
INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

News & analysis from the Fourth International – April 2008 # 399

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International Viewpoint

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Italian elections

The Critical Left, the lists with the hammer and sickle

In Italy "another Left beyond the Rainbow is needed". It is with this slogan that the Critical Left, the first formation to present a symbol with the hammer and sickle, is contesting the coming elections.



And after the old symbol of the labour movement, it innovates by presenting "a tandem and not a chief candidate" for the presidency of the Council, a young feminist activist, Flavia d'Angeli, together with the "heretic" senator, Franco Turigliatto.

"Another left is needed", explains the outgoing deputy, Salvatore Cannavó "because that which is gathered under the symbol of the rainbow failed: the bankruptcy of the Prodi government is especially a bankruptcy of their first candidate, Fausto Bertinotti". A left, continues Flavia d'Angeli, which is "inert and useless, which in recent months only said to the workers, to the young people, to the precarious: "I cannot do it"...".

The Critical Left, which includes among its candidates the former chief leader of the PRC group in the Senate, Gigi Malabarba, the journalist Umberto Gai and the historian Antonio Moscato, will give a voice to the students and teachers who disputed the presence of the pope with Sapienza, the women who defend law 194 on the termination of pregnancy ("in Ferrare we say" says Angeli

“that men cannot control maternity. Why? Because they cannot experience it!”) and the workers who struggle to reach the end of the month on their wages.

A left with the hammer and sickle, therefore “Communist”, but also “ecologist and feminist”,

which calls for an “emergency social program” with proposals for a minimal wage of 1,300 Euros, a tax on inheritance, social benefits of 1,000 Euros for the unemployed and the precarious and the reconversion of the army “to civil employment”.

The first obstacle on the road of the Critical Left is the electoral rules, which specify the obligation to collect the signatures in order to present lists for formations which do not have two members of Parliament in the same Chamber. “It is absurd”, said Cannavó, “we are two elected officials, one in the Chamber and one in the Senate, and are excluded by the rule. We called upon the President of the Republic and presented an amendment to remove this disparity. In words, all the other parties said they agreed, we will see at the time of the vote... But in any event they are informed, we will present ourselves at the elections”.

AGI

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Italy

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Italy

The Critical Left faces the April elections

Document

Critical Left

We have decided to present our lists at the elections, not to build a small self-proclaimed party but to continue to defend the need for an anti-capitalist constituent through our program and in the manner of forming our lists.



Flavia D'Angeli, Sinistra presidential candidate

At a meeting in Turin on February 17 the national coordination of the Critical Left characterised the legislative decree by which the government released political groups from the obligation to collect signatures for presentation on the electoral rolls as anti-constitutional. A generalized exemption, which excludes only the Critical Left, whose two members of Parliament would be thus less equal than the others, is obviously a violation of article 67 of the Constitution, which stipulates that each member of Parliament represents the Nation.

This decision makes us indignant us but it does not surprise us: it is not fortuitous that the only political movement which voted against the war and the package of so-called laws on well-being suffers discrimination. It indicates also in an obvious way the will of the governmental left to prevent the ballot paper from presenting the symbol of the hammer and sickle. We will fight against this anti-constitutional measure through recourse to the regional administrative court but, especially, by presenting our lists everywhere.

Because the critical Left has decided to be present at the coming political elections. We have in the past few days launched a call for a plural anti-capitalist left. This call did not obtain adequate and significant support. We regret this, because the idea of a broader coalition remains our fundamental orientation. Consequently, we have decided to present our lists at the elections, not to build a small self-proclaimed party but to continue to defend the need for an anti-capitalist constituent through our program and in the manner of forming our lists.

We present ourselves at the elections so that there is an anti-capitalist point of view to the left of the Rainbow, to affirm an ecologist, feminist and internationalist viewpoint turned towards struggles and mobilizations across the country, in defence of the environment, against Italian military interventionism or by women in defence of their self-determination, or the LGBT movement for civil rights and a secular state. So that there is a communist point of view, because once again the symbols of labour are thrown into the dustbin to justify the umpteenth turn to the right by the governmental left.

We present ourselves with an innovative candidacy for the presidency of the Council (which we will illustrate at the time of the press conference on Tuesday) and the symbol of the hammer and sickle, on an anti-capitalist programme of workers, women, young people, for a new left, class-based, ecologist, feminist and Communist.

We reproduce above the motion adopted by the national Coordination of the critical Left - Movement for the Anti-capitalist Left, on February 17, 2008 in Turin.

Agency Dispatches

AGI:-The Critical Left has appealed to the President of the republic, Giorgio Napolitano concerning the government's electoral decree to allow "all to present lists without collecting signatures, except for a left list, with a hammer and sickle in the symbol".



