those who have really swindled the people”. This sometimes gave rise to tensions or misunderstandings in the MAS’s own campaign: while Morales was demonstrating against the ALCA (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas) alongside Hugo Chavez in Mar del Plata, Alvaro Garcia was explaining that that didn’t affect possible bilateral negotiations with the

United States for a Free Trade treaty (TLC), a treaty that was desirable “as long as it does not infringe on the economic sovereignty of Bolivia” [29]; While Morales celebrates the fraternity that links him to Chavez or to Fidel Castro, Alvaro confesses his “admiration for European social democracy” and thinks that Venezuela, like “any other state, is above all seeking to satisfy its own interests in the framework of inter-state relations”.

So there is no “revolution” in view, nor very radical measures like a new agrarian reform or an ambitious programme of social aid, which could however seem to be “socially necessary” in a country where extreme poverty reigns. All the more so as Evo Morales has indicated that in spite of the mention in the programme of the repeal of supreme decree 21060, responsible for the massive privatisations of 1985, a Masista government would nevertheless begin to act with neo-liberal laws...

The main radical changes that the programme puts forward are above all in the sphere of production, through the rehabilitation of the state, whose role would be to coordinate the various platforms that comprise the Bolivian economy (large enterprises, communities and artisanal micro-enterprises), what Alvaro Garcia calls “Andean-Amazonian capitalism”, with the aim of producing a “productive shock” that would generate

employment and wealth.

But in spite of the apparent moderation of the programme and the pledges constantly given to national and foreign capital by the presidential ticket, it would be a mistake to announce in advance a “Lula-type” scenario in Bolivia in the event of a victory of the MAS.

Some questions, such as the depenalisation of coca that is proposed by Morales, in fact polarise the political landscape and push the US embassy to intervene, certainly discreetly, but effectively, in local political life, as was demonstrated recently by the “missile scandal” [30].

What is more, the polarisation that also intervenes at a regional level should not be without its effects on the MAS government, which, we can imagine, will quickly be forced to choose between Washington and the Caracas-Havana axis [31].

What seems sure today is that the Masista government, unlike the cases of Gutierrez or Lula, will have no respite either from its opposition or from the United States. For them, the victory for Evo is a nightmare, because it calls into question the structures of a colonial state that have always been profitable for them since the Republic was installed in 1825 [32]. The Masista government also has the responsibility of not disappointing the hopes that the popular movements, the poorest and the excluded have placed in it.

The Zapatista Approach to Politics

8 December 2005, by Miguel Romero

INTRODUCTION BY MIGUEL ROMERO

In the interview references appear to concrete facts of the Zapatista experience. We will summarize them very succinctly. Ample information on all these subjects can be found on the website of “Rebeldia” and the FZLN

www.fzln.org.mx, including the Sixth Declaration and the activities of the Otra Campaña.

- The San Andrés Accords were signed between the Mexican government and the EZLN in February 1996 and contained the fundamental demands to provide a democratic solution to the

oppression of the indigenous peoples.

- Later the Commission of Reconciliation and Participation of the Mexican Congress, made up of deputies representing the PRI, PAN, PRD and PT [33] drew up the so-called Ley Cocopa or Indigenous Law; the EZLN supported this law to the extent

that it embodied the fundamental points of the Agreements of San Andrés. Finally, the government and the Mexican Congress betrayed their commitments.

- The March for Indigenous Dignity was called by the EZLN in December 2000 and traversed Mexico until April 2001.

- In August 2003, the EZLN decreed the creation of the Juntas de Buen Gobierno ("Assemblies of Good Government") in five territories under their control, which came to be called "caracoles".

The Assemblies are made up of indigenous civilians elected by their communities. They work in parallel to the official city councils, but with complete autonomy with respect to the government of the State of Chiapas.

Interview

Miguel Romero: *The objective of this interview is to understand better the experience of the social and political movement that has arisen from the Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona and that is being constituted around the Otra Campaña. Unlike what was the case some years ago, I believe that very little is known on the European left about what is happening here.*

And from what I see and hear, is important to make it known, so that interest in Zapatismo revives if, as I think, it has declined. Let's begin then. It will be clearest if we follow a chronological order. So we begin with the "Red Alert" of June 19 this year, the call of the EZLN, that initially caused alarm, because it seemed the signal of an imminent military attack from the Mexican Army, and, frankly, met with disagreement from some, among whom I count myself.



Sergio Rodriguez: In some senses, the Red Alert represented the culmination of three years of debates in the Zapatista communities on the conclusion of the March for Indigenous Dignity of early 2001 and

what should be the new initiative. The constitution of the Assemblies of Good Government in August 2003 was a first stage, to consolidate strength in their territory.

But, as always, Zapatismo wants to go further and so the idea has arisen of culminating the process of consultation in the communities. Normally, they [interviewer's note - Sergio habitually talks about the EZLN as "they", probably to avoid any misinterpretation of his opinions as a "spokesperson"; but it is clear that he does not feel in any way exterior to "them"] consulted across the communities; now it is decided that the communities name their representatives who go directly to a meeting, which will debate and vote on the Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona.

Then the Red Alert was proclaimed to guarantee the security of the meeting, the Zapatista Army must stay on alert: that was the meaning of the Red Alert. When the meeting finished, it was lifted.

The Sixth Declaration is not presented as a political turn, but at least subjects are considered that were not previously part of the discourse of the EZLN.

In your opinion, why did it arise at this moment and what is its fundamental content?

First it should be said is that it is a political turn. There is a substantial change both in the subject which this declaration is addressed and the subject which justifies it. It is a founding proposal that is no longer directed fundamentally to the indigenous peoples, like the San Andrés Accords, or to a somewhat amorphous civil society, nor is simply for including a series of provisions in the Mexican Constitution, it has another, different, objective.

