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"We are a nation and we have the right to decide"

26 April 2006, by Revolta Global

However, this new-found radicalism was in large part based on the calculation that the Popular Party (PP) would again win the state-wide elections to the Spanish parliament, the reforms would be blocked and the coalition would score political points in Catalonia without actually having to put its money where its mouth is.

The calculation backfired. Aznar was kicked out and the process of drawing up a new statute had to go ahead in very different circumstances. After many months a compromise was reached in the Catalan parliament embracing all forces bar the Catalan PP. This proposal was then sent to the Spanish parliament, where it was further watered down following a deal between Zapatero (who had publicly promised to pass whatever proposal came from Catalonia) and CiU leader Artur Mas, possibly heralding a change of partners in Madrid, where the PSOE had hitherto governed with the support of ERC and the United Left (IU). Nevertheless, the result was enthusiastically accepted by the PSC and ICV-EUiA, though not ERC.

Revolta Global, the Fourth International organisation in Catalonia, criticised the method and content of the original proposal from the very beginning. But it has also been one of the prime movers of a broad-based campaign (also involving ERC) under the slogan “We are a nation and we have the right to decide”, ie that it is up to the Catalan people, and not the central Spanish parliament, to decide what statute they want. A demonstration called by the campaign on 18 February saw by far and away the biggest turnout in Barcelona since the mass mobilisations against the Iraq war three years ago.

Revolta Global has argued that the best and clearest way to reject the proposed statute, which satisfies neither the demand for self-determination nor the demand for socially more progressive policies, is to vote No in the referendum set for 18 June. To explain its position, which is shared by none of the major parties, it took advantage of St. George’s Day, 23 April, when Catalonia’s patron saint is celebrated by people coming out in huge numbers to buy each other gifts of books and roses from street stalls specially set up for the occasion, to hand out 10,000 copies of the leaflet translated below.

Ten reasons for a left and Catalanista “NO” to the "Statute of Moncloa"

ETA’s permanent cease-fire does not only represent a hope of peace for the Basque Country. It also contributes to a dissipation of the dramatic quality that has always surrounded the debate about the right of self-determination of peoples. At the end of the process that is today beginning in Euskadi, it will be necessary to give the say to its citizens. If that is so, why should Catalonia renounce the democratic yearning to reach full self-government?

Why should it have to accept - precisely now! - a reduced status "for a lifetime"? The will to reform the prevailing legal order does not result from anybody’s whim. The necessity for change arises from the exhaustion of the state model inherited from the transition. Almost thirty years ago, the national aspirations of the peoples that long had been subjected by the dictatorship were only partially satisfied.

Since then, social and economic changes, accelerated by globalisation and the demands of European construction, have been increasingly coming into conflict with the

restricted framework of that centralist and monarchical "Spain of Autonomies".

The urgency of facing the despotism of the multinationals or the necessity of conceiving citizenship from a racially mixed national reality, has forcefully mixed old democratic aspirations and new social demands. For the people, the necessity of taking their destiny in their own hands is already on the agenda.

From that optic, the project of Statute that was adopted by 90% of the Catalan Parliament was very modest, and tried to meet some of these aspirations within the framework of the monarchic Constitution of 1978.

The version that the Spanish Cortes now gives back to us, trimmed and limited by the pact between the government of Zapatero and CiU, seriously weakens that Proposal and turns it into an absolutely unacceptable text for Catalonia. There are ten powerful reasons here to say "NO" to what is already known as "the Statute of Moncloa"...

1. This Statute bears the scars of the anti-Catalan campaign of the Spanish right, before which the PSOE government has yielded - when it has not lent a sympathetic ear to its theses. In a certain way, this is the Statute of the PP, a law which is the product of the demagoguery, pressures and threats of the heirs of Francoism.

2. This Statute refuses to Catalonia its right to affirm what it feels fully, how it has imagined itself throughout history: as a nation. A nation that, therefore, has the right to decide and has the right to self-determination. This same history and, concretely, the years of a transition watched over by the army, has charged the term “nationality” with a precise significance: a people subject to monitoring.

3. This Statute denies to Catalonia its fiscal sovereignty and the means to face the growing social necessities of the country. Neither its own Tax Office, nor transparency. Catalonia’s fiscal balance continues to be one of the best kept secrets of the State. The lack of resources hits the poorest layers of the population hardest. Opacity moves us away from distributive justice and solidarity towards the social groups - and the territories - that need it.

4. There is no new model of financing. The increase in the share of certain taxes (VAT and personal income tax) that would belong to the Generalitat will not resolve the problem. The State refuses to yield decisive resources, like company tax. This policy, very well known, has systematically pushed the Catalan autonomous administration to resort to indirect taxes, instead of limiting big fortunes and capital income. The new Statute presents an ambiguous formulation about fiscal progressivity, responding to the interests of the right and the employers.

5.There is no bilateralism in the relations between the central government and the Generalitat. The State in fact retains the last word on all subjects. The absence of a clear definition on investment or the future mechanisms of restoring the balance between autonomous communities makes the advance promised to Catalonia more than doubtful and on the contrary bestows a heavy duty of tutelage on the central bureaucracy.

6. No “leap forward in self-government” will take place, contrary to the predictions of some sectors of the left. The State resists the transfer of powers basic to the development of the country, as is the case with ports and airports. Control of Barcelona’s airport has not been achieved, not to mention a cluster of tolls around Barcelona and its industrial periphery.

7. There is no progress in the democratic rights of citizenship. The most advanced provisions have been removed from the Proposal adopted on September 30 of last year: ability to call popular consultations, revision of statutory laws... If the secular character of education has already been battered in Parliament by the demands of Catalan clerical nationalism, correcting this has not been a priority for Spanish socialism - very much on the contrary!

8. The new social and environmental rights - emblematic for political formations like ICV-EUiA - have been trimmed and disfigured. The formulations are general and they do not contain mechanisms to guarantee their carrying out. Thus, women have the right to control their own bodies... in the framework of a legislation that continues to characterise abortion as a crime. We have the right to “dignified death”, that is, there will be no opening of the question of euthanasia... Vagueness also characterises the references to cooperation and solidarity with the poor people of the planet.

9. The Statute does not substantially improve the position of the language. Catalan can only prevail if it becomes a privileged vehicle of social communication. Judges continue to enjoy a position of linguistic privilege. Only by making demands on the administrations, the multinationals and the big companies will it be possible to guarantee the linguistic rights of citizenship and promote the use of Catalan.

10.This Statute does not allow the integration of immigrants in full conditions of citizenship, for want of legal instruments and resources. Participation in the “control of contingents” thus comes down to the shared management of an injustice for thousands of men and women. The deprivation of rights suffered by this group undermines the labour market and favours the rise of xenophobia.

The so-called “Catalan way”, an institutional bargaining distanced from popular participation, has led to this frustration. The young people and worker’s movement of France, mobilized against precarious contracts and vanquishing the government’s neoliberal turn, offer us a very different example.

It is necessary to follow the way shown on February 18. Now, we must vote “NO” to prepare a new citizen’s attack. Some will say that in voting “NO”, we will be playing the game of the worst enemies of Catalonia’s liberties. The same voices warned us

last year that to resist the European constitutional treaty was to align with the far right.

However, it is certain that the victory of that “NO” in France and Holland prepared the formidable social explosion that we now witness. Perhaps somebody is confusing the voice of French youth with the racist harangues of Le Pen? Here also, nobody would attribute to the influence of the PP a forceful “NO” from Catalan citizens. It is not enough to protest against this insult with abstention or a blank ballot.

We have to force the effective withdrawal of an unacceptable project. Who talks of complicity with the right? The Valencian Statute, agreed between the PSOE and the PP, tried to limit Catalan aspiratiions. With the Catalan Statute the aim is now to scale down Basque aspirations. This Statute - and the pact that has prefigured it- prepares a turn to the right in Catalonia and throughout the State.

The days of the Tripartite government are numbered. The leaders of the PSOE seek, through the conservative nationalist forces, the agreement of alliances to undertake neoliberal reforms - in the tax or labour areas - such as those that provoked the French revolt. In order to open a perspective of progress and liberty for working people and for the peoples, we must start to resist this attack. In the referendum if June 18, it is necessary to reject unequivocally the shameful Statute they are trying to impose on us.

WITH A BRAVE, CATALANISTA AND LEFT “NO”!

The Karachi Social Forum and its international significance

23 April 2006, by Pierre Rousset

The report is, then, “foreign” and does not claim to be based on a real knowledge of the country. It is on the other hand informed by the comparative experience of the preceding forums in Porto Alegre, Europe and India. A more detailed report will be drawn up later.

After Bamako (Mali) and Caracas (Venezuela) last January, Karachi constituted the third wing of the World Social Forum, in its “polycentric” version of 2006. Meeting from March 24-29 in the main industrial centre and port of Pakistan, it proved to be a success both in terms of numbers and of politics. The attendance - more than 30,000 - was twice as big as predicted and the forum represented an event with many new aspects for this country.

There were certainly a good number of organisational problems, from the spectacular absence of any dustbins on the meeting site (a sports complex) to the cancellation of seminars or unforeseen changes in the programme - which the Pakistani press has dwelt on. But the organizers had not had an easy task.

The destructive earthquake of October 2005, in the north of the country in Kashmir, forced the delay of the forum, initially planned for the end of January. For several months financial resources and activist energies were devoted to aiding a population which had been very hard hit and was threatened by the rigours of the Himalayan winter. Moreover, the social and citizen-based dynamic which had contributed to the success of previous forums was not self-evidently present in Pakistan.

Pakistan, land of expansion of forums

In its original homeland (a part of Latin America and of southern Europe) the launch of the WSF benefited from a new context (the emergence of resistance to capitalist globalisation), but also from the renewal of unitary traditions during the 1990s, already involving a notable diversity of social actors.

The forums have enlarged and strengthened these unitary traditions, but they have profited from a dynamic of convergence which was already underway. In other countries, in the lands of expansion, it is rather the existence of the world process which serves as reference.

It is this which allows the initiation of the dynamic of convergence specific to the social forums, which constitutes their “trademark”. It is always difficult to seek to understand the characteristics of a country that one knows very little of, but, at the risk of caricaturing a necessarily complex reality, it seems to me that such has been the case in Pakistan.

The experience of the Karachi WSF is all the more interesting to analyse inasmuch as it took place in a very diversified country (as much in social structure as in regional and national identities); under a military regime; placed on the Afghan front line of Washington’s “war on terror”; subject to the growing pressure of religious fundamentalist currents, called here “sectarian movements” and capable of murderous violence [1]; in a region dominated since the partition of 1947 by Indo-Pakistani antagonism, which has now become a nuclear stand off. [2] It is also the first time that a forum of this breadth has met in one of the biggest Muslim countries in the world.

The success of the Karachi WSF was not then in any way banal. It should be

analysed in its specificities. It is obviously the job of the Pakistanis (and those who know Pakistan well) to do it. But the perception, without pretension, of an old habitué of forums can nonetheless be also useful, at least to raise certain specificities which are the most apparent to a "foreign" onlooker. I would like first to sum up briefly on what, in my eyes, has given the event its significance.

Declension of a success

First element of success, and a major one, the WSF in Karachi opened a democratic and secular space between the pressure of the military regime and that of the fundamentalist, conservative currents. The site of the forum was alive. It was a permanent theatre of demand-based demonstrations.

Musical groups and poets gave an emotional power to the political speeches. In the seminars, some women wearing shawls or veils removed them - in Pakistan, there are many who wear no headgear. Women were numerous and mixed company was the rule in the spaces and the tribunes of the forum. The atmosphere was joyous, the speech and behaviour liberating.

Second element of success, diverse popular movements effectively appropriate the democratic and secular space opened by the forum: small fishers from the Karachi region; peasants from the province of Punjab; trades unionists in struggle against privatisation; nationalists from Sind (where Karachi is located), Baluchistan (in the west) or Kashmir (in the north); and a myriad of women's organisations. As at the WSF in Mumbai, in January 2004, the movements were participants as such in the forum, impelling the space, more than is often the case in Europe or in Latin America. The WSF in Karachi thoroughly merited the name of social forum. It expressed the radicalism of democratic and social demands.

Third element of success, the demand of solidarity was also forcefully affirmed on the most burning questions. Since the partition of 1947, Pakistan and India have lived in a situation of open war or armed truce. Despite administrative difficulties, an Indian delegation was able to get to Karachi, as a Pakistani delegation had attended the WSF in Mumbai (Bombay), two years ago. The situation in Kashmir was the theme of seminars and an important plenary where the combatant movements from the two sides of the "line of control" met for the first time thus in public. [3] Even if dialogue has not really been installed between them (that's an understatement), the event was striking.

Fourth element of success, the presence of youth and the return of politics. Hundreds of youth, particularly from Karachi, participated in the forum as volunteers. For many among them, it was their first political experience - sometimes a little disconcerting, it seems, because of the changes of programme. More generally, the forum allowed a reaffirmation of the authenticity of the political terrain in the face of the military regime which sterilises it in the name of the imperatives of national security and faced with the fundamentalist movements which sterilise it in the name of religious imperatives. The forum has reopened the debate on the place of politics and it is not the least of its results.

Muslim identity is not necessarily above all religious. It can be nationalist and cultural as seems for example to have traditionally been the case for the (regional) national movement in Sind. But the Pakistani state is constituted with a confessional reference base. A policy of official Islamisation was subsequently pursued, in particular by the military dictatorship of general Zia which made Islam a state ideology. But Islam being very diverse in Pakistan, that has exacerbated the "sectarian" conflicts between Muslims. The experience of the Karachi WSF allows us to perceive, in such a context, the centrality of the secular demand, a necessary condition for the realisation of the social unity of the exploited and the oppressed divided by the religious reference.

Fifth element of success, the forum constituted a new stage of a regional process, in South Asia, begun in India during the forums of Hyderabad (2003) and Mumbai (2004). It also initiated a unitary dynamic in Pakistan itself, which should continue: discussion was immediately opened, after the experience of Karachi, on the regular organisation of a Pakistani social forum. To be followed up and confirmed, then.

Some problems

The tensions, contradictions and setbacks should also be analysed. I will content myself with raising five here - mentioning first the organisational problems (like the deficient information on programming) which probably made life difficult for the individual "unorganised" participants.