The members of Parliament for the Critical Left, Salvatore Cannavò and Franco Turigliatto, stressed that: "Tomorrow, the national coordination, which meets in Turin, will decide whether we present ourselves at the elections. We could be the single political force present in the Parliament obliged to collect signatures. We have confidence in the democratic and institutional ideas of President Napolitano, who will manage to find a non-discriminatory interpretation of the decree. In any case we await an answer quickly because, otherwise, we can only pose the question in all places and in all forms which we consider convenient, without exclusion".

ANSA: "The new standards of the government concerning the presentation of lists at the elections "discriminate against us and seem to me anti-constitutional" said senator Franco Turigliatto in Turin, before attending a meeting organized by the Critical Left. He referred, in particular, to the rule making it possible for parties not to collect signatures if they have at least two deputies.

"This law covers everyone, the centre, the right, the reactionary movements and discriminates, it seems, only against the anti-capitalist left". According to information collected in Turin, the Critical Left has started to contact members of Parliament and plans to turn to the Head of State. "In any event" Turigliatto concludes, " we will decide tomorrow what we must do. It is necessary that positions like ours are represented within Parliament, because it is a strong demand which emerges from society". Things will only change "if there is a new 1968 ago and a new 1969: then the partisan delegations will no longer be enough, we will change protagonists with the participation and the democratic presence of the neighbourhoods and the workplaces."

► *Critical Left (In Italian, Sinistra Critica) is an association of those "who want to create an alternative and anti-capitalist left for the radical transformation of society"*

International seminar on climate change

Climate change, energy revolution and social transformation

Laurent Garrouste

The seminar which was held in Amsterdam from 23-27 February, 2008 at the invitation of the International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE) was extremely fruitful and stimulating.



Entitled "Faced with climate change, energy revolution and social transformation", this initiative, unprecedented for the Fourth International, brought together in an open way activists who were experts and experts who were activists, some of whom were members of our political current, some who were not.

Among the experts, we should note in particular the interventions of Jean-Pascal van Ypersele, climatologist, Daniel Tanuro, agricultural engineer, Carine Barbier, energy economist, Michel Husson and Jean-Marie Harribey, economists, Phil Ward, chemist, the physicist Jean-Paul Deléage having sent his excuses. Altogether, more than 50 people attended the seminar, coming from Europe (Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Spain, France, Britain, Greece), Asia (Turkey), North America (Canada, the United States) and South America (Brazil). Many of them have been directly involved in building mobilizations and movements against the climate change.

The guiding lines of these exchanges were to examine the state of scientific knowledge on climate change, to analyze the neo-liberal responses that are proposed for it, and to define the broad outline of an alternative response to this challenge, both in programmatic terms and in

terms of building a worldwide mobilization on climate change. To do that, it was essential to reconsider in a detailed way the energy question in all its dimensions: the discussions thus dealt with the necessary energy transition, but also the Marxist theoretical corpus.

Invited as a resource person, the climatologist Jean-Pascal van Ypersele (Catholic University of Louvain) outlined, in the light of the most recent work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) the gravity of the diagnosis concerning the modification of the climate and its foreseeable consequences on the ecological, social, medical or alimentary levels, which is now the subject of a very broad consensus among the scientific community. He insisted in particular on the fact that the IPCC based its analyses on an exhaustive taking into account of the whole of the scientific literature: an approach which can lead us to underestimate somewhat the extent of the changes in progress, but which, at the same time, is the basis for the very strong credibility of its work.

In fact the consequences in terms of reduction of greenhouse gas emissions that flow from the objective of stabilization of the temperature recommended by the IPCC appear as a gigantic challenge. Many participants insisted on the solid basis of support that this work represent: an analysis and recommendations that are shared by the world scientific community, to take account of which really comes directly in conflict with the operation of the capitalist economy and with its technical foundations. Michel Husson examined from this point of view, in particular in the light of the theory of long waves, the possibility of the emergence of a green capitalism. He insisted on the daunting question of profitability with which a green capitalism that claimed to be more than simply a "green-painted" capitalism would be confronted.

Daniel Tanuro presented the various facets of the neo-liberal response to the climate crisis, detailing the limited and insufficient character of the objectives laid down at Kyoto and of the measures taken, but also the perverse effects of the mechanisms that were chosen. He insisted on the turn being taken on the level of the ruling classes: the recent conference in Bali in December 2007 showed that they are becoming conscious of the need to come up with a response to the developing crisis, which by no means signifies that this response will be effective on the ecological level or satisfactory from the point of view of the oppressed. Not only it is likely to be completely insufficient, but the mechanisms that are favoured are likely to lead to a reinforcement of imperialist domination and the neo-liberal offensive.