Once one's own spaces of autonomy are consolidated, with the Assemblies of Good Government, it is important to create a national perspective, to catalyse a process that exists in the country, with a new element, which is the Otra Campaña. It is a political, not an ideological, change.

The Sixth Declaration speaks of an anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal programme, of a new constituent process, in the sense, not so much legal, but of a "new country"... But by the form in which things are being developed, it seems that the main target is the construction of a new social and political movement, the generation of an autonomous movement independent of the policy of the Mexican state and its institutions.

What emerges as a programme will be the result of a long process. A second fundamental point is that the process is directed to foment, to dynamize a space in which people can develop, to construct mechanisms of self-organization. That is not because they did not exist before. Until a few months ago, people said that, outside Chiapas, there were no processes of social self-organization in Mexico. What we have seen in the meetings of the Otra Campaña is that there are very deep processes of self-organization, that were submerged, that had emerged in the uprising of 1994, but that were not visible, and that have now come to light.

There are two related points of a practical character in the Sixth Declaration that I would like you to expand upon. The first is the survey as method of work: what is set out initially is not a program, not even in its more elementary aspects, but to go and ask the people "from below" what are their concerns, proposals, hopes, and so on.

The second is how the Otra Campaña, from the first moment, and although is not explicit, sets out to construct a movement. Just now a group of university students came to see you to say they wanted to join the campaign and they asked you to organize a meeting to talk about what they could do; that is no longer a survey, it is the organization of a movement...

These things will certainly emerge in practice. But I believe that the two activities that you have named are different. They say to the people that they are going to listen and they fulfil that commitment, although has given rise to marathon meetings of up to 36 hours listening to the people who

came to the forest; but of this we will speak more later.

So the first commitment is that the EZLN listens. In addition, they recommend this as method, listening to what people say. Who does the diagnosis of what is happening in a specific place? In the first place the very people who live there. This has to do with one's own experience: in the origins of the EZLN, when they arrived in the communities, first they wanted to speak, to propose a program, a military-political conception and they hit against a wall, dialogue was not possible.

When they managed to make contact with some people from the communities they said to them: "It is you that have first to listen, and you can act on the basis of what you have heard". They like to speak of "ways", they say for example that it took ten years to understand the "indigenous way", so now it is necessary to understand the "ways" of the different social movements and to create the space for dialogue. But one is not a passive listener. One has to listen and to construct.

Before it was said: "advance while questioning". Now it is "advance while listening".

Let's return to the order of events. The Sixth Declaration is addressed to the political left, the social communities, movements, NGOs and so on, it proposes they go to Chiapas to listen and to be listened to, and this amazing march is generated to Chiapas of hundreds of people, in some cases travelling thousands of kilometres... Describe how the process has happened.

After the proclamation of the Sixth Declaration, a kind of work plan was developed, that included the holding of six specific meetings: with political, indigenous, social, collective and non-governmental organizations, individuals and the sixth with what they call "others", that is to say, those for any reason not included in the previous meetings or unable to attend them, Finally there was a plenary.

Altogether 6,500 people went to the meetings and the number does not

reveal much of the magnitude of the process, because you have to consider that Chiapas is in a corner of the country; for a student in Chihuahua to arrive at the meeting place meant crossing the whole country in a journey of several days. The first meeting was with the political forces, 34 organizations and about 220 people came.

There are three forms of approach to the problem were expressed. On the one hand, there were those that knew clearly that the Sixth Declaration opened a new political space for them and did not have ideological problems with it, considering that it did not prevent their process of construction, because nobody has been asked to dissolve or limit their political or ideological positions.

Another sector considers that the Otra Campaña requires an electoral definition, not by voting in favour of the PRD but by constructing an electoral alternative. This reflects a broad debate in Mexico; the polls give Marcos between 18 and 21% in terms of electoral support. Peculiarly, these figures were circulated to denigrate the EZ, showing that it has no chance of winning the elections. But they have had a boomerang effect, because many people think that, without any campaign, to have 18-21% is a lot and propose to participate in the elections.

And a third sector says to the EZLN that the Otra Campaña, the mobilizations and so on are good, but that now the important thing is that Lopez Obrador wins and, in addition, to organize an independent social force to force Lopez Obrador to fulfil his commitments in the interests of the people. The comrades of the EZLN made an initial speech and a closing speech...

They only spoke at the beginning and at the end?

Yes. They were there listening, taking notes...

How long did the meeting last?

The one with the political organizations lasted from 9 am Saturday morning to 1am Sunday, with a rest to eat. This was the

briefest one, because there were only 36 speakers. Let me say an important thing before dealing with the meeting. The place in which the meetings were held had a great meaning. This time it was not a zone of political and cultural interchange, like the Aguascalientes, in which the communities do not live.

This time they decided to hold the meetings in "reclaimed estates" that were in the hands of racist ranches - the worst ones, those that hung the Indians - they were "reclaimed" by the EZLN from January 1, 1994 and they have always stayed under their control, in spite of interventions from the Army.

What they wanted to symbolize with the choice of this place was, I think, three key ideas: first that the Salinas reform that privatised land in the early 1990s had not worked; second that the dynamic of action and struggle finally gained partial victories, as opposed to "ultimatum" visions of the process of social struggle, and three, that nevertheless all that is at risk, because it is not possible that the caracoles and the assemblies of good government coexist in the long term with neoliberal domination.

They wanted to send these three messages to the left organizations. And they concluded by saying: "For this reason we are rendering a tribute to the militant tradition of the Mexican left that is here, because beyond political, programmatic or other errors, you continue insisting on a direction that breaks with neoliberalism". In the presentation of the meeting, Marcos raised a position without ambiguity opposed to any support for the candidacy of Lopez Obrador.