1. **The MQM**. The relationship to the governmental institutions in the towns or the countries where the forums are held has nearly always caused problems. In Karachi, the tensions crystallized on the attitude to be taken to the MQM, the "Mohajir" movement [4] which dominates the municipality and which many formations of the Pakistani left judge "ethnicist". It was not integrated in the programme of the forum.

2. **Integration**. A certain number of movements which should logically have participated in the forum did not do so. This was notably the case with the feminist organisations of Lahore. The process of integration in the dynamic of the forums of all the components concerned is not then finished. This problem goes back probably as much to questions of functioning (opening of structures) and orientation as of "visibility".

3. **Visibility**. the contrast was striking between the composition of the platform during the forum's opening ceremony (where there were no social movements) and the place occupied by the movements in the space of the forum itself or in number of seminars.

This contrast is still more accentuated in the area of "international visibility" of the Pakistani forum (at least before its holding), which was very reduced. This problem of representation and visibility, of the gap between the composition of the central platforms and the movements which ensure the social character of the forums, is obviously not specific to the case of Pakistan.

4 **On the left**. This polemic on the nature of the social forums divided the Pakistani left. Some political movements supported the process from the beginning. This is particularly the case of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) whose activists were perfectly at home in the forum. The Awami Tehreek (from Sind) was very present. A little before the forum, a front was set up between six left organisations [5]. That probably facilitated a broader participation of left forces in the forum.

5. Internationally 58 countries were "represented" at the forum in Karachi. But, outside of South Asia, the national delegations were generally small. These were generally made up of people already concerned by Pakistan or the region (with exceptions, concerning in particular the Latin Americans). The French delegation was probably the most numerous "outside Asia". From the CRID to ESSF via the Frères des Hommes, the French were in the main already "into" Asia - although the presence of unions like the CGT and the Italian CGIL should be mentioned.

From this point, the forum in Karachi was an essentially Pakistani forum with a significant regional dynamic but a weak global participation. It was supposed to be a wing of the World Social Forum. But it was not "taken up" by the components and the international bodies of the WSF in the same way as the forums of Bamako and Caracas.

Very significantly, on the very eve of the forum in Karachi, the International Council of the WSF met… in Nairobi. It was certainly good to prolong without delay the African dynamic of Bamako to prepare the WSF 2007 in Kenya, but it would have been preferable to hold the March IC in Karachi and the following, planned in October, in Nairobi. The consequences, in Pakistan, of the lack of international support made themselves felt, including on the financial plane, and the Pakistanis clearly posed the organisational problems at a meeting during the forum, with the members of the IC of the WSF present.

Given the difficulties and the stakes (national and regional) of the Pakistani forum, the WSF in Karachi particularly merited being supported internationally. It was also a unique occasion to learn about a pioneer experience. But Asia remains the poor relation of solidarity in Europe and Latin America. Despite the role played since Mumbai by the Indians, the international bodies of the WSF reproduced instead of correcting this very unequal perception of the world.

Provisional conclusions

This only amounts to a partial, indeed fragmentary, balance sheet. All critical commentaries would be welcome. But by way of a provisional conclusion, I will stress the following points:

1. The functionality of the forums. With the emigration of the WSF outside of its Latino-European countries of origin - after Mumbaï (2004), Bamako and Karachi (2005) - the utility of the forums (of this type of forum) has now been tested positively in very varied contexts. Nothing is universal or eternal, but the adaptability of this form of action (and of the process which supports it) has proved remarkable. It has been tested on the international level in countries where the social movements are strong or weak, in favourable and unfavourable political situations, in highly defensive or counter-offensive conjunctures.

Of course, each forum has its own characteristics and functions. But the form "forum/process", "meeting space/place of impulsion of actions" clearly responds to needs linked to the period and not only to a specific political geography. We already knew it, but this is a confirmation of it. The forums allow the rallying of resistance (in its diversity) in a time of globalisation, when the crisis of the socialist reference has not been overcome and the modes of centralisation of the past period (around the workers' movement or armed struggles) do not work as before.

2. The significance of the Pakistani experience. The Karachi forum illustrates this first point of conclusion. The political situation in the country is not good. There are key struggles, sometimes victorious, but the trade union and social movement remains fragmented and globally weak. The country is extremely divided. Social structures are often very different according to province, or even inside the same province like the Punjab. The whole history of the Pakistani state since its formation in 1947 is traversed by conflicts between the elites of "ethnic" groups and provinces for the control of the administration and the army (which are dominated by the Punjabis, but also the Mohajirs). Regional or national conflicts are numerous (Baluchis, Pashtoons, Kashmiris, Sindhis and so on) and can lead to internal wars. Statistics show 97% of Pakistan's population are Muslims, with all the ambiguity linked to the use of categories of religious (or cultural?) appearance against a complex social reality (don't doubt it, there are Pakistani atheists). But we have seen the multiplicity (Sunni, Shiite, Ahmadiyya, Sufis and so on) and the violence that this "unanimous" percentage hides.

Despite all this, the forum in Karachi was a dynamic place of popular convergence. It is this which gives us something to reflect on, and which ensures that this experience its national and international significance.

3. Internal contradictions. A recurrent polemic on the role of the NGOs in the process of the WSF re-emerged in Karachi. The "left" critique of the forums is often formulated in too abstract, too "external" a fashion. The

success of the forums has nothing obvious about it, it expresses something new. To be pertinent, the critique should then begin by understanding this and recognising this; it should be formulated in, let us say, a more "internal" fashion.

The evolution of the world of NGOs poses a problem? Effectively. Some, in the name of global civil society, weaken the local or national activist fabrics. In the name of a citizen-based discourse, they stifle social radicalism. In the name of democracy, they monopolise visibility to the detriment of otherwise more representative organisations. But the world of the NGOs is not homogeneous; and it is not alone in creating a problem. The same is true of the trade union bureaucracies, intolerant "rank and file" movements, authoritarian political leaderships, of naïfs and cynics and (oh how many!) egotistical personalities and manipulative individuals. In short, it is not enough to denounce the NGOs (many of whom have their place in the forums) to ensure the popular dynamic of the process.

The poor are, in society, invisible. On the contrary, the forums should ensure the visibility of the most exploited and oppressed. Since the very beginning in Porto Alegre this has not been self-evident. The gap can be large, inside the forum, between the "street" and the platforms. Since 2001, some progress has been accomplished, but the process is not one-way - there are also regressions.

Just as the experience of the forums merits being defended against a "left" critique which is too "external", it is necessary to take seriously the contradiction at work among the people of the forums. We should neither hope nor wish for a process without contradictions. But for a new forum to merit the name "social", the most audible voice should be that of the most exploited and oppressed, their movements should be at the heart of the process.

4. Globalisation of resistance. The process of internationalisation of forums began from 2002 with the European Social Forum in Florence. It experienced a qualitative leap with Hyderabad (India) and Mumbai in 2003-2004. It is today again the case with Bamako and Karachi (Caracas occupies a specific place in the deepening of political themes). That will again be true in 2007 with Nairobi.

All the regions are not yet integrated in the same way in the process (weakness in Northern and Eastern Europe), nor represented in the same way in the international bodies (under-representation of Asia and Africa). But it is very rare to see a movement spread so rapidly in the world (in more than 40 years of militant activity, it is only the second time that I have seen it). A remark which goes, more generally, for the whole of the global justice and anti-war movement.

The forum in Karachi was made possible by this world expansion of the process; in return it gives it dynamism in a country and a zone of strategic conflicts. A sole regret: that too few organisations in Europe and Latin America took this opportunity to acquaint themselves with the stakes in South Asia.

Footnotes

[1] The non-Muslim minorities can be victims of discrimination in Pakistan. But the sectarian violence of the fundamentalist movements is above all exerted between Muslim currents, Shiites, Sunni and so on.

[2] The territories with Muslim majorities which today constitute Pakistan (to the west of the sub-continent) and Bangladesh (to the east) were only separated from India at the time of "partition" during decolonisation in 1947.

[3] Kashmir, in the North, near the Himalayas, is divided in two by the "Line of Control" which separates the armies of Indian occupation on the one hand and the Pakistanis on the other.

[4] The Mohajirs are the immigrants who came during the partition of 1947 from the Indian states with a Hindu majority: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and so on. They moved in great number to the province southeast of Sind and its capital, Karachi.

[5] The six organisations have set up the Awami Jamhoori Tehreek (AJT) (Peoples Democratic Movement). They are the National Workers Party (NWP), the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP), the Awami Tehreek (AT), the Pakistan Mazdoor Kissan Party (PMKP), the Pakistan Mazdoor Mehaz (PMM) and the Meraj Mohammed Khan group (MMKG).

Impressions on the movement for global justice in Africa

19 April 2006, by Jean Nanga

But, unlike the two other regional sites, the Polycentric World Social Forum (PWSF) in Bamako was a first on the African continent. Until now there have only been editions of the regional version, the African Social Forum (ASF). Moreover, this PWSF in Bamako is also the prelude to the 2007 World Social Forum, which will take place in Nairobi (Kenya). In other words, it was a trial run for the movement for global justice on the

continent, responsible for the organisation and mobilisation for an effective popular participation. So, what impressions has it left?

Participation

The organising committee had hoped to attract 30,000 people, from Mali and neighbouring countries, other regions of Africa and the rest of the world to this West African country, where a regional version of the Social Forum had been organised and which has also been since 2002 the site of an alternative summit to the G8, the so-called Forum of African Peoples. Participation was smaller than expected: the figures vary between 10,000 and 20,000 people. The opening demonstration was a march of around 5,000 people, over 2 km, with a route largely distanced from the popular neighbourhoods and without any real manifestation of popular support.

This low participation can partly be explained by the social situation of the Malian population, 70% of who live below the poverty line. Time is thus more devoted to individual tactics of survival, while low incomes tend to be spent on the satisfaction if basic needs rather than the payment of registration fees (equivalent to at least two meals) for a Forum of discussion and exchange. This also in the light of recent local history, that of the "falsification of the victory of March 26" (the popular movement which overthrew the military dictatorship in 1990, at the price of human lives, has given way to a "democratic" regime of billionaires which is incapable of ending pauperisation).

Nonetheless, the people of Bamako intermingled massively with those attending the Forum at a concert (tickets cost nearly as much as the costs of registration) at the Modibo Keita stadium, by the Ivory Coast reggae singer Tiken Jah Fakoly. At the concert refrains against the burden of the foreign debt and other misdeeds of neoliberalism were taken up. A proof of the sympathy of those who were absent for the work of the PWSF in the critique of neoliberalism.

Would a participation without registration fees have attracted more people in general, and in particular young schoolchildren, students and unemployed? Did the high rate of illiteracy (nearly 60%) dissuade the non-Francophones who feared being lost among the "intellectuals" and foreigners despite radio and television advertising in local languages?

In addition to the frustration caused by this low participation, there were problems connected to the fragmented localisation of the Forum, over a dozen sites, stretching from one extremity to another in a city deprived of an adequate system of public transport. As if the organising committee had no memory of the inconvenience resulting from the fragmented nature of the European Social Forum in Paris-Saint-Denis and the advantage of the concentrated localisation of the World Social Forum in Mumbai. This dispersal reduced the possibility of going immediately from one meeting or workshop to another and the possibilities of meeting and exchanges between participants belonging to different thematic networks. For example, few people were able to go from the House of Culture, the so-called "Universe of women" to the "Thomas Sankara" international youth camp, since they were situated at two extremes of the city.

On the global character of the PWSF

The PWSF was not simply a repeat of the last African Social Forum, held in December 2005 in Conakry (Guinea). Many of the most media-prominent figures in the movement for global justice were present, like Christophe Aguiton, Samir Amin, José Bové, Bernard Cassen, Susan George, François Houtart, P.K. Murthy, Paul Nicholson, Jacques Nikonoff, Riccardo Petrella, Ignacio Ramonet and Aminata Traoré. There was participation from delegations and individuals from outside Africa: Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Catalonia, Finland, Greece, India, Philippines, Uruguay and so on. The most visible non-African participation was from Europe and France in particular (No Vox, Sud trade unions, CGT and so on).

Nonetheless, some participants were not appreciated. For example, Federico Mayor, ex-director general of UNESCO, was judged unwelcome by the participants at a meeting of the organising committee, since he was partly responsible for the neoliberalisation of education and culture. The same was true for a representative of the French state, who intervened in a workshop organised in the youth camp on the theme "What youth to free Africa from imperialism? The case of Mali, from yesterday to today" to invoke the African passion of Jacques Chirac. Also there was the presence of the banner of USAID at the entry to a workshop of the said camp.

Even the presence of some big international NGOs through their African sections displeased some. Thus, some activists from the southern African social movements expressed hostility at the end of the opening march to the entry into the Modibo Keita stadium of camels carrying a banner favourable to fair trade. The issue here was hostility to Oxfam, supposedly responsible for the camels, whose opposition to neoliberal globalisation seemed to them ambiguous. It showed that some so-called NGOs from the North would merit rather the denomination of PGO (para-governmental organisations), because of their relations with the states of the North, from which they await some positive, morally motivated changes concerning its relations with the South. As if it was possible to put an end to the unjust relations which are fundamental characteristics of the present world order without challenging the class nature of its economic organisation.

As if the history of liberalism, a euphemism for capitalism, in the 19th and 20th centuries had known a moment of truce in its predation,

savagery and barbarism towards the peoples of the South: colonial imperialism, the so-called world wars, apartheid, the banana republics, neo-colonialism, low intensity wars, in the name of defence of “free trade”.

If Rémy Herrera, from the World Forum of Alternatives, said he was in Bamako to defend two positions - “the necessity of passing from consciousness to anti-imperialist action… [and] beyond the anti-neoliberal critique, the more fundamental critique of capitalism” [1] - this tone is not dominant in the movement for global justice in general, in Africa in particular. Which partly explains the dependency of some local NGOs - under the pressure of everyday life and the dominant ideology, including the illusion of a capitalism of social justice, following the bankruptcy of “actually existing socialism” - on NGOs from the North, which are supposed to guide the peoples of the South towards development, capitalist of course.