In this framework, Jean-Marie Harribey presented a detailed criticism both of the markets in rights to pollute and of the ecotax, questioning the methods of use of commercial mechanisms within the framework of a dynamic of progressive social transformation. Phil Ward supplemented this criticism by taking apart the Malthusian response, which often accompanies the dominant discourses, but also certain ecologist discourses on "overpopulation". Several comrades

underlined how much this type of answer was always accompanied by violent attacks against women's rights. Joao Alfredo, a Brazilian activist, furthermore presented the policy of fighting against climate change of the Lula government. He showed how much this policy leads to the multiplying of ecological damage, in particular by the frenzied development of biofuels, with the disastrous consequences which result from it for the poor and landless peasants.

Carine Barbier presented the main parameters from which the outlines of an energy transition can be thought about: starting from the present characteristics of the production and consumption of energy, she highlighted the need for any process of social transformation to be accompanied by an energy revolution. She insisted on the fact that the cardinal point of this transition was the drastic reduction in energy produced and consumed, which is compatible not only with the maintenance but even with an improvement of the standard of living of the world's populations. It is only in this perspective of economy of energy that the system can be based on renewable energies and free itself from both fossil fuels and nuclear energy. She explained in what way purely technical answers to the climate crisis constitute illusions and often dangers (capture and sequestration of carbon, recourse to hydrogen, etc...).

Daniel Tanuro insisted on the need to start from the concept of a capitalist energy system, outlining the main features of this system. In fact, any analysis of capitalism which disregards its energy base appears eminently insufficient, in particular when it is a question of facing a challenge such as that of climate change and of the answers we need to find to this challenge. Drawing out his analysis, he also argued for a revision of Marxism on the energy question. He stressed the absence of distinction in Marx's work between energy of flux and energy of stock, which prevented Marx from perceiving one of the key dimensions of a capitalism based on fossil energies and from giving full force to his concept of "rational regulation of the social metabolism", characteristic of the relations between humanity and nature. At several points the question of the possible impact on the crisis of capitalism of the rarefaction of oil resources was discussed, the majority of the speakers tending to relativise the question by stressing the importance of the coal resources that still exist.

Michael Löwy and Joel Kovel, two of the principal organizers of the recently set up international ecosocialist network, gave reports relating to the ecosocialist perspective, particularly in relation to the unfolding climate crisis. In a report entitled "Worst-case scenarios and ecosocialism", Löwy underlined to what extent the developments in the global ecological crisis reinforce the urgency of a change of society. The discussion covered in particular the conditions of using pessimistic forecasts in mobilization and in political discourse, certain comrades pointing particularly to the negative effects of the reflexes of fear that could be generated. The editor of the review Capital, Nature, Socialism, Joel Kovel, tried to

outline a global vision of the ecosocialist perspective. The discussion dealt particularly with the theoretical relevance of the analysis of nature as a value, and the risks of such an approach.

Lastly, the seminar tackled from several angles the question of struggles and the building of the mobilization against climate change. Terisa Turner, professor at the University of Guelph and ecofeminist activist, analyzed in a detailed and enthralling way a series of mobilizations in the countries of both the South and the North concerning the appropriation or the use of oil resources, underlining the cardinal role played by women in these struggles, for example in Nigeria. Pierre Rousset reviewed the balance sheet of popular mobilizations in the face of natural disasters: he presented concrete examples of North-South internationalist solidarity, in particular following the Asian tsunami and the Kashmir earthquake. He stressed the importance of building concrete international solidarity when such events occur, solidarity which can only be based on popular movements with real roots on the ground. Manolo Gari, collaborator of the Trade-Union Institute of Work, the Environment and Health (ISTAS) of the Workers' Commissions (in the Spanish State), developed for his part the need to develop trade-unionism as eco-trade-unionism. Arguing that it was important for the trade-union movement to take up the climate question and to place it at the heart of its orientation, he underlined the various facets of the question, in particular in the conflicts within enterprises, and also outlined what was at stake.

The involvement of the trade unions on these questions will be decisive in the face of the character and the effects of the capitalist responses. He particularly stressed the demand for a "just transition": it should not be the workers who pay for the upheavals that are necessary. Which means combining defence of employment and defence of the environment. Lastly, the comrades present explained the mobilizations in progress over the climate, which have taken on a mass dimension in several countries, in particular in Australia, Belgium, Spain and Britain. Alan Thornett gave a progress report on the state of the mobilization in Britain, where in particular a conference of 300 trade unionists took place in the same month of February.