At the end, they requested a time, of one hour more or less to prepare their answer. In this, they indicated, among other points, that nobody is requesting an electoral message from them now, because that is not the sense of the Otra Campaña.

It can have in it people who support Lopez Obrador in the electoral area, but they are asked not to take up this theme in the activities of the Otra Campaña, exactly to avoid the EZ entering the debate, which would

harm the fundamental process of work. Sure, on the following day what the media emphasized was the Marcos-Lopez Obrador confrontation. The newspaper "La Jornada" even attributed to Marcos the expression: "Either they are with me or they are against me". A completely invented phrase.

*One of the organizations which attended the meeting was the Frente Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (FZLN) [34]. What is the present role of this organization? Seen from outside it is a mystery: it appeared with great strength, seemed to be a fundamental political support for the EZLN; but since nothing is known of it, what it does, what it says...**

Well, I believe that the FZLN has sometimes been judged harshly. Remember the conditions in which it was created, on the eve of the signature of the Agreements of San Andrés, in 1996, the Fourth Declaration of Selva Lacandona was published and there was the approval of the Indigenous Law in the Chamber of Deputies.

Then it was said that the FZLN was going to be the "airport" in which the "airplane" of the EZLN would land later. But once it was clear that the government and the parties were going to betray their word, the EZLN sent a letter to the congress of foundation of the FZLN in which it allowed it freedom to decide its future. It is easy to understand that it is very different for the FZLN to consider itself as airport for the EZLN or as an independent organization.

A process began then which was long, complicated, contradictory, but very interesting. They started from an idea very different from the EZLN: they wanted to have the smallest possible media projection. For that reason, there have been important processes of struggles in which the FZLN has had an outstanding participation, but without appearing publicly.

Today we have an organization which is already consolidated in most of the national territory, where you have about 800 militants who work regularly...

...more than most of the left organizations who went to Chiapas...

By far. And more also as far as territorial extension goes. It is an organization of very young people; as 75% are under 30s. People very influenced by the uprising of 1994, that were adolescents then, participated in caravans of peace, aid campaigns, that were promoting health, education and so on, who really had that original experience in politics. The other 25% come from different organizations from the Mexican left.

Good, let's return to the meetings.

To take up where we left off, subcomandante Marcos announced that he had asked the magazine "Rebeldia" to be part of the process of organization of the Otra Campa±a. Before the beginning of each meeting we wrote to the attending groups and we asked them if they wanted participant or observer status.

Many of them also adhere to the Otra Campa±a, or they constitute a collective; unitary platforms and fronts between unions and other organizations were constituted; it is an important subject of debate how the Otra Campa±a relates to these type of initiatives that arise independently within it.

In the meetings, everybody has the same speaking rights. The magazine has the obligation to make a kind of record of all the interventions, present it to the comrades who spoke so that they verify if they recognise the fundamentals of their intervention; without their agreement, it is not published. Once we have agreement, the record is sent to all those who until then had signed the Sixth Declaration and we set up the website of the Otra Campa±a, so that anyone can have access, whether participating or not in the Otra Campa±a.

The second meeting was with the indigenous peoples. It was very touching, because it was the first encounter after the March for Indigenous Dignity of 2001. There were some who said: "we have fought struggles without receiving the

support of the EZLN". And the EZLN recognized the error and said that the Otra Campa±a tried to respond to those problems and to see how we can defend everyone from all the attacks that we receive from the Mexican State

There were nearly sixty delegations of indigenous peoples, among them those of greater weight, and even some that are migrants within the country, and have begun to organize, for example in the capital; these by the way have suffered terrible aggression and violence against them from the government of the capital that Lopez Obrador presides over.

The third was with social organizations and representatives came from 120 organizations of the Popular Urban Movement, feminist organizations not linked with the lines of "empowerment", that is that are not in situation of dependency on the regime, lesbian, homosexual organizations... There were many people from unions, metalworkers, electricians, oil, from Secretary Generals or representatives of executives to representatives of union currents and workers' collectives who had come together in a workplace to integrate themselves in the Otra Campa±a: it is important to emphasize this because until now the union organizations had hardly participated in the Zapatista meetings. Here there were very diverse debates, from critics of those policies of "empowerment", to proposals of concrete demands...

In this meeting, the EZLN insisted more on the idea of "listening". We can say that each meeting had an outstanding particular meaning. In the first, the political definition with respect to the elections. In the second, the commitment to indigenous autonomy. In the third, it was "we are going to listen".

Because many people saw the Otra Campa±a as a similar initiative to the March for Indigenous Dignity, which was a spectacular mass action, which, for example, attracted many more people in the cities than Lopez Obrador is attracting in his electoral campaign now. Now it is clarified that we are not talking about big rallies,

big actions, but dialogue from below, speaking with people. It is not going to be then a media initiative, but destined to construct from below the networks of linking, interchange, debates... between diverse sectors, diverse sensibilities

And in this meeting already there would be many people...

Yes, 900 people. The arrival of all these people has already been an adventure as you can imagine. The comrades had constructed shelters so that people could sleep under cover, but the calculations were exceeded; at the first 100 people were expected and 220 arrived; at the second they expected 300 and 500 came; at the third, 500 expected and 900 came.

And beyond the EZLN commanders, the 900 listened to all the debates?

I won't say 900, but at least 700 listened to the whole meeting. There were no small groups commenting, at the margin of the meeting. And those who spoke, whatever they said, were applauded equally, even if they had said the opposite to the previous speaker.

It is not strange to me; one of the good, and enviable surprises that I have had here is that the debates are very clear, and sometimes very strong, but people can express themselves without problems, says what they say, and the debate does not jeopardize common action.