On programme: the universal and the particular

On the eve of the opening of the PWSF the Third World Forum, the World Forum of Alternatives and other groups organized a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Bandung Conference, which gave birth to the non-aligned movement, and is supposed to have contributed to decolonisation, particularly in Africa. Despite a very low attendance, this meeting, organised in thematic workshops, ended with a declaration called the “Bamako appeal”, aimed at organisations who recognise “the necessity of passing from collective consciousness to the construction of collective actors”, in other words to the construction of the “internationalism of the peoples of the South and the North faced with the ravages engendered by the dictatorship of the financial markets and by the uncontrolled globalised deployment of the multinationals… to the solidarity of the peoples of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas faced with the challenges of the development of the 21st century… [of the] alternative political, economic and cultural consensus to neoliberal and militarised globalisation as well as to the hegemonism of the US and its allies”

As for the PWSF, it took place according to tradition, with a multiplicity of themes attempting to cover all aspects of the existence and relations of societies and individuals affected by neoliberal globalisation. Thus, the following themes were discussed in the form of meetings and workshops: wars and peace; the WTO; the Third World debt; agrarian and peasant questions; “the Universe of women”; international cooperation; the destruction of the ecosystems; migration and the criminalisation of migrants; raw materials; social struggles; communication and information, culture, the future of the WSF; good governance; alternatives; education; the critique of the UN as tool of the imperialist powers in general, the US in particular ; the impunity of African leaders, former and current, who torture their peoples and so on. Despite the intention of avoiding hierarchies, some themes drew more attention than others, principally because of their impact on the everyday life of societies, African in particular. That was the case, for example, with the theme of debt and its consequences on health, education, jobs and so on, which were principally organised by networks like Jubilé Sud or the CADTM.

However, numerous workshops were also devoted - quasi-exclusively in the “Universe of Women” - to questions of patriarchy in neoliberalism and the emancipation of women. While many still justify the oppression of women in terms of relativism or essentialist culturalism, in our day it is the product of an articulation between pre-capitalist forms (so called traditional, of control of bodies and exploitation of the labour force) and capitalist forms, neoliberal, among them: the strengthening of economic heteronomy (also through the unemployment of women, including educated women) and the massive falloff in the attendance of girls at school (a consequence of social measures of structural adjustment) which favour the development of prostitution among young girls, as individual strategy of survival. This tendency is not getting any better in a time of neoliberal barbarism. However, it would not be controversial to say that mobilisation for fundamental sexual equality is not yet considered cardinal for the majority of the African movement for global justice, which is predominantly male. .

It should be said moreover that a workshop was devoted to the question of sexual preferences because this is virtually a taboo question in most African societies and one on which the movement for global justice is also not free of prejudice. Above all in relation to male homosexuality, with homophobia illustrated in recent times in Africa by the legal repression of gays in Egypt, the discourse of Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe, the press campaign against gays underway in Cameroon and so on. So its place on the agenda was entirely justified. However, nothing guarantees that it will be on the agenda of the next African Social Forum because the specific weight of prejudice in the societies and the repression underway does not favour the organisation of gays, confining them most often to a suffocating quasi-clandestinity.

Burning reality: immigration, land, rail…

Among the themes on the agenda particularly in synch with African reality were those concerning migration policies. The host country of the PWSF is a big centre of migration towards other African countries and out of the continent. Thus the drama of Ceuta and Mellila (covered by the media in a very ambiguous fashion) was taken up in a number of workshops as a symbol of criminalisation, particularly by the western states, of certain categories of migrants, fleeing poverty, war and the repressive regimes which emerge from neoliberalism. Which favours,

moreover, the production of those "without papers" whose "illegality" allows their exploitation. What could be better for employers seeking superprofits and verging on nostalgia for the slave workforce of the first days of globalisation? Today, there are 80,000 Malian immigrants in France, nearly half of them "illegal", and thus forced to work at the whim of their employers, and exposed to the threat of expulsion.

To denounce this policy of violation of the right to migration as well as racism, a peaceful march was organised from the International Conference Centre at Bamako to the French embassy The mobilisation, was affected by the force with which Aminata Traoré, a leading figure in the African and Malian global justice movement intervened to denounce it, thus reducing Malian participation, without succeeding in having it cancelled.

Which illustrates the ambiguity of certain elites in the global justice movement. Some recalled that the African Social Forum, of which she is the main leader, was not associated with the organisation of the counter summit to the Summit of Heads of State of France and Africa held in Bamako in December 2005.

Among the most disappointed demonstrators were the hundreds of Malian participants at the workers and peasants' conference whu had suspended their work in order to participate in the march. This conference, largely organised through the Kayira network of community radios, seemed at the margin of the PWSF through its location, a big straw hut in the courtyard of the conference centre. However, it was a space of information and exchange on the social situation of the rural areas. At the end of this conference, a step forward in the area of coordination seems to have been accomplished. The Malian small peasants benefited from the support of peasant delegates from other countries, African in particular, who denounced the imposition of genetically modified seeds, food insecurity and expulsion from land. For their part, Malian workers were able to exchange with trades unionists from elsewhere, in struggle also against measures of flexibilisation, privatisation and its consequences. These struggles are particularly symbolised, in Mali, by the struggle against privatisation of the railways.

Some of those attending from South Africa drew attention to the setting up of an international network for the right to work, which does not exist on the continent, based around their national campaign "Make unemployment history. Demand the right to work" [2] But unemployment without benefits, in the Third World in general, in Africa in particular, seems to compromise the effectiveness of such a network. Such a network, demanding the fundamental right of everyone to a decent job, seems not to interest the big development NGOs, who often relay (despite themselves?) the neoliberal principle of the economic incompetence of the state and of salvation by capitalist private initiative which flows from it.

The necessity of a radical current

Others from southern Africa in general, and from South Africa in particular, placed the critique of the NEPAD on the agenda. They insisted on the specific role of South Africa, whose chief of state, Thabo Mbeki, is a promoter of the NEPAD, as main relay of imperialism in Africa. [3] Since the presidency of Mandela, but above all under Thabo Mbeki, the South African state perpetuates its nature as assistant to South African capital.

Yet this African expansion of South African capital, through the NEPAD, has found defenders among the participants. The president of the organisations of civil society from Guinea, Elhadj Farouck Tafsir Souhmah, defended the pan-Africanism of the NEPAD, arguing nonetheless for the necessity of a supplement of social soul, through the implication of African "civil society" in its realisation. Again an expression of the influence of neoliberal ideology.

In contrast to this pan-Africanism, (deliberately?) blind to the class nature of the African states and to the heterogeneity of often conflictual social interests in African civil society, youth attending the PWSF named their camp after Thomas Sankara [4] This latter, in spite of his faults (like the dismissal of 1,500 striking teachers on March 22, 1984) and limits, remains to some African youth the last African anti-imperialist figure.

Thus, a symposium (conferences, film, book exposition and so on), discussed Sankara's lone appeal for the repudiation of the foreign debt (made at an Organisation of African Unity (OAU) summit in July 1987), his critique of neo-colonial cooperation during the 1987 reception of French president François Mitterrand, in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), and his concrete struggle for the emancipation of women in Burkina Faso For these youth, he was a precursor of the African movement for social justice. Next time it is planned to pay tribute to the leader of the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, Amilcar Cabral, another great radical figure of the recent African past whose spirit had contributed to the unfolding of the April 1974 Revolution in Portugal.
The radicalism expressed by these youth - which is not shared by others, who identify despite everything with the African Union - is in synch with the desire expressed by others in the African movement for social justice to develop radical perspectives. An option which is necessary if we wish to attack the evil at its root, rather than simply its current appearance which is neoliberalism.

The dominant current in the movement, which often behaves as if the social situation of the peoples of the South was similar to that of the petty bourgeoisies of the North, indeed of the South unhappily scored some points in Bamako, with the very weak participation - around 50 people - at the Assembly of Social Movements and the non-adoption of the declaration of social movements. The Assembly was scheduled for the eve of the closure of the PWSF, at the same time as workshops and lectures which were also of interest to the social movements. [5]

In order for the articulation of the reflection and the passage to action to be more audible at the next WSFs,

much remains to be done. The next meeting in Nairobi could be a stage in the clarification of the process. The movement in Africa will continue its processes of clarification through social Forums at the national and sub-regional (southern Africa, West Africa, Maghreb and so on) levels, the Forum of Peoples and the African Social Forum but also through struggle and mobilisations on a daily basis against exploitation, oppression, repression and injustice. Thus the concrete road to a world of human equality and fundamental social justice depends on the degree of participation and organisation of consciousness of the wretched of the earth, everywhere, according to local and global rhythms.

Footnotes

[1] "This day is a day against imperialism", in "Terraviva", independent daily of the Polycentric World Social Forum of Bamako number 1, January 20, 2006. However in the same interview, R. Herrera spoke of the "bourgeoisies of the South who serve the interests, not of their peoples, but of the establishment of the North". This recalls the illusion, criticised by Fanon, on the possible existence of emancipatory or progressive bourgeoisies in the countries of the south in general, in Africa in particular. Do the bourgeoisies of the North really serve the interests of their peoples?

[2] For more information, see AIDC, Alternatives, Vol. 3-no 17, November 2005, or on the Internet: www.aidc.org.za.

[3] Ishmael Lesufi, "NEPAD and South African Imperialism", Jubilee South Africa, 2006, p. 37. Pamphlet edited with the support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

[4] Thomas Sankara (1949-1987) was head of state in Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta) from 1984 to 1987. He was assassinated on October 17, 1987, during a putsch led by his number 2, Blaise Compaoré, who remains head of state today.

[5] The traditional declaration was replaced by the Contribution of the General Assembly of Social Movements in the World Social Forum in Bamako

A first balance sheet

17 April 2006, by Franco Turigliatto , Salvatore Cannavò

First of all, while is true that Berlusconi has been defeated, his coalition and Berlusconism as a "biography of Italy" haven't been beaten. This is a significant analytical element, as it impinges on the Union's actual possibilities of governing.

Berlusconism has proven a formidable social and political bond that has enabled the leader of the right-wing forces to make an unexpected comeback. And above all, it shows how deeply marked Italy is by the mix of neoliberalism, populism, racism and clericalism that characterise the House of Freedoms.

Its message, also influenced by US neoconservative culture, has attracted and motivated half of the electorate, and the majority of older voters, in an election with a high voting rate and a dramatic drop in the number of stay-at-home voters.

The Union has not proven an adequate option to beat the rightwing forces conclusively and undermine their cultural influence, social breeding ground and thus the strength of their forces.

On the centre-left, Prodi has affirmed plans for a democratic party emerging strengthened from the collapse of DS and Margherita in the Senate. However, these elections were a defeat for Prodi himself. He has not succeeded in staking out a place as an unchallenged leader, due to the defeat in the Senate that will have a significant impact on how the Government is formed.

Prodi's electoral campaign was a failure, with its emphasis on moderation and a healthy relationship with Confindustria (the employer association). It failed to grasp the social issues that could have brought about a collapse of the adversary front. While Berlusconi's strategy veered towards a radical, frontal attack to consolidate his own electorate and reduce the risk of abstentionism, the Union responded by faltering, taking one backward step after another in terms of tax policy and their very analysis of Italy, casting an eye towards the "powers-that-be" and downplaying radical elements that could be found in issues such as insecurity or taxation of financial investment earnings.

Giving in to these moderate thrusts turned against the liberal heart of the Union, DS and Margherita, which emerged as losers. Rifondazione's good showing in the Senate, despite a lacklustre showing in the House, and the generally good results of anti-neoliberal forces in the coalition, are signs of a desire for a leftist outlook that Union's general profile and Prodi's image itself do not adequately represent.

The elections also mark the high point and endpoint of a rigidly bipolar system. It is a high point, because never before has the vote represented a referendum for or against the ruling head of government to such an extent. Even the overnight wait as the last polls were counted and the 25,000-vote margin in the House are signs of this particularity.

But precisely due to these features, and a "bastard" electoral law, the confrontation between the two leaders and sides is a snapshot of an Italy exactly split in half, with both houses having a different majority (if only in terms of real figures) and thus with a blockage of the entire political system. This is grounds enough to support an end to the bipolar system, the introduction of an effective and more democratic, proportional representation law, if only like the German model, and the re-establishment of a normal political dialectic between different programmes and a number of leaderships.

Elections always give an indication, albeit a delayed one, of the relationship of forces in social terms and in terms of the class struggle. And this parameter clearly indicates that the phase of struggles and movements just behind us has no doubt put some dents into the Berlusconi myth, but not socially defeated it.

The rightwing bloc has exactly the same votes as five years ago and the defeat of Forza Italia [1]
means an new internal balance of the alliance, tilting towards UDC [2]. The struggles and negotiations of the last five years have certainly indicated a change in direction with respect to the 1990s, but not to the extent of plotting out a clear alternative to neoliberalism and its social model.

Thinking and encouraging others to thing that Italy had changed and that waiting for Election Day was enough to register the change, has proven a dramatic error. The current mood is one of disorientation and the difficulty of finding a real outlet for hopes of change.

A belief that the political outcome was decisive in consolidating the movements of recent years has weighed upon these movements, weakening them. Now we bitterly take stock that along the road to social and political change there is still a long road ahead of us and many obstacles on the way. Furthermore, there was a lacklustre outcome in regions governed by the centre-left.

One year after the change announced by the regional elections, the rightwing has returned to government. Yet another demonstration that, to really achieve change, a social base and the capacity to rebuild a bloc for the alternative able to achieve a dynamic of transformation, especially from below. Thinking today that we can get around that by barricading ourselves in a "social minority" government could have dramatic effects on the development of the class struggle and for the very fate of PRC.

In this context the prospect opening up is far from ideal. The formation of an alternative government seems a very difficult task no longer and not only due to Prodi's programmatic ambiguity or moderate forces within the centre-left, but also due to the objective strength that the rightwing forces have shown and their impact on the centre-left.

Italians waited late into the night to confirm Berlusconi's defeat

Appeals to a centrist option have become stronger today. This can take various forms: concertation in election of the President of the Republic; the election of the presidents of both Houses; respect for a so-called "public accounts emergency" to which various spokespersons of the centre-left have alluded, and so on. For this reason, an eventual Prodi government will either have radical features with signs of obvious breaks with the past, or it will not last. Immediate signs of such breaks must include immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq, abrogation of Law 30, the Moratti and Bossi-Fini acts, a relaunch of the wage question and so on.

Pressure on our party will be extremely strong. Calls for a sense of responsibility and a strong appeal to coalition bonds will exert great pressure on PRC, forcing the party to respect the alliance and not give the right wing an opportunity to take revenge.

This could mean giving in to indigestible measures. Participation in such a government, in the many forms it could take, is a risk far greater than what we had feared in the past few months. Rifondazione runs the risk of being bottled up in a political-institutional trap that we must find a way of getting out of.We must put radical content at centre stage, and not coalition ties.

This means Rifondazione must regain its own autonomy in terms of action. Social struggles must retake centre stage, as in the extraordinary outcome in France. The main issues in the upcoming phase remain those of the electoral campaign: immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq, abrogation of Law 30, the Moratti and Bossi-Fini acts, closing the CPT to taxation of financial investment income and concrete measures for income redistribution, including the reintroduction of a new sliding scale, a law on civil unions and measures for cleaning up the courts by going beyond a different justice depending on who is in court to equal justice for all (amnesty; drug laws...).

The choice of the next President of the Republic calls for particular autonomy, refusing candidacies linked to a neoliberal economic outlook and favouring those who express a solid commitment to the constitution, in particular article 11. In this context, there is the link to the referendum campaign to defeat the constitutional counter-reform - the centre-right's "devolution" and the electoral campaign for the upcoming local elections. Rifondazione's scores can be analysed in two ways. The exceptional outcome in the Senate is not matched at all in the House, with a score beneath the most recent European elections.

Certainly, in absolute terms there is a significant progress in a context in which all forces had the benefit of a higher voter turnout. However, the gap between the two votes remains, penalising the one where young people have more influence. There is a possible dual explanation: on the one hand, competition with the Olive Tree (Ulivo) slate, presented as an innovative, united approach, and Prodi, "further left" than the two slates, DS [3] and Margherita [4] , standing separately for the Senate.

On the other, a spillover effect between votes for the Ulivo in the House and the "Together for the Union" slate in the Senate, and thus a displacement of votes for the PDCI [5] to the Rifondazione symbol, the only one with the hammer and sickle. We must ask to what extent an electoral campaign based on reliability rather than differentiation and the "added value" of PRC.

The outcome is not comforting for the European Left either, because PRC should have had the greatest appeal precisely in the presence of Ulivo's unitary slates. Instead, the PRC won votes in competition with DS and Margherita party slates, with a neutral presence of the "Together for the Union" slate. These attest to the vote for Rifondazione as a "party", its presence on the ground, its symbol, its political and media representation.

PRC has taken a leading role in this campaign, through its activists' energy and pressure, the presence and prestige of its structures in the regions, and its ability to "act as a party" Obviously this fact has not counterbalanced the weight of a highly mediatised electoral campaign, relying on TV exposure and spotlighting the leaders.

This distortion must be corrected via an internal discussion about the party and its role. In any case, alongside this passion and effort there is also a grace period through an electoral campaign that has pushed internal differences to the background, spotlighting unity of action and feeling that still makes PRC a different party from the others.

Click HERE for Chamber of Deputy results.

Click HERE for Senate results.

Footnotes

[1] Berlusconi's party

[2] Union of Christian and Centre Democrats - A party coming out of the former Christian Democrats (elements of the Christian Democrats are also in the Union).
[3] Democrats of the Left- coming out of the right wing of the former Italian Communist Party.

[4] Daisy-Democracy is Freedom - a liberal-centrist member of the Union.

[5] Party of Italian Communists - split from Rifondazione over its support for the first Prodi government, and generally made up of old "orthodox" (Stalinist) CP members.

Ollanta Humala - Peru's New Hope?

14 April 2006, by Herve do Alto

The first round of the Peruvian general elections on Sunday April 9 produced a result: in spite of a very aggressive electoral campaign against him, it was the nationalist candidate, Ollanta Humala, who came out on top with over 30 per cent of the vote.

However, Humala will have to wait to know who will be his opponent in the second round: for the moment the counting of votes does not make it possible to know whether it will be the social-liberal candidate, Alan Garcia, or the representative of the Right, Lourdes Flores, who are both on around 24 per cent of the vote.

In spite of the opinion polls, which were crediting him with a higher score, this result is a real success for Humala, whom the Unites States perceive as a "second Chavez" and whose possible accession to the presidency is feared by the Peruvian bourgeoisie. Thus, on the eve of the elections, the outgoing President Alejandro Toledo addressed the Peruvian people in a televised "message to the nation", in the course of which he declared that the people had to "think" and not vote "for a candidate who represents instability and authoritarianism". In short, a direct attack on Humala.

The day of the elections itself was marked by an unexpected event: at the moment of going to vote in a private university situated in a bourgeois neighbourhood of Lima, Humala had to face five hundred right-wing activists shouting "Assassin!". Once he was in the polling station, he found himself literally blocked for more than an hour: a scene that was to say the least surreal and which was only made possible because of the passivity of the police force, which was suspected of complicity.

The incident, far from being a mere anecdote, highlights all the ambiguity of the person who today reflects the aspirations of a majority of the popular sectors. Accused throughout the campaign of having violated human rights, Humala is suspected of having participated as an army officer in acts of torture in 1992, when former president Alberto Fujimori was conducting his "war on subversion" against Shining Pathway - the Maoist guerrilla movement led by Abimael Guzman that had been launched some years previously, and which was particularly active among the Peruvian peasantry.

These are accusations that, paradoxically, the state cannot prove, because to do so would discredit the whole of the army as such. He is also suspected of having established links with the "military mafia" of Vladimir Montesinos, former army chief under Fujimori, links that are only supposed to have been broken after his rebellion against Fujimori at Tacna in the South of Peru, along with his brother Antauro, in 2000.

In the context of elections which were

extremely polarized, Humala's success can be partly explained by the disoriented state of the Left, part of which got entangled in "Fujimorism" and which is today totally absent from the political landscape. Ollanta is a career officer who initially adhered to "ethnocacerism", a racist Incaist ideology developed by his father Isaac, and which is still espoused by his brother, who is at present in prison following a new armed rebellion in January 2005 [1].

Humala (centre, hat) with his brother Antauro (uniform, no hat) during the October 2000 military rebelion against Fujimori

But he has, since his entry into political activity last year, considerably moderated his discourse, giving it a more clearly nationalist character, which is now centered on recovering the country's natural resources. Proclaiming himself as "neither right nor left", cultivating an image that is in the purest style of the Latin American caudillo, he has nevertheless succeeded in giving a voice to the most impoverished social layers in Peru, and in raising hopes of putting a stop the economic policies that Toledo, by signing on Wednesday April 12 a Free Trade Agreement (TLC) with the United States, intends to pursue right to the end of his term of office [2]. That is what is at stake in the second round of the election, which will take place in a month's time.

"Latin America is exhausted by neo-liberalism"

Interview with Ollanta Humala

At the time of Evo Morales's investiture as President of Bolivia in January, our correspondent Herve Do Alto met and interviewed Ollanta Humala, who had come to Bolivia for the occasion. In this interview, where he argues for a break with neo-liberalism, Humala shows himself to be at the crossroads of nationalism and indigenism.

Q. Evo Morales is the first indigenous president of Bolivia. How does that make you feel?

A. I feel great happiness! It is the expression of a political process which is giving a new orientation and a new face to Latin America. New leaders are emerging from sectors that are social, popular and varied. It would have been unthinkable only twenty or thirty years ago that they should come to power. I think that Evo Morales is part of this new generation of leaders who are going to give a fresh impulse to Latin America in a world context.

Do you think that you are part of this new generation of leaders?

Of course! I've only been in politics for eight months. Until then I was a soldier, posted to France, and in scarcely eight months we have managed to reach the first place in the opinion polls. This is the expression of a progressive current in America [3]. America is exhausted by neo-liberalism, which has brought none of the benefits that its defenders promised. We want to rebuild our economic model. We want to give the masses of this country, who have never been protected by the law, a new citizenship. We are going to see to it that they have education of quality, a reliable health system...

What influence will the victory of Evo Morales have on your campaign?

I think it is important that Morales succeeds in consolidating his position in Bolivia. I see much joy on the faces of Bolivians. This process will help us, if we come to power, to build along with Evo Morales a common agenda for Bolivia and Peru, concerning for example gas, the cultivation of coca, the debt...All these are themes that go beyond the frontiers of our two countries. For my part, I have a long-term ambition, which is to bring to fruition a project of integration between Bolivia and Peru.

Precisely concerning the coca leaf, what is your exact position on the subject? Do you think that it is a question of a traditional Andean culture that has to be defended?

Of course, that's obvious! The coca leaf is today the object of total confusion with cocaine, whereas it represents an ancestral culture, whatever the United States wants to think about it. So in this sense we are partisans of its depenalisation and we think it is our duty to defend Peruvian coca growers.

Your military past and your participation in a coup d'etat against ex-president Fujimori, in 2000, have contributed to giving you an image as dangerous authoritarian populist, or even a fascist. How do you react to these accusations?

They are really trying to discredit me through these assertions. I did in fact take part in an attempted coup d'etat, but today we are counting on the electoral road to change our country and break with neo-liberalism on a nationalist and progressive basis, in solidarity with all those Latin American regimes who are engaged in a perspective that is similar to ours. Besides, fascism has always defended big capital, whereas as far as I'm concerned, I defend the small producers and the poorest Peruvians.

Footnotes

[1] The term "ethnocacerism" refers to General Andres Avelino Caceres (1836-1923), a "patriotic" Peruvian oligarch, who during the 1879-1884 war with Chile was the leader of the detachments of Indian peasant guerrillas. He subsequently betrayed and massacred them when they began to take on the big Peruvian landowners, and later became president. It is highly debatable whether "ethnocacerism" as such can be properly qualified as racist. Humala himself says that: "ethnocacerism is only the military version of Peruvian nationalism" (editors' note.

[2] Toledo's decision to sign the TLC with the United States has provoked widespread protests in Peru. Humala has called on Congress to block the deal and proposed that there should be a referendum on the question.

[3] Like most Latin Americans, Humala uses "America" to mean the whole continent, including, and even especially, its southern half - unlike most Europeans and North Americans, who use it to refer only to the United States.

The challenge for Morales

12 April 2006, by Herve do Alto

The internal difficulties that threaten the government's cohesion are in fact very comparable to those that the MAS has previously experienced and is still experiencing. These difficulties can seem all the more marked because of the absence of a leadership with a coherent political project, which is illustrated by the systematic failure of every attempt to define a Masista ideology.

Morales is being closely watched by all sides

This carries a strong risk of involving the government cabinet in resolving "public problems" on a one-off basis, thus demonstrating its weaknesses and reinforcing the role of the "chief".

The task of articulating the strictly union demands coming from different social sectors could prove to be impossible in the long term: an interesting case is the position of the government on the Free Trade Agreement (TLC) with the United States. Morales publicly opposed this on March 16, 2006, enforcing silence on the Minister of Labour, Santiago Galvez, who had however taken a position in favor of the agreement during the campaign - in his capacity as a trade union leader of factory workers.

The nomination of Galvez had given rise to congratulations from leaders who are opposed to the MAS because of its reformism. So this case underlines how certain social movements that are supposedly "radical" know very well how to combine a revolutionary discourse with economic "pragmatism". [1]

In this context, where even within the government, the lack of "political" cadres makes itself felt, it is very likely that the "invited" intellectuals will once again have considerable influence on the political orientation of the MAS and of the government. "Defence of democracy" as an objective superior to all others seems to be being replaced by the "way out of the crisis through pacts" proposed by [Vice-President] Alvaro Garcia Linera. Despite his radical past as an indigenist guerrilla, Garcia Linera, who is already the theoretician of "Andean-Amazonian capitalism" of which the aim is to create a "productive shock" in Bolivia to resolve chronic poverty, seems to be making permanent negotiations with the right-wing social sectors in Bolivia one of the criteria of the building of a "new Bolivia". The risk here is that despite their corporatists tendencies and the presence in the government of some of their leaders, the social movements will be increasingly marginalized - within a process that is however being conducted in their name - in favor of the "pact" with the elites who yesterday governed the country.

To this internal difficulties must of course be added many external constraints.

First of all there is obviously the pressure of the Bush administration, which seems to have decided to give the new Bolivian government no breathing space. Over and above the various minor diplomatic incidents provoked by the United States, whose effect is essentially symbolic, (like the withdrawal of the visa granted to the Cocalera leader Leonilda Surita, who was accused without any proof of having links with terrorist organizations), the loss by Bolivia of the Colombian soya market because of the signature in February 2006 of a TLC between that country and the United States (which is likely to lead in the next year to the loss of more than 10,000 jobs), reminds us, if it was necessary, that the means of pressure on the Morales government that the powerful neighbor has are numerous. This also encourages the questionings of whether or not Bolivia has "the means of a rupture" [with imperialism and the Bolivian elites], which are illustrated even by the MAS's own discourse - for example on the nationalization of hydrocarbons, where it systematically oscillates between radicality and moderation.

It remains very difficult looking at its first steps to know whether the Morales government will or will not go forward to a rupture.

Certainly this new government has taken courageous decision, like the refusal to negotiate a TLC with the United States, in favor of a TCP (Commercial Agreement for the Peoples) whose content remains to be defined; the suspension of the call for tenders concerning the iron deposits of Mutun so as to revise a mining code that is much too favourable to private companies; or the 100% increase in the Bolivian minimum wage (from 440 to 880 Bolivianos, that is, from US$55 to US$110).

But parallel to this, the law convening the election of the Constituent Assembly, negotiated according to the line of "a way out of the crisis through pacts" of Garcia Linera, seems at first sight unsatisfactory compared to the demands of the social movements: no representation of either indigenous or trade union organizations; limiting of the powers of the Constituent

Assembly by maintaining in place the present Congress and by using the present Constitution as a working base...

However, although this law was in fact a so-called "special" law which required a two-thirds majority in Congress, which the MAS does not have and which consequently required a consensus with the Right, it is striking to note that the MAS leadership refused after having envisaged it, to have recourse to mass mobilizations to exert pressure on the Right in Congress. This is all the more worrying in that the right-wing political forces seem to be still suffering from the shock of their rout on December 18, 2005, are politically inaudible and only maintain a potential for contesting the government's action through the Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee. This constituent assembly - the demand for which has been maintained by social movements for more than 15 years now - is already being denounced by certain social movements outside the MAS, in particular the COB trade union confederation.