That's the process. The fourth meeting was the most representative of the effect of Zapatismo in Mexican society. Not so much by NGOs, although also they had a role, like the groups. 1,200 people attended and about 200 groups and NGOs. This meeting was very youthful. Of those 1,200, at least 900 were young, from 14 or 15 to early 20s.

Many came from an experience of organization and struggle, against repression, or from alternative culture, rock singers, some very well known, sang... because everyone could intervene in their own way, singing, speaking, dancing, making a play, a performance, or whatever, whenever it had to do with the subject. This was

the meeting that lasted longest because it began on Saturday at 9 am and finished on Sunday at 6 pm, with a break to sleep from 4am to 9am on Sunday morning.

All this time was devoted to listening, listening and listening. And the last one was that of the "others". Then there was the plenary in Aguascalientes, on September 16-18. We registered 2,160 people, but there were many more, because the registry queues were enormous and many people did not register. We made a direct transmission by Internet, and received many commentaries on line. The minutes of the meeting occupy more than 200 pages and can be consulted on the Internet.

We are going to try to emphasize some points. I imagine that at some time you will publish a synthesis document and we do not have space now for an exhaustive summary.

I agree. One first important question is that it was decided not to vote on anything. The Sixth Declaration, plus all the proposals presented will be debated by groups, organizations, individuals... As a result of debate, we will establish where there is agreement and where there are divergences that will continue to be discussed. Yes, the national tour with the subcomandante was decided on, the dates, mechanisms of coordination...

But the political content remains open...

Yes, I believe that there was a consensus that the political content can remain open for a long time and they will be defined within the framework of activity.

But there is a common basic political content, isn't there? Anti-capitalism, anti-neoliberalism, total autonomy with respect to the Mexican political institutions...

That's right, that is what is noticeable in the Sixth Declaration.

And now we pass to another stage centred, if I understand properly, in the national tour of the subcomandante to the communities,

popular neighbourhoods, organizations and so on. The idea of this tour continues being "to listen"?

Yes, but obviously there will be dialogue, and forms of coordination will be sought.

The idea of coordinating this process can be considered something already settled. Everybody that it is in the Otra Campa thinks that they are participating somehow in the organization of a movement.

Indeed that is a general conviction. The form, the mechanisms can be diverse. Many raised the point that in some states a state coordination could be constructed. It can be, but in others it will not be possible and it will be necessary to have municipal, or sectoral, coordinations.

Will the tour of Marcos happen before the electoral campaign?

In parallel, during the first half of the next year, until June 26, one week before the elections. The insurgent lieutenant colonel Moisés said at the end of the plenary: "OK, we give you the subcomandante", symbolizing that the EZLN remains in Chiapas and the subcomandante goes to the Otra Campa. There is a calendar that includes the 31 states of the country and the capital, five or six days in each place, mainly in closed meetings, not in public meetings, although we can have them, interchanges of experience.



Then the process of evaluation, discussion and so on will come. We will not accept any economic aid for the campaign. Zapatismo has counted on much aid from national and international networks. But now they have decided said: "we are going to walk on our own feet". The communities can continue receiving aid. But the Otra Campa, no. If people want Marcos to go somewhere, they should arrange his travel, his accommodation... which also contributes to organizing the campaign.

We spoke before of how the Otra

Campaña could be understood as a "Literacy Campaign" in reverse, in which the people "from below" do not wait to become literate, but which they are going to be in a certain way the "literacy teachers". Marcos would be then like a kind of channel...

I use the formula of "catalyst": of experiences, of processes, social dynamics that already exist. Marcos and the EZLN have from the beginning said something important: "we are not going to meet just anybody, but with the people who are struggling and want to organize themselves somehow". Marcos is a tool that the EZLN has given the campaign: not a leader, nor a coordinator, but a tool to facilitate so that people can bring their ideas to the process of coordination, their experiences or their form of confrontation with the regime.

There is a problem that surely that you have considered, but that I have not completely understood. A campaign so extended that it lasts until 2007 will be a campaign conditioned by important events, both in the world and in Mexico, it does not occur in a space autonomous of social and political reality. All these events will affect the campaign and will create a problem of definition. Does the campaign have any mechanism which allows you to respond to this problem?

First, a fundamental question: the process does not finish in 2006. A second very important phase is already planned which will begin on January 1, 2007. As of that day, the command of the EZLN, many militia members, bases of support, and so on will leave Chiapas, not to make a tour, but to remain in a region, in a state, for at least a year; soon it will be seen if they remain there or they march to another place and are replaced by other comrades.

But there will be time to continue speaking of this. As far as mechanisms for expressing opinions are concerned, on the one hand positions are already being prepared on concrete subjects. For example, Fox has introduced a bill in parliament to privatise energy. So a document is being prepared on this. Or on the privatisation of pensions.

We will seek common declarations on precise aspects in which a clear agreement can be obtained. And each organization or movement, and also the EZLN, has the full right to make their own political declarations. In addition, there is an instrument of interchange, the plenaries, that can become a vehicle of opinion, if we people participate with dynamism, with energy...

But when is the next plenary? When it is necessary, perhaps very soon, perhaps not. But rather than work with fixed plenaries, they will become based on events, but knowing that the plenaries do not solve the problems of decision taking by themselves and it is very complicated to bring together so many people.

There are an enormous amount of opinions on every point, very different, and some have an impact on others, so there are agreements, debates... Everything is very rich, but very complex. And we cannot forget that we are in an electoral year. It is possible that Lopez Obrador will win and the PRD, that is a party that we can consider as leftwing in its origins. And there are people who have expectations in this possible victory. We have to see how the electoral process goes to analyse what pressure will exist on the Otra Campaña.

As for me, I believe that what is going to be defined on the electoral terrain is very little: I do not see why it is necessary to choose between an imbecile from PAN and the conservative populism which is what Lopez Obrador really represents. I believe that since it has been decided to leave people to vote as they want next July 2, this has opened the pressure valve and this problem will not fundamentally affect the Otra Campaña.

We have to finish. All that you have just said confirms to me the reasons why I wanted to do this interview, that is, the conviction that your experience is exciting in a world in which it has become almost impossible to get passionate about what passes for politics. What you are doing is very specific and it would be absurd to try to export it. But I believe that you are the only current with a broad political

influence that takes the oft-invoked theme of "another way of doing politics" seriously. So we have much of which to speak.

And much to discuss. It has always seemed me that the good thing about Zapatismo is that it does not give you a model, but that, on the contrary, it forces you to face complicated and necessary problems, that is, you complicate life. And so I want to turn things around towards you: are you influenced or affected by what happens outside Mexico?

What complicates life for you? In the Sixth Declaration there are very fraternal and solidaristic phrases towards the alternative left worldwide, towards Venezuela, Cuba... But I have the sensation that, beyond solidarity, what happens in the world has little influence on the EZLN, be it the crisis of the PT, or the evolution of Rifondazione in Italy, or the experience of the factories expropriated in Argentina, or the next meeting of the WTO and so on. I don't know, I see the EZLN as very much in solidarity, but very distant from what happens in the world.

I don't see it that way. I believe that, in fact, Zapatismo breaks with a utilitarian vision of the European left which has predominated on the Latin American left. Fausto Bertinotti told me that when he went to the Lacandona forest he said to Marcos: "I do not come to make a gesture of solidarity with Zapatismo, I come to discuss politics with Zapatismo". And Marcos replied: "Finally".

Because indeed that political discussion is very important. Zapatismo maintains a close relationship with solidaristic bodies, but it goes beyond simply a solidarity question. The Encounters for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism reflected that will and that vocation.

Beyond the fact that they concretely occurred, they reflected another way to understand international relations with respect to the Latin American left then grouped in the Forum of Sao Paulo, already in crisis. It is necessary to also consider that they say that on many international issues they are very ignorant and that produces

prudence.

But for example, the Iraq war has been key for the EZLN. It had a tremendous importance because then it made contact with many people who were in the anti-war movement in Europe and in the USA. It is the only time that the EZLN has signed an international manifesto, the one initiated by Chomsky in the USA. I believe that sometimes the non-participation of Zapatismo in

international forums is misinterpreted.

It can give the impression of superiority, but I rather see it as an example of prudence and modesty. In the Sixth Declaration the international content is greater than on other occasions. The possibility of a new international encounter is also spoken of. And in the Otra Campaña the international question is very present. We are going to see how things develop in practice.

How many people do you think are participating now in the Otra Campaña?

I calculate that from August to now it's 45,000 people.

Well done! Good health and good luck, brother.

This interview, conducted in Mexico DF on October 6, 2005, was published in "Viento Sur" number 83.

"Strategic Redeployment" vs. "Out Now"

1 December 2005, by Gilbert Achcar , Stephen R Shalom

In October, Lawrence Korb and Brian Katulis, writing for the Center for American Progress, a liberal organization headed by Clinton's former chief of staff John Podesta, issued a report calling for what they termed "strategic redeployment." (Lawrence J. Korb and Brian Katulis, *Strategic Redeployment: A Progressive Plan for Iraq and the Struggle Against Violent Extremists*, Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, October 2005.)

Like Murtha, Korb and Katulis (who served in the Reagan and Clinton administrations, respectively) make telling observations. For example, they note that:

"most Iraqis do not want us there and they do not feel our presence makes them safer. One half says they support insurgent attacks on coalition forces and a majority says they feel less safe when foreign troops patrol their neighborhoods, according to polling of Iraqi citizens sponsored by the US government earlier this year."

They conclude, however, that what is needed is a "strategic redeployment," specifically rejecting "calls for an immediate and complete withdrawal." Under their proposal, during 2006, 46,000 national guard and reserves would be returned to the United

States, 20,000 troops would be sent to other theaters (18,000 to Afghanistan, 1,000 to Southeast Asia, and 1,000 to Africa), and 14,000 troops would be stationed in Kuwait and off-shore in the Persian Gulf.



US troops in Falluja march past some of the thousands of civilian dead

The 60,000 U.S. troops remaining in Iraq would be redeployed away from urban areas to minimize inflaming Iraqi opinion. By the end of 2007, most of these troops would be withdrawn (to unspecified locations), leaving only "counterterrorist units."

"This presence, along with the forces in Kuwait and at sea in the Persian Gulf area will be sufficient to conduct strikes coordinated with Iraqi forces against any terrorist camps and enclaves that may emerge and deal with any major external threats to Iraq."

Some analysts (for example, Slate's Fred Kaplan) have suggested that Murtha got his plan from Korb and Katulis, though he speeds up their timetable and moves his entire residual force out of Iraq. But the

same reasons given in our original essay for why the anti-war movement should avoid confusing Murtha's position with its own apply with even greater force to the Korb-Katulis position.

Korb and Katulis wisely point out that to enhance U.S. security President Bush should announce that the United States "will not build permanent military bases in Iraq, counteracting arguments made in recruitment pitches by militants and Iraqi insurgents." But where are the U.S. counterterrorist units in Iraq going to be housed if not at bases?

In any event, it's not just designs on military bases that need to be disavowed, but plans to dominate Iraqi oil too, which are proceeding apace. (See Greg Muttitt, *Crude Designs: The Rip-Off of Iraq's Oil Wealth*, London: PLATFORM with Global Policy Forum, Institute for Policy Studies [New Internationalism Project], New Economics Foundation, Oil Change International and War on Want, November 2005.) And a two-year timetable is unacceptable.