In fact, there is still a space for the "social Left" despite the presence of the MAS in government. Represented by leaders such as Jaime Solares, Felipe Quispe, Edgar Patana, and especially Oscar Olivera (spokesperson for the Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y el Gas which arose from the "water war" in 2000 in Cochabamba, who is a sympathizer of the MAS but wants to keep his independence), this Left continues to have a potential for mobilization independent of the government, making it possible for it to involve, as it has done in the past, the rank and file of the MAS in the social mobilization that could develop around the debates over the nationalization of gas. This can act as a counterweight to the tendency that exists within the MAS to subject the social movements to the action of the government, as Alvaro Garcia suggested during an interview given to the newspaper Pagina 12. Asked about the contestation of the draft law convoking the Constituent Assembly by certain organizations within the MAS itself, he replied: "These movements have not yet taken the measure of the historic moment that they are living through, since it is now they who occupy the seats of power. But in the stage that we are going through, this is no doubt normal". [2]

This can also lead us to think that the Masista government is not for the moment condemned to repeat the disillusions of the experiences in neighbouring countries. And that we can still believe that a government that comes out of struggles, maintains an "organic" link with social movements and relies on their development, can be a force for social transformation.

Footnotes

[1] In this respect the town of El Alto is a case that is extremely interesting because of electoral sociology. Although it was the epicentre of the two "gas wars" of October 2003 and May-June 2005, its population elected twice in a row as mayor, in 1999 and 2004, Jose Luis Paredes, a former member of the MIR who has just one the prefectoral elections in La Paz, standing for the coalition led by the principal right-wing candidate, Jorge "Tuto Quiroga".

Paredes explained to the Argentinian newspaper Pagina 12 during the 2004 election that he "(had) made the choice of centering (his) campaign on the signature of a free trade agreement with United States". Although the inhabitants of El Alto have become the heralds of the social struggle, they have nonetheless basically remained small traders...

[2] The interview was published on March 13, 2006.

Without ifs or buts, even after 9 April

12 April 2006, by Sinistra Critica (Critical Left)

This means expectations have been let down by a centrist and moderate offensive within the Union, expressing itself through support for the high-speed train between Lyon and Turin, the European Parliament vote on the Bolkestein guidelines and Prodi's proposals to reduce labour costs, mostly measures targeting the Confindustria, the employers' confederation.

How Liberazione saw election outcome

Marco Ferrando's removal from the PRC slate can be viewed in this context. This grave decision has led to strife in the material and formal make-up of the party but above all, giving in to the moderate and centrist offensive launched against the PRC. Beyond different appreciations about some of Ferrando's statements, the event has been used by the daily Corriere della Sera and the Ulivo.

In the name of so-called "incompatibility" with the party line, the PRC national secretary has made a choice that is serious in formal terms, mistaken in political terms and worrisome in terms of relations towards minority views. What good is a guarantee of the right to dissent if disciplinary measures are brought in immediately, whenever it is exercised?

And how can the political disagreements that we absolutely don't want to renounce, and which will certainly have public repercussions, be settled in future? If getting closer to government has such effects even

before the new parliament takes their seats, what will this situation mean later on? These are questions that threaten the quality of life in the party, its future as a united force with the ability to welcome differing views.

Up against the centrist offensive, PRC needs to change gears, in terms of political line and its electoral campaign. A qualitative leap in political outlook cannot be modelled on the Union's programmatic profile; it needs the ideas and outlook of a coherently anti-capitalist left. These ideas and outlook, as we repeat, are what it takes to beat Berlusconi. For this reason, we are putting forth and standing up for certain programmatic priorities in the electoral campaign to clearly affirm that "No to war and neoliberalism" will remain our stand after the 9 April elections, even after a victory of the centre-left with a Prodi government as its most likely outcome.

1) The first priority is to "Abolish all their laws": this means a commitment to round out what the Union programme has left uncompleted, namely, the need to abrogate the Berlusconi government's worst legislation, not just the Bossi-Fini immigration measures. These include Law 30, the Moratti Act, the Pensions Act, the Fini Act on drugs and Law 40 on artificial fecundation. Abrogating this legislation is not merely a symbolic measure. It is the only way of preventing these laws simply being redrafted or "bypassed" - a return to such centre-left legislation as the Treu package, the Turco-Napolitano, Zecchino-Berlinguer Act or the Dini pensions reform.

2) The second priority is wages. References to redistribution of income are not enough if a precise system to get back the wages lost in twenty years of neoliberal policies is not enacted.

For this reason, we view the call for the re-establishment of a "New sliding scale" as a necessary battle. Beside this, we are fighting for the introduction of a social wage to combat precarity, as well as a higher floor on pensions.

3) Precarity can also be beaten, firstly by re-establishing clear rules in the labour market to protect employees.

4) Although the Union programme does abolish the Bossi-Fini Act, it fails to abolish the CPT. This is the price paid for the philosophy of "migration flows" and hence entrance quotas. Alongside voting rights for migrants, the right to asylum, citizenship and residency, the closing of all types of CPT is one of our priorities.

5) An immediate, definite withdrawal from Iraq. The "technical times" safeguard for protection of troops is an established practice, and cannot be used as an alibi for extending the mission. But Italy is also present on other fronts, beginning with Afghanistan. An antiwar commitment also entails withdrawal on those fronts, as well as a cut in military spending, closing foreign military bases and the reconversion of war industries. This is why we oppose plans for a European Army.

6) The fight for the Palestinian people's rights must continue, starting out from the full recognition of the democratic vote in the latest elections, as well as a refusal of cuts in aid to the Palestinians as blackmail to impose Israel's unilateral plans, with backing from the Western powers.

7) In this context, it is particularly important to successfully build the 18 March demonstration for withdrawal from Iraq and defence of the Palestinian people's rights.

8) The approval of the Bolkestein guidelines and the declarations on the TAV (high-speed train) say more than any programme about the centre-left's intentions. As for us, we are fighting liberalisations, for the defence of labour rights, for the safeguard of the rights of local populations against the logic of profit and environmental devastation.

9) We are the party of rights, freedoms and women's self-determination. The centrist orientation also means denying these rights, especially in terms of freedom of sexual orientation. We must fight for civil unions, for a secular state, for the abrogation of Law 40, for the respect for women's self-determination, to guarantee sexual freedom to everyone.

10) A halt to privatisations and capitalist models must be rounded out by a relaunch of public intervention, foreseeing new forms of nationalisation starting from essential nodes of the economy: energy, telecommunications, transports, banking, health.

As the Critical Left (Sinistra Critica) we are fully committed to the battle to boot out Berlusconi and to promote progress for the regions and the interests of workers, those in precarious employment and the unemployed. We want to work to create the conditions for a real alternative as a society, a change in the system that cannot get around the need to challenge the capitalist order. To do this, we believe that the entire alternative left must stop to reflect on the new co-ordinates of a modern anti-capitalist programme. A new programme that will be in tune with the times and able to face up to the shortcomings behind us; a programme nourished by struggles and movements, in which discussion fosters the development and achievement of a modern anti-capitalist left. In this spirit, we are preparing for a broad collective discussion around a programmatic manifesto: "For an Anti-capitalist Left". We are promoting such a discussion as the Anti-capitalist Left, but hope it will be open, pluralistic, with broad participation.

In the upcoming months, even in the midst the electoral campaign, we will forge ahead with this task that we see as particularly useful to sketch the outlines of the left in construction and the necessary refoundation. We will do this by organising an extensive discussion, town by town, culminating in a large national meeting in May. We hope that many will take part in this effort, to provide a concrete contribution to communist refoundation, to emerge from the dustbin of a reflection put off for too long, to provide strength and energy to a critical left, a coherently anti-capitalist left.

The time of Alternatives

12 April 2006, by isl

1. After the federal legislative elections (which were held on September 18, 2005) the political and social situation is in several respects paradoxical. Against the background of a purely defensive attitude of the big majority of the population against neo-liberal policies, the ultra-liberal version [1] of these policies could not be imposed to succeed social liberalism. [2] But neo-liberalism remains largely dominant. And although social liberalism failed, there is no other answer to the failure of the "Red-Green Coalition". From this comes the widespread feeling that the situation is "politically blocked".

When we look closer, the policies that are really being pursued by the Grand Coalition [3] represent a further slide to the right.

However, this government is weak. It is operating in an international, European, and national context which is seeing central elements of the new neo-liberal order (the war in Iraq, the WTO negotiations, the Bolkestein directive, the European Constitutional Treaty) meet more and more resistance, indeed even run the risk of not being able to be imposed. The government of Angela Merkel and Franz Muntefering [4] must find within its own ranks the balance between several variations of liberalism. It thus runs the risk - in an economic conjuncture that is still lacking in dynamism - of seeing both the employers' organisations (with their lobby in the Christian Democratic and Christian Social Unions) and part of the trade unions lining up against it.

But this government has the big advantage of having a parliamentary majority of two-thirds of the seats in the Bundestag. That makes it easier to modify the constitution if necessary, which would in that case enable it to get rid of a conception of federalism aiming at the unification of living conditions [5] and their upward alignment - to the detriment of an increase in pure economic competitiveness. The changes that are being programmed in this field are accompanied in the field of "internal security" by a strengthening of centralization and the reinforcement of authoritarian structures. (We see here the process that is already under way on the level of the European Union).

2. The government of the Grand Coalition presents an open flank to social contestation. But whereas the employers are brilliant in the way that they form an opposition, aiming to force the government to launch attacks that are much harder than what is provided for in the governmental contract of the coalition, the trade unions either continue to seek an alliance with the government ("so as to avoid the worst" as Michael Sommer, leader of the DGB trade union confederation claims) or practise a strategy of zigzags (as its the case with Ver.di). [6] In no case and for no union is mobilization against the government on the agenda, in a situation where only unions that were militant and conscious of their strength could prevent the government taking on board more and more of the employers' demands. The constellation of political and social forces is still such that a strong mobilization could destabilize this government and lead to its premature end. The probability that it will not last until the end of the legislature [7] is high; the question, however, is to know under what conditions it will fall and who will take the initiative of bringing it down - in other words who will prove to be the leading political or social force.

3. This government also intends to make the unemployed and low-paid workers carry the main burden of a regressive redistribution of wealth. Although it does not yet dare to openly envisage new reforms - regressive measures that would be directly detrimental to the social base of each of the two big political forces which comprise it - it is advancing little by little, concerning for example the dismantling of protection against sackings, [8] or taking long detours over pensions and health. The implementation of the Hartz IV program [9] and of the increase in VAT [10] are issues around which it will perhaps be more difficult to mobilize than against Agenda 2010, [11] but they are contributing to a rise in discontent and a predisposition to contestation.

The big majority of electors voted in the federal legislative elections against the radical version of liberal policies and at the same time against the experiences that they had had with the "social democratic and green" variant. Not withstanding that, 90 per cent of electors voted for political parties which are pursuing neo-liberal policies. Although the monopoly of neo-liberal ideas is now destabilized, including in Germany, the majority of people nevertheless remain attached to it because they don't see any alternative. The principal tasks of a left opposition - both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary - consist under these conditions of developing such an alternative on as broad a base as possible, of expressing it in a few slogans that are easily understandable and in developing an effective mass propaganda in favour of these slogans. The opposition, extra-parliamentary as well as parliamentary, must concentrate on this question - with means that are different in each case.

4. The mobilization against Agenda 2010 once again put the social question at the centre of action and discussion. Its most active and radical part was made up of the unemployed and of the population of East Germany - for a short time they also succeeded in including the unions in it. However the union leaderships quickly sacrificed this alliance with that part of the working class which was without jobs to their loyalty to the Schroder government. That did not

fail to leave traces: that is how part of the lower and middle cadres of the trade union organizations turned towards a new political force to the left of the SPD, causing serious cracks in the social democratic hegemony that had for a long time dominated the German unions. But the process of radicalization at work in the unions was derailed onto the road of realpolitik. The unions thus avoided a debate about perspectives. The debate on the necessary renewal of the trade union movement did not take place and the trade union left was even weakened in the process.

The process of formation of the WASG [12] has not so far led to the unemployed being able to count on stronger allies in the union organizations. If we add to that the demobilizing strategy of the union leaderships towards the government and the difficulty of finding a new point of convergence for social mobilizations, this situation carries a big danger that anti-trade union attitudes will be strengthened among marginalized layers (in West as well as East Germany) - something which could already be seen during the last phase of the "Monday demonstrations". [13]

A strong trade union left remains the central lever of an extra-parliamentary opposition aiming to build a broad alliance of social movements. It alone is in a position to build a bridge between the union apparatuses and the extra-parliamentary movements.

5. Attacks coming from an unstable government will lead to an increase in social contestation. This is already happening, in the form of a rise of defensive struggles at the level of the workplace or on a local or regional level. Some of them have been crowned with success (as is demonstrated by the example of the struggle against sackings at Alsthom or the struggle of Ver.di against the privatization of hospitals in the region of Baden-Wurttemberg). They proved that even in unfavourable conditions we can have successes. Other battles are being conducted in a lukewarm way, remain isolated (such as the struggle of the unemployed) or else simply require an organizational and political/trade union lever that is broader and more powerful (like the struggle against sackings in the automobile industry). Campaigns like the one that Ver.di has conducted against the Lidl supermarkets [14] show that the unions are capable of learning from more advanced experiences (such as, for example, the campaigns carried out in the United States). But overall, many struggles suffer from the fact that they are conducted from an angle that is limited to the workplace and that the political perspective and/or the organizational means that would make it possible to discuss links between these problems and to act in a more general framework are missing.

6. The policy of accelerated social dismantling can only be stopped by an extra-parliamentary mobilization. The trade unions are very hesitant on this level. The formation of a new party to the left of the SPD [15] has up to now left its actors principally occupied by their own process. Furthermore, this party remains essentially centred on parliamentary action. Because of this there will not, in the near future, be other forms of action capable of preparing the necessary extra-parliamentary mobilization than those coming out of the process that was started by the Congress of Perspectives (May 2004) and the German Social Forum (July 2005), and is now continuing with the Conference on Action and Strategy. It is a question of trying to overcome the scattered character of actions of resistance, of social fightback (and in so doing to overcome their respective weaknesses); of putting the accent on common points and interests; of politicizing the struggles through making links between problems and issues; of building a sustainable common framework for action and discussion; and finally of laying the practical and programmatic foundations of a social and political alternative. This attempt can and must be independent of the union leaderships and the political parties. The possibility of its succeeding will depend in the long term on knowing to what extent the process of radicalization which is reflected in it affects the unions and the new left party.

7. The foundation of the WASG is an expression of the social and political radicalization and of the (partial) break with the SPD that took place under the Schroder government. Its fusion with the PDS, re-christened Linkspartei (Left Party) opens up the possibility of rebuilding, for the first time in Germany, a party to the left of the SPD which is present in the whole country and is represented in parliament. If the unification of the two parties succeeds, an important step would be taken on the road of the unification of the German workers' movement between East and West (which was in fact a political split). This split had paralyzed it for long periods in the course of the 20th century and prevented alternatives to capitalism which went beyond the bureaucratic Stalinist dead end being envisaged.

The process of building a new political party to the left of the SPD is extremely contradictory. Its results are not yet known. It is part of the tasks of a socialist left to lead it to a positive result. To do this it must however be conscious of its own contradictions and limits and it must define what it itself is looking for.

– The WASG is first of all cut across by a social contradiction. Born out of the wave of protests against Agenda 2010, of which the protests against the Hartz laws [16] represented the culmination, many of its members are themselves affected by this legislation. But its initiators and its leading personalities are in the majority trade union full-timers or members of workplace councils. [17] From this different social situation there result different expectations and different political cultures. For the unemployed whose allowances are running out - as in general for the increasing number of those who are excluded from this society - the struggle to obtain meaningful social protection, by any means, is the central question. Their situation pushes them to actions that will have an immediate effect, because they can't wait. The trade union militants who founded this party sought by doing so above all to see a new political force represented in parliament, a force that will be able to win on the political level what the trade unions no longer succeed in winning by collective bargaining and

by strikes [18] (or no longer believe that they can obtain them by these means): a legal minimum wage, [19] the defence of pensions, the refusal of privatization in the health sector, a new redistribution of wealth, etc. They are seeking in the new left party an interlocutor in parliament, which they previously had with the SPD and which they have lost. [20] They are not looking for a political force which can organize the social movement and represent their interests, because they have the union for that. Trade union militants, even left ones, can come to terms with the classically social democratic division of labour between the union and parliamentary representation, whereas the unemployed and those who are excluded no longer can.

In this conflict we are fighting for a kind of party that has its essential field of action not in parliament, but in the organization of social contestation - in a new cooperation with the social movements, which as such are independent of political parties. For us the party is not a goal in itself. It is useful only insofar as it uses the means that it obtains through parliament to support extra-parliamentary forces. We are dealing, in the process of forming a new left party, with the issue of the limits of parliamentary work as to its effects, and at the same time with the need to remove the barriers separating parliaments and political parties from society, by reorganizing the relations between the left party and extra-parliamentary movements.

– The WASG was established through a process of breaking with the SPD, but also as a reaction to the fact that the PDS, because of its origins, its bureaucratic sclerosis and also its participation in governments, [21] was not able to absorb this process of breaking with the SPD. The imbalances are important: faced with the PDS, which rests on a stable social milieu and which has a mass base, in East Germany we have branches of the WASG which have scarcely a few hundred members and which have no political weight. In the West of the country, most of the time the WASG has more members. However the PDS can draw strength from the fact that it has a relatively experienced apparatus and is represented in several municipal councils. In Berlin the weight of the apparatus of the Linkspartei.PDS, which reinforces the desire to continue to participate in government, [22] is faced with a WASG that is much weaker numerically and of which the majority refuse this participation in government and the line of adaptation to the majority neo-liberal forces.

These differences weigh all the more heavily because the two parties are not very different as regards their basic orientation: in both of them the Keynesian line of seeking to reform capitalism, whose political ideal is essentially represented by the old-style Welfare State, is dominant. This orientation has become incapable of resolving the problems that face us.

– The character of the new party that is to be formed depends to a large degree on the way that the process of unification will be carried through. If the WASG is to be more than the finally successful extension of the PDS to the West, [23] it must define the points on which it is different from the PDS and it must at the same time say how the new party should deal with these differences. To do this it must look for points in common with those among the members of the former PDS who are trying to overcome the weaknesses of this party, which are the consequences of its history.

The clarification of these points must be the object of the common forums which have been agreed on, and of the process of open debate which is suppose to lead to the new party, whose foundation and the construction have to be carried out together.

The most important questions that have to be clarified concern participation in government, the structure of the party, its programmatic profile, as well as the question of knowing what role it intends to play in parliamentary assemblies.

On these questions the WASG itself does not have a common view, but it seems nevertheless that there exists a strong tendency to reject participation in government in the conditions that exist at present and in the near future, and to form a political party which will be pluralist, democratic in its structures, which will belong to its members and put itself in the service of the social movements. This heritage, which comes from the process that gave birth to it, must be preserved in the process of unification.

The question of participation in government is the main stumbling-block. In Berlin the WASG will decide how it wants to deal with this issue. For the PDS, many political careers depend on the party staying in government. On its side, participation in government is not an open question - forums and joint conferences won't do anything to change that. In Berlin the motion of the PDS leadership for the regional congress of 3rd and 4th December 2005 spoke of "renewing the option of a "red-red government"; in Saxony-Anhalt, the PDS, anticipating an electoral victory, [24] made the choice of forming a government with the SPD in order to "strengthen the left potential in the regional assembly" (The quotation comes from the motion put to the regional PDS congress).

Within the WASG there is a tendency to play down this conflict as much as possible, in other words, not to deal with the question of participation in government so as not to put the process of fusion in danger. The result of that would be to go into the fusion without any clarification of controversial issues. There is a double pressure to go in this direction: on the one hand the expectations of the electors are invoked, on the other hand, the parliamentary rules of the Bundestag are cited - in other words the risk of seeing the joint parliamentary group juridically invalidated. [25] Neither of these questions can constitute the central criterion for a political decision. However the pressure is real and no one will argue seriously, in the present state of the discussion and the disputes, for freezing the efforts undertaken to reach unification, because of the attachment of the PDS to participation in government. On the contrary, the WASG must fix itself the objective of using the unification process to launch a critical debate within the PDS on the usefulness and

the costs of participation in government.

The majority of the WASG in Berlin decided, at its regional congress on November 2005, to organize a vote of its members on the question of running its own candidates. [26] Since then it has been reproached by the Linkspartei.PDS and by part of the WASG itself with bearing the responsibility for the risk of seeing the common project of the new party fail. However the debate is not over. The WASF can withdraw its own list in favour of a joint list as soon as the Linkpartei.PDS creates the minimum conditions for it. Assuming joint responsibility for the conduct of neo-liberal policies as a minority ally of the SPD is certain not compatible with that. Since the Berlin WASG is being portrayed, including by the media, in the role of a scapegoat, it is necessary for it to say frankly and publicly that on its side it is fighting energetically to take forward the process of unification. If the Linkspartei.PDS in Berlin maintains its present position, it is it which will carry the responsibility of gravely endangering the process of unification. Only a type of party which leaves open political questions whose central nature is recognized, within which the competition between different opinions can be organized without obstacles and which guarantees a maximum permeability to social movements as well as maximum exchanges across national frontiers, seems to offer a way out of this difficult situation. Such a pluralist party is possible on condition that its action and the objectives that it sets for itself are not subordinated to its presence in parliament and in the state apparatus. It is only on this condition that the new party to be built will be to the left to the SPD and will be a factor of progress.

8. The International Socialist Left (isl) sets itself the following tasks:

- It will support in the coming weeks and months the European mobilization and the national campaign against the Bolkestein directive, as well as the national mobilization against the government in the spring of 2006.

- It will encourage the fundamental debate within the trade unions concerning their strategy and will reinforce the trade union left.

- It will participate in the protests against the Hartz IV law and against any exclusion of the unemployed whose allowances have run out and of immigrants.

- It will participate in the preparation of the mobilization against the G8 summit in Heiligendamm [27] in 2007 and will seek in this framework cooperation with the Interventionist Left. [28]

- It will reinforce the efforts to constitute an extra-parliamentary opposition that is broad and capable of acting on the national level.

- It will initiate a debate on the alternatives to capitalism, which can serve as a basis for extra-parliamentary movements as well as for a left opposition in parliament; in doing so it will start from the debates that have taken place over alternatives to the European Constitutional Treaty and circulate these ideas.

- It supports the formation of a joint party between the WASG and the PDS, which must defend in a consistent way the interests of workers and marginalized layers and participates in this framework in the regroupment of anti-capitalist forces; it fights for a pluralist party, which is controlled by its members, which is open and which guarantees the right to form currents; it rejects in present conditions the entry of WASG or the PDS into a government.

- It seeks to win to this line the members of the WASG as well as the members of the PDS and tries to encourage the establishment of a network of anti-capitalist forces within the two parties.

Footnotes

[1] The right wing alliance between the Christian Democrats (CDU-CSU) and liberals (FDP) did not win a majority in parliament, having respectively 35.2% and 9.8% of the votes, essentially because of the breakthrough of the PDS list - opened up to the WASG under the name of Linkspartei (Left Party) - which won 8.7% of the votes. See "The Winner is the Left Party", by Thadeus Pato, International Viewpoint 370, September 2005.

[2] The SPD and the Greens, who made up the outgoing government, won respectively 34.3% and 8.1% of the votes.

[3] The Grand Coalition is an alliance between the Social Democrats and the two Christian Unions which enabled Angela Merkel to become chancellor.

[4] Former SPD President during the latter part of Gerhard Schroder's term of office as chancellor, who is now vice-chancellor and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs.

[5] The German "fundamental law" aims at the improvement and the equalization of the living standards of the citizens of the different lander (the regions which make up the federal republic). Because of the very big differences between the former East Germany and the former West Germany the German ruling class is trying to modify this principle which is considered by neo-liberal ideology to be obsolete.

[6] The DGB is the German trade union confederation: Ver.di is the federation of service union, which with nearly 3 million members is the biggest federation of the DGB.

[7] The Bundestag has been elected for the period 2005 to 2009.

[8] The German government has already gone further than the French government, by deciding at the outset to generalize a trial period of 2 years for all work contracts.

[9] One of the laws reforming unemployment insurance, which largely dismantles the rights of unemployed people, adopted by

the Red Green Coalition in 2004 and became law on the 1st of January 2005, although certain aspects of it have not yet been implemented.

[10] The Grand Coalition government has announced its intention of increasing the basic rate of VAT from 16% to 19%, starting in 2007.

[11] The name given to the program of counter-reforms of the Schroder government, of which the law reforming an employment insurance was part. It is the German component of the so-called "Lisbon Strategy".

[12] The WASG (Electoral Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice) was formed in 2004, essentially by militants breaking on the left with the SPD.

[13] The mobilizations against the reform of unemployment insurance in the second half of 2004, which were quite strong between August and October 2004, before dying down.

[14] Ver.di is conducting a campaign against the very low wages and the appalling working conditions that are imposed by the Lidl supermarket chain. It has published a Black Book on Lidl and engaged in poster and leafleting campaigns, often together with the Lidl campaign of Attac-Germany.

[15] This new party is still in the process of being formed and should come into existence by the projected fusion between the WASG and the Linkspartei.PDS in the summer of 2007.

[16] The different components of the reform of unemployment insurance.

[17] Workplace councils in Germany have considerable power and financial resources, but are subject to the legal obligation of ensuring good cooperation with the management of the workplace.

[18] In German law a strike can only be used as a last resort, only if it is called by a recognized union and only as a means of support in the framework of collective bargaining.

[19] There is in Germany no national minimum wage, but only negotiated minimum wage levels in different sectors, which does not help workers in sectors where there is no collective bargaining. However for the last two years there has been a debate in the unions over whether they should demand a national legal minimum wage. This demand is supported by the service and hotel and restaurant unions and rejected by the unions of (skilled) workers in engineering and especially in the chemical industry.

[20] The SPD started its turn to neo-liberalism with proposals made by Oscar Lafontaine at the end of the 1980s, but this turn became much sharper under the Schroder government from 1998-99 onwards. At that time Lafontaine defended more or less Keynesian positions.

[21] The PDS participates in governments in the lander of Berlin and Mecklenburg-Pomerania.

[22] In the land of Berlin

[23] The attempts of the PDS to establish a significant electoral base in West Germany during the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000 decade were failures.

[24] Regional elections in Saxony-Anhalt

[25] German electoral law forbids alliances between several political parties that are concluded in order to form joint lists and does not allow several parties to put together their members of parliament in order to reach the minimum number required to have a recognized parliamentary group. That is why the WASG candidates had to be on the PDS list for the elections of September 2005.

[26] That is to say a list that would be in competition with the Linkspartei .DS in the Berlin regional elections in September 2006.

[27] Near Rostock on the Baltic coast, in the land of Mecklenburg-Pomarania

[28] The Interventionist Left (IL) is a new network of militants from different tendencies on the radical left which exists on a national level without however being a structured organization and which is in part influence by the ideas of the Italian social centres and those of Michael Hardt and Toni Negri. Unlike the large "autonomous" milieu (with which it overlaps) this network puts the "social question" and the working class at the centre of its preoccupations (and not only anti-fascism and anti-racism, mobilizations against the transport of nuclear wastes, gender questions, cultural questions...) and is ready to take part in broad alliances. Some of the components of this network-alliance have a Marxist background or were part of the far left currents of the 1970s: all of them have an "anti-Leninist" identity and they are quite distant from the WASG and distrustful of it - although there were some discussions within it about giving the WASG critical support in the September 2005 election.

The white flag goes up

12 April 2006, by Murray Smith

Students mobilized massively against the CPE, occupying and blockading universities and high schools. They were supported by a united trade union front - the movement was led by the Intersyndicale, a coalition of 12 trade union and student organizations. There was a succession of strikes and demonstrations, which at their peak brought 3 million people onto the streets. The movement was supported by the entire left, from the reformist Socialist Party to revolutionary organizations like the LCR and LO. In opinion polls 65 to 70 per cent of people opposed the CPE

In nearly four years of the right-wing UMP government, this is the first time that mass protests have succeeded in blocking one of its attacks. Previously defeats were suffered over pensions in 2003 and health insurance in 2004. Some politicians and commentators in France and abroad have argued that it is undemocratic for mass protests to be able to over-rule the decisions of elected representatives, revealing a touching faith in France's democratic institutions.

It is worth recalling that the UMP, which thanks to the peculiarities of the electoral system has an absolute and indeed substantial majority in Parliament, won just 33 per cent of the vote in the 2002 elections - a figure that goes down to 22 per cent of registered voters given the 35 per cent of electors who abstained. Representatives elected under those conditions and subject to no kind of control or recall by their electors are ill placed to give lessons in democracy.

According to the electoral calendar the government still has more than a year in office, until the 2007 elections. But after this it will be very difficult for it to push through any more major attacks. Indeed now would be the time for the unions and the Left to undo some of the damage already done, by going on the offensive and calling into question the "reforms" already adopted. A good place to start would be with the CNE (New Employment Contract) which was passed last autumn without the unions really mobilizing against it, and which allows employers in companies with less than 20 employees the right to sack workers during the first two years without justification.