As we noted earlier, two to three months is plenty of time to remove all U.S. troops, if that is one's genuine interest. Protracted "timetables" only make sense if one is trying to secure a

continuing dominance over Iraqi politics and resources before leaving.

In the *Washington Post* of November 26, Joe Biden of Delaware, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and an aspiring presidential candidate, wrote an oped column entitled "Time for An Iraq Timetable." Biden declared that in 2006 U.S. troops

"will begin to leave in large numbers. By the end of the year, we will have redeployed about 50,000. In 2007, a significant number of the remaining 100,000 will follow. A small force will stay behind — in Iraq or across the border — to strike at any concentration of terrorists."

Biden's language is interesting — he doesn't quite call for this, but essentially predicts it. His prediction seems to be based on the fact that the Senate by a vote of 79-19 and over the objections of the White House adopted an amendment requiring the President to provide quarterly reports on the progress of U.S. policy and military operations in Iraq. (This vote took place after the Senate defeated a Democratic-sponsored amendment asking the president to prepare an estimated timetable for withdrawal from Iraq.) Given that the successful amendment has no teeth at all, it's hard to see why it presages much of anything.

Nevertheless, Biden's comment is consistent with various hints from the Bush administration itself. Obviously the Republicans don't want to go into the 2006 elections, let alone the 2008 elections with an increasingly unpopular and seemingly endless occupation of Iraq on display.

In part this leads them to make optimistic comments about how soon Washington will be able to reduce the number of troops in Iraq (glossing over the fact that several thousand troops were added before the October 15 referendum, so a withdrawal of these would indicate no progress at all). During the Vietnam War there were countless optimistic predictions of when the troops would come home, only to have the president send more troops when the situation deteriorated further. And we've been hearing

similar optimistic comments from the Bush administration for more than two years; for example, on October 19, 2003, the *Washington Post* reported on its front page:

"There are now 130,000 U.S. troops in Iraq. The plan to cut that number is well advanced.... and has been described in broad outline to Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld but has not yet been approved by him. It would begin to draw down forces next spring, cutting the number of troops to fewer than 100,000 by next summer and then to 50,000 by mid-2005, officers involved in the planning said."

True, in 2003 Iraq was nowhere near the political liability for the Bush administration that it is now, so we shouldn't discount the prospect of a real policy shift. Clearly the Bush administration has scaled back its more grandiose goals in Iraq, but it's unlikely that it would choose to withdraw its forces without being confident that it could secure its more basic goal — domination of the oil resources of the region — unless, of course, this were made untenable.

It is possible that the U.S. will fall back on a strategy of trying to replace its troops with air power, hoping that the reduction in U.S. casualties will make the war more palatable to the American public. In late August, the head of the air force told the *New York Times* that after any withdrawal of U.S. ground troops, "we will continue with a rotational presence of some type in that area more or less indefinitely," adding "We have interests in that part of the world...." (Eric Schmitt, "U.S. General Says Iraqis Will Need Longtime Support From Air Force," Aug. 30) To support these interests Washington is upgrading 16 different bases in the Middle East and Southwest Asia (*New York Times*, Sept. 18, 2005).

According to Seymour Hersh in the Dec. 5 *New Yorker*, plans are being drawn up precisely to replace U.S. ground troops in Iraq with warplanes. Hersh reports that some Pentagon officials are worried about what it would mean to have Iraqis calling in bombing targets to the U.S. air force, but no matter who calls in the coordinates, white phosphorus, cluster

munitions, and 500-pound bombs are not going to address the problem of the insurgency; indeed, they are going to generate more recruits for both the insurgency and terrorism.

For the anti-war movement, it is critical to insist on the *complete* withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces, from Iraq and from the region, because retaining any of them — whether counterinsurgency units ready to intervene or air power to level further Iraqi cities — will violate Iraqi sovereignty and continue to fuel insurgency and hatred. And the anti-war movement must insist as well on *immediate* withdrawal, because the Bush administration itself will soon be talking of future drawdowns — and indeed it already is.

We should bear in mind that the mere fact that the antiwar movement raises the "Out Now" slogan does not mean that U.S. forces are going to leave Iraq overnight. During the Vietnam War, a much more powerful movement than anything we have seen in the U.S. in the last few decades demanded that U.S. troops get "Out Now."

This did not lead — even when the U.S. power elite reached the conclusion that the war should be terminated — to a "precipitous" withdrawal, but to a withdrawal that was completed only after the Paris Accords were concluded with the three main Vietnamese parties involved. Nevertheless, the pressure of the antiwar movement in the U.S. was decisive in compelling Washington to opt for this withdrawal.

The issue with "Out Now" is therefore not about the logistical details of withdrawal, but about how to be most effective in countering Washington's imperial aims. "Out Now" is a slogan around which one can build a large coalition of forces, from those who only care about "our boys" to those who care about the Iraqi people's freedom, whereas any dilution of the "responsible exit strategy" kind — aside from the fact that it would be extremely difficult even to agree on what the "conditions" for the withdrawal should be — would only provide the Bush administration, along with pro-war Democrats, an argument for justifying the protracted presence

of U.S. troops.

We are not calling for a "cut and run" withdrawal, abandoning Iraq to its fate (like in the "selfish" nationalist rhetoric of the isolationist Right). We are perfectly aware that, given what the United States has been doing in Iraq, tragically disrupting the situation in that country, if the U.S. troops were just to leave Iraq suddenly, say in 48 hours, without prior notice, that would definitely create a dangerous chaotic situation. But this is not what we are demanding.