Since the victory of the 'No' vote in last year's referendum on the proposed European constitution, France has had a lame duck president. Now it also has a lame duck prime minister and government. The simplest solution would be for them just to get out now, as more and more French people want them to. But they won't go unless they are forced to.

A government on the ropes

8 April 2006, by Murray Smith

On Tuesday March 28th, there were widespread strikes and an estimated 3 million demonstrators poured onto the streets of France's towns and cities. This represented, according to Le Monde (which like most other papers did not appear on March 28th due to strike action), the biggest demonstration in recent French history - bigger even than in 1968. Just a week later, on April 4th, the next day of action saw even more people on the streets. In between, French President Jacques Chirac addressed the nation on television. He announced that he was promulgating the law - then asked his government not to apply it until it was modified, proposing that the period when young workers could be sacked be reduced to one year and that employers should have to give a reason - without that impinging on their right to sack. Chirac's attempt at minimal concessions was unanimously rejected by trade unions and student organizations. But it reflected the government's disarray. In the following days Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, who had introduced the CPE, was dispossessed of the dossier, which was handed to his arch-rival, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy. Under Sarkozy's direction, parliamentary leaders of the governing UMP party have been receiving delegations of unions and student unions.

The government and its majority are divided between those who want to simply withdraw the CPE, those who think it can survive in a watered down form and those who want to propose an alternative. For the moment the government is trying to avoid purely and simply withdrawing the measure. The highly respectable Conference of University Presidents has however called on it "to finally pronounce the word that the students and their unions have been demanding". The word in question being of course "withdrawal".

The government has been fought to a standstill by the movement. But will only give in if it is forced to. Student organisations have called for the movement to continue and intensify. And in fact over recent days students have been engaging in forms of direct action, of civil disobedience - blocking motorways, railway stations and other public places.

The united front against the CPRE is very broad and has so far remained solid- embracing all the unions, the student organizations and the entire Left, from the Socialist Party to Lutte Ouvriere and the LCR. The unions are standing firm on the demand for withdrawal, described by Bernard Thibault, leader of France biggest union confederation the CGT, as “non-negotiable”. In a declaration on April 5th, the Intersyndicale, the united front of twelve trade unions and student unions, called for a new day of action on April 11th. The pressure must be maintained to force the government to back down completely.

The enormous mass movement of the last few weeks has created a veritable social and political crisis. It has expressed on the streets and in the schools the same rejection of neo-liberal policies that led to the defeat of the proposed European constitution in the referendum of May 29th last year. In an editorial in its March 31st issue, the London-based pro-business weekly The Economist informed its probably bemused readers, in a tone of exasperation, that only 36 per cent of French people thought the free market was the best possible system, as against around two-thirds of people in Britain, Germany and the USA.

This mass opposition to neo-liberalism is the fundamental problem of the French ruling class. And over the last few weeks a new generation of youth has come of age, not only demonstrating and occupying but organising mass meetings and engaging in intensive political discussion. And unity between workers and students has from the start been much stronger than in previous movements. This renewed combativeness and rejection of neo-liberalism will re-emerge over the next months and years, in the streets and no doubt in next year’s presidential and parliamentary elections.

Francisco Louçã’s presidential campaign

8 April 2006, by Alda Sousa

Yet a year ago, at the general elections of February 2005, the Socialist Party had for the first time won an absolute majority in Parliament, capitalising on the hopes for change which followed the debacle of the right wing government. Since then, the new prime minister José Sócrates has simply followed the neoliberal policies of his right wing predecessors in government: an increased age of retirement, the reduction of the real wages of civil servants for the eight consecutive year, the complete privatisation of the energy sector, continued declining investment and increased inequalities in income distribution.

That is why the Socialist Party suffered a humiliating defeat in the municipal elections of October 9 last year. The four biggest town halls in the country - Lisbon, Sintra, Vila Nova Gaia and Porto - remain governed by a right wing coalition. For the Socialist Party, this result was worse than that of 2001, which was difficult to believe... and to predict.

The presidential campaign took place then in a scenario where the voters were disillusioned by governmental policies. At the same time, the media crowned Cavaco Silva in advance, as if there was no need for elections to declare him victor! The right has regrouped around him. [1] The PS split into a quarrel of fraternal enemies between Mario Soares (80 years old, former prime minister, president of the Republic between 1986 and 1996) and Manuel Alegre (former socialist leader, vice-president of the Parliament). Finally the Communist Party (PCP) presented its secretary general, Jerónimo de Sousa.

An open candidacy

In these elections organised by the politicians of the past, the best-known leader of the Left Bloc, Francisco Louçã, was the candidate of renewal. Since the beginning, his candidacy has been clear, having as its goal combating the “soft consensus” and the policy of social and political deterioration pursued by the government. In announcing his candidacy, Francisco had said, “this will be the most difficult election of my life”. He was completely right. It was about presenting an alternative for the next 10-15 years, which meant presenting choices on the basic questions: jobs, social security, public services, reform of justice, European policy, parity between men and women, defence of the environment and so on. “The first objective of my candidacy is to create a universal and just system of social protection; it is this determination which will allow us to respond to the country’s most urgent question, namely unemployment which now affects half a million men and women. But I also want to present alternatives for long term social protection because the system that exists today is neither universal, nor just, nor defensible”.

Under Portuguese law, each candidacy only becomes legal after a request to the Constitutional Tribunal made by at least 7,500 voters (accompanied by certificate of registration on the electoral register!). Between early November and early December, more than 12,000 people had signed in support of the candidacy of Francisco Louçã.

A National Commission of Support for his candidacy was created: it was very open, plural and representative of several sectors, well beyond the activists of the Bloc. An “old” singer like Sérgio Godinho, new fado singers like Mísia and Camané, singers in well known bands - Miguel Guedes (Blind Zero) and Messias (Mercado Negro), writers like Luisa Costa Gomes and José Luis Peixoto, intellectuals like Boaventura Sousa Santos and Claudio Torres, editors, cultural figures like Zélia Afonso (widow of the singer José Afonso), trade unionists in the civil

service and in commerce, members of several workplace workers' commissions (Volkswagen, Banque Santander Totta, among others), activists in social movements (anti-racist, feminist, LGBT), which show how this candidacy was "rooted" in a plurality of left sectors who desire a more profound, more radical change embodied in the proposals of a candidacy which has the courage and the determination to break with neoliberalism.

… present everywhere

Francisco Louçã covered at least 48,000 km by car, accompanied by a team which included at the minimum his campaign director, press attaché and "site team": a journalist, a photographer and a filmmaker. For a country of 560 km x 280 km, that is equivalent to making several circuits of Portugal. From mid-December to the end of the campaign, Francisco was also accompanied by the European deputy Miguel Portas, other deputies in the National Parliament - Luis Fazenda, João Teixeira Lopes, Alda Macedo, Fernando Rosas - and the national agent, José Manuel Pureza.

The Internet site (active from 17/10/05 to 26/1/2006) allowed contact with the voters. Francisco Louçã himself responded to the 1,228 mails that were sent to him for the site. He did this while travelling, in the small truck in which he travelled with his team.

The 96 videos of the site included debates with the other candidates, television interviews, times of television broadcasts and reports on the campaign initiatives. A campaign journal (a kind of blog) included news of activities and commentaries on the campaign of other candidates.

Francisco Louçã criss-crossed the country. He met the fishers of Algarve and Matosinhos, visited high-tech factories (Auto-Europa and others), met workers in struggle, visited hospitals, faculties, institutes of scientific research, immigrant communities, and prisons. Whether discussing social security, the future of stem cell research, the rights of immigrants, the need to change the labour code, the defence of public services or the importance of the exchange of syringes inside prisons, Francisco had clear, courageous proposals which defied the conservatism of society.

The "arruadas" (little street walkabouts, normally preceded by music, where propaganda is distributed) were always a success: whether in the town centres or in the markets, there were always men and women of all ages who wished to speak to Francisco, either to recount an experience or a personal problem, or give information on an illegality and an injustice, nearly always also to congratulate him for his courage as deputy and to say that if he had not been candidate, they would not have known who to vote for.

Against Cavaco Silva…

One of the summits of the presidential campaign was undoubtedly the televised debate between Cavaco Silva and Francisco Louçã. In the preceding debates and interviews, Cavaco Silva had always succeeded in avoiding replying to questions, seeking shelter in vagueness and abstraction. With Francisco he really had to speak and say what he thought. Apart from his ignorance of the most recent studies on social security, he revealed himself to be very conservative. He tried not to say anything about gay marriage ("this is not a very important problem"). He said that his detractors accused him of not taking into account women's questions, but that his wife had never complained to him! Concerning immigration, he expressed fear: "if all the immigrants suddenly wanted to have Portuguese nationality, we would risk being in a minority", he said.

Cavaco Silva was elected by a slender margin in the first round. Abstention was moderate (37.4%). Manuel Alegre received 20.7% of the vote. Mário Soares, ex-prime minister and ex-president of the Republic, the official candidate of the Socialist Party, suffered a heavy defeat, only gaining 14% of the vote. All the votes received by Mário Soares and Manuel Alegre were lover by 10% than the number of votes received by the Socialist Party a year ago. The Communist Party vote held up well for the second time: 8.6% was the result of a campaign in defence of the Communist fortress, which proved very effective in its goal of maintaining a vote based on identification with the CP.

Francisco Louçã scored 5.3% of the vote, a little less than the score of the Left Bloc in the parliamentary elections of 2005 (6.3%). Given the difficulty of the political situation provoked by the division of the left, it was a good result which shows that a significant part of the electorate wants a left alternative which can mobilise in the coming years. Immediately after the elections, some commentators who wanted to denigrate the Bloc by insisting on the volatile, inconsistent character of its vote, claimed that nearly half the votes of the Bloc in 2005 had been transferred to Manuel Alegre. But to this presumption there is also the other side of the coin: if it was true, the conclusion would be then that among those who voted Francisco, many had never voted for the Bloc before!

…the best ally of Sócrates

Cavaco Silva owes his victory to the Socialist Party. In reality, it is the irresponsibility and defeatism of the Socialist Party leadership and the Sócrates government which are primarily responsible for the defeat of the left. From the beginning, with their hesitations, their delay in presenting a candidate and their final choice: in fact neither Mário Soares nor Manuel Alegre were first choices, but the fourth or fifth choice of a PS whose secretary general and prime minister have willingly accepted cohabitation with Cavaco.

Moreover, the government did not shy away from approving highly unpopular measures in the midst of the electoral campaign: increases in the price of petrol and public transport, the closure of health centres, laws instituting the temporary character of

first jobs in the civil service. It is as if candidate Soares did not exist or as if the victory of Cavaco Silva was inevitable, not to say welcome. It is true that the two Socialist candidates were different, but they were obliged to play the same political role during the campaign, that is, each day they had to explain the positions and strategic or tactical choices of the government.

Manuel Alegre, a member of the PS since forever, was annoyed at not being the choice of Sócrates and made inflammatory speeches against the political parties (!) and their apparatuses, defending an active citizenship. He avoided criticising the government, missed the parliamentary session which voted for the 2006 budget, and remained vague on numerous questions.

Nonetheless it should be said that many left voters wanted to punish Sócrates and gave an opportunity to Alegre to go into the second round, while overtaking Soares. . And if it is true that the million votes for Alegre were very heterogeneous, it is nonetheless also true that a significant number of these voters were certainly closer to the Left Bloc than the policies of the Sócrates government. But contrary to the stated intentions, this million votes will not lead to the creation of a stable or organised civic movement. Still less, to the creation of the new political party of which some seem to dream.

With the election of Cavaco Silva the right gains a reference for its recomposition, having been capable of polarising a significant section of centrist voters who had given victory to Sócrates in 2005. In his first speech to parliament Cavaco Silva vindicated those such as Francisco Louçã who had said during the electoral campaign that Cavaco Silva would show a very clear convergence with the policy of the Socialist government. The Prime Minister José Sócrates has himself stressed the affinity of the viewpoints expressed in the speech with the actions of the government. The first anniversary of the government is marked by the slogan of institutional stability.

The convergence of the Sócrates-Cavaco Silva discourse at the economic level will have still other consequences: the prime minister's agenda will turn to right. Reforms on citizenship rights (divorce, abortion, gay marriage), much more moderate than those put forward by Zapatero but capable of at least opening fractures with the Catholic hierarchy, will be forgotten.

The Central Bloc at the highest level of the state has immediately won the confidence of high finance and the bankers, with the announcement of significant moves on the part of the economic groups: an takeover of Telecom and a banking concentration through the takeover of the Banco Portugues de Investimento.

Building an alternative

The commentary by Francisco Louçã was clear: the more active social polices will be put on the back burner, the coming years will be marked by the strengthening of right wing policies. He also criticised the total absence of references to international politics: "on the eve of a probable armed conflict, the new president has not a single word to say on Iraq or the possibility of war with Iran."

It is henceforth more than necessary to build a left political alternative which fights for full employment and a tenable social security and against the privatisation of public services. The socialist opposition that the Bloc represents has an immense responsibility. The desire of the PS and of the PSD to change the electoral system by introducing single member constituencies imposes a tenacious struggle: the dislocation of the proportional system excludes plurality, reduces political representation to two parties and excludes women from political life, which runs counter to the needs of democracy

The country has nearly half a million unemployed and 20% of the population is poor. The Bloc is preparing a march for jobs in the first fortnight of September.

Whether it is about war, public services, justice, or parity, Francisco Louçã has advanced proposals that will not be quickly forgotten in the years to come.

Footnotes

[1] Anibal Cavaco Silva was prime minister between 1985 and 1995, and then a candidate in the presidential election of 1996, beaten by Jorge Sampaio (PS).

The end of ETA

8 April 2006, by José Ramón Castaños "Troglo"

To speak of the beginning of the end of an organization with 50 years of history might appear an excessive affirmation, but not if we analyse the terms of the "ceasefire" and its underlying causes. Among the latter must be considered the effect that the frightful balance sheet of the violence has had on the democratic consciousness of the Basque majority, for the pain it produces strikes with too much strength on the consciousness for it not to be taken into consideration.

In the course of its history, ETA has carried out 72 kidnappings and has caused the death of 817 people (339 civilians and 478 police and military), of whom only 45 correspond to the stage of the Francoist dictatorship. The other 772 were killed under the democratic system. Among the dead civilians, 20 of them were activists or

political leaders of the PP and the PSE (12 of them between the years 2000 and 2002). However, to complete the picture of the violence, we should not forget that the Spanish state has killed 145 ETA militant (a good part of them through “state terrorism” under the rubric of the GAL); to this we should add 10 suicides in Spanish jails, thousands of cases of reports of torture; several thousand people jailed or in exile, and a remaining 510 people incarcerated now in Spain as against 150 in French jails.

The sum of these two violences expresses moreover an enormous disproportion between the “small magnitude" of a national problem that can be resolved in a democratic system by democratic methods, and the “great magnitude” of a violence that has become unbearable for a small country of 25,000 square kilometres and three million inhabitants. This explains in part why there is now unanimity of criteria in ETA and between ETA and Batasuna. Also it explains, it should be said in passing, the opinion of Egiguren (president of the PSE and the key person in the negotiations with ETA), when he says that “the desire for peace and reconciliation is so strong that the wounds of violence will soon heal”.

Unlike previous truces, this recent ceasefire declaration has a permanent, that is definitive character. ETA has not announced its disappearance, but it is not hard to figure out that if an armed organization announces that its arms are being silenced in a “permanent” way, what it is saying in reality is that it stops being operative, and from that moment it begins to yield its existence. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that the adjective “permanent” is united with that of “unconditional". The ETA declaration does not use this term, but it is most significant that the “ceasefire” is being called without demanding anything of anybody in advance. And this is a decisive change with respect to the previous ones, in that ETA broke off the Algiers negotiations with Felipe González because he did not want to recognise self-determination, and the later truces of the years 1998-2000 broke down because the pact of Estella for sovereignty and self-determination did not accept the content and rhythms ETA wished to impose. Things are otherwise today. ETA has decided to lay down its arms without political concessions in return.
The solution to the problem of the relations between Euskadi and the Spanish state are left in the hands of a round table of political parties with nobody excluded, which is equivalent to recognizing democratic procedures for the solution of the conflict; that is, the renunciation of the subordination of politics to the threat of violence; the demand for no external interference from the Spanish state, and the submission to citizen consultation of the proposal(s) to emerge from the table of parties.

The announcement of the “ceasefire” is perceived as a liberation. Today the enthusiasm produced by the last truce among the social mass of Basque nationalism does not exist because this truce has been preceded by a weariness of society against an armed organization which truncated the expectations of peace and democracy, assassinating the political leaders of the opposition to “socialise the pain”. Any feeling of relief is thus accompanied by a deep sadness. It is the sadness of knowing that the suffering caused by ETA had no possible justification and has moreover served for nothing. This final “ceasefire” comes late, very late. Before us the enormous task is opened of re-elaborating a new political ethic from which a new left movement can be recomposed to continue the struggle for what is pending; the release of prisoners on both sides of the border, the creation of political institutions that relate the Basque territories to each other, the self-determination and political sovereignty of the Basque territories that demand it. That at least is our wager.

Report on the international situation

8 April 2006, by François Sabado

The international situation is characterised by a major contradiction between the deepening of neoliberal counter-reforms and popular resistance to neoliberalism. There is popular rejection, there is a very deep crisis of political and ideological legitimacy but the steamroller of neoliberalism continues to advance. That leads to a great electoral instability, above all in the dominated countries.

I. Some characteristics of the neoliberal counter-reforms.

a) We are witnessing, in a certain sense, the installation of a new mode of accumulation of capitalism. There is a generalisation on the world scale of the main tendencies of capitalist globalisation:

- financialisation of the economy but a new growth of industry and services in certain countries (emergent countries or specialisation for some key countries, new technologies in the US and equipment goods in Germany).
- continuation of privatisation
- deregulation
- tendencies towards the unification of the labour market on a world scale.

These main tendencies develop on the basis of an integration in the world market of new sectors like the countries of Eastern Europe, Russia and China.

They have led to rates of growth in the world economy which average 4-5% with rates of 8-10% in the developing countries or in China.

b) World growth is drawn by three locomotives : the USA, China and India. 5% for the USA and 10% for China, without forgetting India with more than 7%.

Nonetheless the dynamic of US growth remains unhealthy. It rests on a basis of huge deficits : a trade deficit of 6% of GDP, a budget deficit of more than 4.5%. Americans buy more than they produce and spend more than they own, in particular because of a brutal policy of tax cuts for the rich and an explosion of arms spending.

This policy risks being aggravated with the rise in prices of raw materials.

External indebtedness is financed mainly by China and Japan, notably through the purchase of US treasury bonds. Internal indebtedness - resulting from a high level of household consumption - is paid for by a systematic policy of credit, in particular in the area of property. There is now a huge property bubble in the USA which accounts for more than 50% of jobs created in the recent period.

Things are holding together, and the entire chain of the world economy and capital has an interest in the system continuing to hold. It should be said that anti-crisis mechanisms have been used to contain crises leading to potential collapse - since the crises of 1994, 1997 and 2001 in Argentina, there has not been anything similar - but for how long will that hold?

c) This new phase of the world economy also involves a reorganisation. There is a rise in power of the "emergent countries", China but above all India and Brazil, even if Brazil has had mediocre growth rates in the recent period. The discussions of the WTO and the role played by India and Brazil, who have negotiated new positions for their economy, in particular the agro-export sector, are an indication of this. The positions taken by Brazil and Argentina on the question of the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) and involvement in Mercosur are a second indication. Socio-economic and political capacities - the ability to manage mass movements - to create the conditions for a temporary stabilisation form a third element.

d) In this phase of growth of the world economy, Europe is "dragging its feet", with rates of 1% to 2% and a certain weakening in the face of world competition. The current phase of globalisation also has a specific dimension in the USA/China/Europe competition. The contradiction between the growing integration of "old Europe" in globalisation and its weak growth rates, like its unfavourable position at the level of monetary policy - a euro which is too strong faced with a weak dollar - lead to a hardening of all bourgeois economic policies, notably in France and in Germany.

The European "social models" are, in the eyes of the neoliberals who want to smash them, an obstacle in the competition between the great powers. Targets of these policies: the deregulation of social relations, the smashing of the labour code in France, the liquidation of the rights of the jobless in Germany and so on. In any case, in a country like France, the right is now attempting to liquidate the fixed duration contract of employment (the "CDI") - which was the typical work contract - in favour of work contracts allowing employers to dismiss workers without explanation from one day to another. That exists in other countries but in France it amounts to a major turning point. This aggravation of competition can even lead some European countries or the European Union to attempts protectionist policies.

e) Finally, far from disappearing, the role of states is also still decisive. More precisely they are regrouping, focusing on the defence of the interests of the dominant classes, abandoning a series of social domains. States are concentrated on the policy of economic liberalisation, but also form an instrument in the economic war and in competition. We witness the authoritarian hardening of states, against the social movements and the revolts or explosions linked to the increasing precariousness of the living conditions of millions of people, and in immigration policies. We witness above all the hardening of states in the policy of armament and political-military domination of key territories, as shown by the US in Iraq and in central Asia. Capitalist globalisation is accompanied by armed globalisation. The state has a strategic place in these developments. .

II. Contradictions and popular resistance

a) There will be a specific discussion on this subject , but one of the major expressions of these contradictions is concentrated in the US war against Iraq. The resistance of the Iraqi people, its will for independence and self-determination has until today counteracted the plans of US imperialism. This latter cannot withdraw without losing face.

The risk of becoming bogged down, indeed of a new Vietnam, is now regularly raised in the US press. It should also be noted that the difficulties in Iraq weaken the US in other sectors, like Latin America, where despite the maintenance of their political and military plans - notably plan Colombia - the US appears as a power whose strength can be contested.

b) In Europe, the brutality of the capitalist attacks and the headlong rush of the dominant classes into neoliberalism provoke situations of social and political crisis.

On the social plane, there can be resistance (although in recent months, the curve of social struggles has tailed off, the situation remains explosive, the mobilisation against the "first job contract" beginning in France is a new proof of it), there can also be movements of opinion like the "no" in the referendums in France and in Holland The sentiment of a "no" to capitalist Europe is globally a majority sentiment: in France it is a majority which is markedly left in character, but in other countries it also includes sectors and parties of the right and

indeed far right.

Capitalist brutality provokes crises of political representation on the right, opening spaces for the far right and the fascist or nationalist movements, but it also creates contradictions on the left. We will see them in the discussion on Europe. There are the apparatuses of social democracy which remain on the terrain of neoliberalism, but a whole series of sectors reacting against social liberal adaptation which is increasingly neoliberal. That has been the case in France with Laurent Fabius, the socialist left, but also with the Linkspartei in Germany, where Oskar Lafontaine accompanied by the ex CP has refused to follow Schröder to the end. Which is a step forward for the German workers' movement and which should be accompanied. We have discussed this question with the comrades of the RSB, [1] with whom we have a divergence on this terrain : even if these steps forwards are partial, even if there are steps backwards as in the French PS where the socialist left and Fabius again rejoined the leadership at the last congress, it is necessary to take these advances into account.

This also created a debate in the Communist parties, which in general adapt to social liberalism. The shift of Italy's Party of Communist Refoundation towards the centre-left is the last example, after the choices of Spain's United Left and those of the ex-Communists of East Germany. The French Communists are for the moment at a crossroads, torn between links to the left "No" movement which has an anti-neoliberal dynamic and on the other hand the demands of a strategy of alliances with the PS to maintain their parliamentary and municipal positions.

c) It is in Latin America that this contradiction between neoliberalism and popular resistance is at its most explosive. There is a marked shift to the left in Latin America, with the recent defeats of the right and the coming to power of social liberals in countries like Uruguay or Chile, and the probable defeats of the right in Mexico, Costa Rica, or Nicaragua. But also with the victory of Morales in Bolivia. Soon Colombia will be the only big country to remain as the direct relay of Washington.

In this context, there is a first polarisation between imperialism and the reactionary or putschist right who have a strategy of confrontation. The intervention of the right is often the factor which radicalises the process.

The US intervenes regularly on this line since Miami. There is Plan Colombia. There are the interventions of paramilitaries here and there. We should not forget the quotation that Chavez takes from Trotsky: "The revolution often advances often under the lash of the counter-revolution".

There is a second polarisation between on the one hand the social liberals (Lula, Kirshner, Tabare Vazquez, Bachelet, Palacios, Duarte and tomorrow Lopez Obrador in Mexico and Ortega in Nicaragua) and on the other, Cuba, Chavez, Morales... and a question mark over Ollanta Umalla in Peru.

This second polarisation is more muffled. First for reasons of state and because of the popular aspiration to a project of Latin American integration. Faced with US imperialism, all look to another America. They have rejected the FTAA, but Brazil and Argentina put the accent on Mercosur, having previously integrated Venezuela into it, while Chavez and Castro stress above all the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America (ALBA).

But it is necessary to take the full measure of the Kirshner and Lula project. Strengthened by the new positions of their countries, they can play on Mercosur, rest on their capacities to master the mass movement, the fact that they have succeeded in imposing a certain stabilisation. They have a real autonomy in the context of globalisation, even if on the medium term there is no place for a new Peronist or Cardenist project as in the 1930s in Mexico or the 1950s in Argentina.

There are two key issues :

- the first concerns Chavez. Can Lula and Kirshner draw him to the right and lead him to new agreements with imperialism?
- the other concerns Morales. Who will win him over? Chavez or Lula and Kirshner?

These are the two central issues for in all the mechanism in place - option of confrontation or option of negotiation in a social liberal framework - there are two flies in the ointment : Chavez and Morales...

We will discuss Venezuela. But Bolivia is the other country in ferment, where the situation is explosive. There is a mass movement there which retains the initiative: the co-ordinations of the landless have from the earliest days mobilised for a negotiation with Morales and there is pressure from a whole series of other associations. If Venezuela is dominated by Chavez, Bolivia is still for the moment dominated by the explosive character of the social movement. Evo Morales will not be Lula, firstly because the social pressure is much stronger. Then, in his declarations and initiatives (in relation to the army top brass, in cutting his salary by 57 %) he shows a certain direction. There are certainly other forces : that of Santa Cruz, that in his own camp of the vice-president who is favourable to an Andean capitalism, but the situation remains open, very open. And we should concentrate our attention on these two countries.

III. Our tasks

a) To discuss of our solidarity tasks with the people of Iraq against the war and with Venezuela. To develop solidarity collectives, to talk about the Venezuelan experience, familiarise youth with the Bolivarian process. We should discuss solidarity brigades.

To combine the social and the democratic question: the social question in defending the social emergency programmes in defence of elementary demands but emerging into public and social appropriation, sovereignty over natural resources considered as common goods, enlarging the notion of the common good, to pose the problem of ownership in new terms.

To support in Latin America, but also

in the movement for global justice, the perspective advanced by Chavez of the “Socialism of the 21sr century”. There are, of course, many generalities in this formula, but we must enter fully into this debate, as we have done with the leaflet in Caracas. Because in putting the accent on socialism, there is the question of the rupture with capitalism.

c) Finally, the new coordinates of the social situation and of international politics confirm the possibility and the necessity of building of new “broad anti-capitalist parties”. Not as a uniform continental tactic, but taking account of the specificities of each situation. Because we face a difficulty, namely the lack of synch between struggles, the levels of combativeness and the levels of consciousness. There is no mechanical link between the two. We still have many difficulties on the level of a perspective of anti-capitalist transformation and it is this which gives more margins of manoeuvre to the radical reformist forces. But only before the tests of government because afterwards the problems are posed in other terms.

That involves putting at the centre a genuinely anti-capitalist programme and a perspective of a workers’ government against any form of participation in coalition governments.

In Europe, that implies a discussion with the Italian PRC or certain sectors of the Linkspartei who seek an agreement with the SPD in Berlin.

In Latin America, while integrating the experiences of even partial anti-imperialist rupture, while supporting, for example, the Bolivarian alternative, it is necessary to develop an anti-capitalist alternative to social liberalism. It is on this terrain that we situate our support for the PSOL, as for the organisations, currents or individuals which seek to deepen from inside the Bolivarian process and also the Mexican left which is in the other campaign of the Zapatistas.

It is on this terrain that we propose a European meeting of the anti-capitalist left in May and also the relaunch of our activities in Latin America in particular.

Footnotes

[1] The Revolutionary Socialist League (RSB) is one of the sectors of the German section of the Fourth International. Its viewpoint on this subject was published in the September 2005 edition of IV. The July 2005 edition contains the viewpoint adopted by the other sector of the German section, the International Socialist Left.

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