The demand for the immediate withdrawal of the troops is, first of all, a demand for an immediate political decision to withdraw the troops. Once the political decision is taken and proclaimed publicly, it becomes possible, in fact indispensable, to prepare the best conditions for its implementation in the shortest possible timeframe, while starting without delay to bring troops back home. To be sure, the modalities through which this should be completed in a way not to harm the

Iraqi people must be worked out with their elected representatives.

If Washington were to make clear that it wants to complete the withdrawal of its troops within a timetable stretching over weeks, or very few months, this would provide a very powerful incentive for the Iraqis to reach an agreement among themselves on a way to run their country together peacefully and start to concentrate their efforts on the huge task of its reconstruction.

The consensus reached at the recent Cairo conference is an important step in that direction and proves that it is perfectly possible, and much easier indeed, to reach such agreements when U.S. representatives are not there constantly interfering and calling the shots.

Finally, those who accuse the antiwar movement of wanting to "cut and run" and pretend that they care more for the interests of the Iraqis — whereas most of them are actually worried

about U.S. imperial interests — would be better advised to demand that the U.S. respect Iraqi sovereignty over Iraqi natural resources and reconstruction.

For our part, we believe that there is a moral obligation for the U.S. government to pay reparations to the Iraqi people for all that they have suffered as a consequence of U.S. criminal policies — from the deliberate destruction of Iraq's infrastructure in the 1991 war to the devastation brought by the present invasion and occupation, through the green light given to the Ba'athist regime to crush the mass insurrections of March 1991 and, above all, the murderous embargo inflicted on the Iraqi population from 1991 to 2003.

The withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces, the end of U.S. economic domination, and the payment of reparations: this is the way to truly serve the principles of justice, as well as the best interests of the people of Iraq and the U.S. population.

Respect conference: a setback and an opportunity

1 December 2005, by **Socialist Resistance**

Socialist Resistance remains fully committed to building Respect, since it is the best thing to happen on the left in England for a long time. The conference, however, was a deeply worrying event. It unfortunately put a question mark over Respect's long-term development as a broad based alternative to new Labour and its neo-liberal agenda. It questioned Respect's ability to develop as a genuinely pluralist organisation capable of embracing the bulk of the left in this country. It was a sharp reminder that Respect only has a future as an open pluralist organisation, in which the bulk of the left can feel comfortable and play a role.



Respect supporters march through George Galloway's east London constituency

This was a serious problem. It should have been a conference which summed up the undoubted successes of the past year and mapped the way forward. How to recruit new members and integrate them for the long term. How to develop Respect - as John Rees, Respect's National Secretary and leading member of the SWP, had argued - as a "mass membership party". How to consolidate the strong areas and build the weaker ones. How

to bring other sections of the left into Respect. How to develop effective local branches in as many places as possible. How to develop Respect as an organisation which can function with elected representatives both in Parliament and in local government. How to be seen as the anti-war party, but not only as an anti-war party.

The conference needed to discuss how to locate Respect firmly in the emerging campaigns against the new neo-liberal offensive of the Blair government. How to confront the assault on civil liberties which is taking place. Indeed the conference adopted excellent resolutions on these issues - on the NHS, education, and

pensions. It had an important debate on climate change. It adopted a strong statement on the war in Iraq and supported the upcoming peace conference.

It adopted a series of excellent resolutions on the war (introduced by writer Haifa Zangana), the defence of civil liberties (introduced by Paddy Hill one of the six people wrongly jailed for 16 years after the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974), and opposition to the anti-terror legislation currently going through Parliament - though this was marred by the failure of the conference to oppose the Incitement to Racial and Religious Hatred Bill. This Bill is currently going through Parliament and would extend the currently existing blasphemy laws. The SWP has supported this law and argued for it inside Respect.

It was also regrettable that the resolution, supported by several Respect branches, which called for Respect's existing policy in support for LGBT rights to be included in future election manifestos (it was controversially not included in the manifesto for the general election), was caricatured in the debate as islamophobic when neither the mover nor the resolution mentioned Islam.

The resolution was adopted but it is hard to see why it is such a sensitive subject. LGBT rights are mainstream issues across the spectrum of progressive opinion and Respect must reflect this.

It was in the session on building Respect, however, which was opened by Colin Fox of the SSP - the key session of the conference as far as Respect's future development is concerned - where the main problems arose.

Faced by a clutch of resolutions aimed at developing Respect as an organisation - resolutions calling for better administration, better democratic functioning, better contact with members and branches, more collective policy discussions and Respect's own publication - John Rees and George Galloway (Respect's MP) responded negatively with demagogic speeches and crude appeals to loyalty.

Some resolutions were opposed, others were not, but the tone of the debate was that they were either unnecessary or placing unreasonable demands on Respect's resources.

This created a contradictory situation. The conference passed a number of important resolutions on building Respect but the rhetoric from leading members was to the effect that these would be a low priority.

In his introduction to this session John Rees berated the conference saying that it was not a matter of minutes and reports it was a matter of political leadership - and he and others were giving it. With George Galloway he and had given it in the anti-war movement and they and others were giving it in Respect. He gave a list of examples of political leadership he and others had initiated since the formation of the anti-war movement. He said that if Respect wanted him to sit in the office behind a computer it would have to find another national secretary.

Of course we all want Respect to have an effective, proactive and campaigning leadership. We all want a leadership that responds to political developments as they take place. But it has to be a leadership based on the collective development of policy by Respect's membership and elected committees as a whole, not one based on individual leadership initiatives with the rest expected to follow without question.

Behind all this of course is the debate as to whether Respect should develop as a party or a loose coalition - and the more structures it has the more it takes on the character of a party. But there is no avoiding this if Respect is to develop as an effective and democratic organisation.

If it is going to challenge for political power at national and local level taking on all other political parties and dealing with all the problems that will arise in the course of this, it has to be able to effectively organise its work and develop its line. It has to ensure that its membership feel included. It has to have its own political life separate from its participating organisations. It doesn't matter what

it is called but it cannot avoid taking on the character of a political party.

Other left parties from across Europe were invited and spoke at the conference - the RC from Italy, the Left Block from Portugal, the Left Party from Germany and the SSP from Scotland. They are not all called parties but they all organise themselves as it they are.

Unfortunately a decision appears to have been taken by George Galloway and the SWP to defend the loose coalition model and ensure that development of party structures go thus far and no further. This imposes a narrow organisational framework that is not a viable model for an organisation which challenges for political power on the full spectrum of political issues.

Nor is it working: despite the important successes Respect has had Respect remains organisationally weak with a great diversity between its branches as far as their numerical strength and political viability is concerned. Yet there was no assessment of this from the leading figures, the conference was urged to look only at the achievements and not at the problems.

Alan Thornett, a members of the Respect National Council and a leading members of Socialist Resistance (moving the Southwark resolution) argued that whilst the gains Respect had made in the general election were extremely important we had to take a much more sober view of the development of Respect since then. This had been a period of great opportunity yet the membership has remained the same and no new section of the left has joined. Some Respect branches are strong, others weak and struggling. Unless we recognised this and got to grips with it Respect would run into serious problems.

The discussion from the floor on building Respect was dominated by supporters of John Rees's position. Speaker after speaker demanded that Respect have an internal regime that, frankly, would not be tolerated in any union. No need to waste time on minutes, communicating with

branches and poring over policy. All we need is to intervene spontaneously into and build the latest campaign and bring the Respect message.

George Galloway's close-of-conference speech continued on this theme - despite the fact that the debate had been closed and the votes taken. He said that what John Rees had said had been "brilliant". There was simply not the money, or staff in the Respect office, to implement the proposals being made. He said he had always been against Respect having a newspaper and he was even more against it now. Respect was not a party, he said, but a coalition and that is the way it should stay. If Respect had a newspaper people would fall out over Cuba or what the Soviet Union had been. No one had remotely suggested anything like this as content for a paper.

George Galloway referred directly to a point raised in Socialist Resistance broadsheet, that Respect has not increased its membership of 4,000 since the general election, nor brought in any new sections of the existing left. In this he even managed to argue that the size of Respect's membership does not matter.

It is votes which count he said: "it is better to have 4,000 members and 250,000 votes than 10,000 members and 100,000 votes". "We are doing well," he told the conference "enjoy". All this was a dangerous cover up of the inability of Respect to recruit or broaden itself out to wider sections of the anti-war movement and the left. The idea that a small, narrowly based party can command big votes on a long-term basis is completely false

Galloway argued that the old language of the left needs to be discarded. Indeed it should. And the first thing we should junk is browbeating speeches about how the leaders are doing a good job and the job of everyone else is to get behind them.

SWP members applauded all this to the rafters. Even worse it has since emerged that some SWP members who had voted for various resolutions in their local Respect branches switched votes and opposed them in

the conference without any discussion with their delegation. It is impossible to build a local branch on that basis.

In responding to these developments we need to re-affirm the importance of the Respect project and continue the fight to build it. It is the only show in town. If the Respect project foundered it would be a major loss to the left from which it would take a long time to recover. We urge anyone proposing to leave Respect to stay in it and help build it on the basis of the decisions of the conference and to fight to change it where necessary.

Despite some important resolutions on building Respect being voted down and the inference in George Galloway's closing speech that those adopted would be given a low priority a number of important resolutions were adopted which if properly implemented could take Respect forward and build on its achievements.

The Southwark resolution argues that Respect has to be built as a mass membership organisation in which all members feel they have a role to play in developing the life of the organisation. This means building a much stronger national profile for Respect at both the political and organisational level.

A series of practical measures were adopted which are listed below. * The implementation of these resolutions would go a long way to improving the administration and collective development of Respect and improve its chances of bringing in other sections of the left and the trade union movement. As the Camden and Barnet resolution said: "It is vital for our development into a mass party that we are recognised as the most democratic, transparent and pluralist organisation within the wider labour movement".

Practical measures adopted by conference for building Respect.

- Urging local branches develop

strong and regular campaigning activities.

- Making Respect as open and inclusive as possible in order to encourage recruitment and keep and consolidate the new members.

- Making a fresh approach to those sections of the left, including the trade union left, which are not currently in Respect.

- Strengthen our political profile at national level by producing further editions of the successful Respect tabloid paper.

- Seeking to strengthen the national office and press and publicity profile between elections.

- Building strong local branches which develop their own political life and culture through regular discussion and debate.

- The National Council should convene consultative groups on specific areas of policy, such as housing, health, transport, drugs, civil liberties etc. drawing on the expertise and specialist knowledge of interested members and supporters of Respect in order to develop policy papers for discussion by the National Council and the party at large and to produce fact sheets and campaign materials for use by party members.

- The National Council should establish (or encourage the establishment of) special interest groups for members involved in specific areas of work, such as a Respect teachers' group, a Respect health workers' group and so on.

- That the National Secretary should circulate reports on the business conducted at meetings of the National Council; as soon as is practically possible after those meetings.

- The National Council meetings should be open to branch observers.

- Mechanisms should be developed to encourage and facilitate the flow of information both between branches and between individual members with common areas of interest. For example.

- The Respect website should, as part of a wider upgrade, include a bulletin section accessible only to members - a feature widely used by other membership organisations.

- The publication of a general Respect manifesto which can be available for sale and on the website.

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