Although we may find it regrettable that the discussion on the demands to be put forward in the framework of the battle against climate change was not developed more, or that not enough participants came from countries of the South, this seminar nonetheless constituted a remarkable success, something that was underlined by all the participants. Everyone wanted a new seminar to be held in two years' time, hoping that by then progress will have been made in the building of a mass mobilization on the climate question. Already, these four days of discussions have had a first concrete result, since the members of the Fourth International who were present, in a meeting that discussed the balance sheet of the seminar, worked out a draft resolution to be submitted to the leading bodies of the International, who subsequently adopted it.

► *Laurent Garrouste is a member of the Ecology Commission of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International).*

Book Review

A window into courageous resistance

Jeffery R Webber

Aviva Chomsky, Garry Leech and Steve Striffler, eds., The People Behind Colombian Coal: Mining, Multinationals and Human Rights. Bogotá: Casa Editorial Pisando Callos, 2007, 200pp.

Washington's man in Bogotá, President Álvaro Uribe Vélez, made international headlines in early March when the Colombian military murdered members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country's largest guerrilla organization, in Ecuadorian territory.

Among the dead was Luis Edgar Devia Silva, aka Raúl Reyes, the FARC's chief spokesperson and a key participant in the recently negotiated release of several hostages who had been held by the FARC. The ongoing hostage negotiations were being mediated successfully by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Uribe's assault on the FARC guerrillas in Ecuador was a stark illustration of the regime's belligerent refusal to allow for serious steps toward a negotiated settlement to Colombia's civil war. To the contrary, Uribe's latest move suggests that he will continue to serve the Colombian ruling class and imperial interests of the US and other major capitalist powers, orchestrating from on high a war of state terror against any and all dissent and resistance. [1]

In the immediate aftermath of the Colombian state murders in Ecuador, massive demonstrations were held across Colombia and throughout the world on March 6 on behalf of Colombians killed by state or paramilitary violence. [2] One of the immediate consequences has been renewed paramilitary terror and threats against trade unionists and human-rights activists involved in organizing the marches and protests. Carmen Cecilia Carvajal, a teacher, was killed on March 4. Leonidas Gómez Roza, a member of the bank workers' union, Unión Nacional de Empleados Bancarios, was murdered the next day. Gildardo Gómez Alzato, a teacher and member of the Asociación de Institutores de Antioquia, was likewise assassinated on March 7. Carlos Burbano, the Vice-President of the Hospital Workers Union, Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores Hospitalarios, was murdered on March 11. On top of these deaths, 28 other human rights activists and numerous social organizations have been threatened by a paramilitary group calling itself the "Black Eagles." In their communiqués they warn

that all the organizers of the March 6th demonstrations are future targets. [3]

It has been well-established that transnational capital operating in the extractive resource industries of Colombia has played a central part in perpetuating civil war and backing military and paramilitary terror against the civilian population. [4] These processes have been occurring against a more general backdrop of neoliberal restructuring since the 1990s. Wealth has become more concentrated, dispossession of land and resources has accelerated, exploitation of labour has intensified, and the dislocation of peasants and indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities has reached astounding heights. Karl Marx's notion of "primitive accumulation" remains incredibly apt as a tool for understanding twenty-first century capitalism in Colombia.



El Cerrejón, North Zone

Social movement activists, trade unionists, leftist political leaders, and peasants deemed to be supporters of the guerrilla insurgency, experience threats, assassinations and other human rights abuses at the hands of the armed forces and paramilitary groups as part of a cruel routine. [5] Roughly three million people have been displaced in the twenty-first century in Colombia. [6] Two million of these were displaced from mining regions. [7] Levels of violence in mining zones defy the imagination, as do the poverty rates in these regions.

All of this makes the publication of *The People Behind Colombian Coal* timely and important. Two of the editors, Aviva Chomsky and Steve Striffler, are scholar-activists, and Garry Leech is a journalist, author, activist and editor of the on-line publication, *Colombia Journal*. All three have made important contributions to our understanding of Latin American politics, imperialism, and capitalism in the past. [8] This latest collective effort is a very good collection of short articles, testimonies, and primary documents that together cover mining capitalism, state power, imperialism and dispossession on the one hand, and the resistance dynamics of community, union, and international solidarity struggles on the other.

The focus of the book is the human devastation wrought by the world's largest open-pit coal mine, El Cerrejón, in La Guajira, in northern Colombia. The basic thesis tying together the various strands is that "multinational mining

companies that own El Cerrejón profit at the expense of the 'people' of the Guajira region whose plight has remained hidden 'behind the Colombian coal' that many of us in North America and Europe rely on to generate our electricity" (13). The testimonies and analyses are drawn from, sociologists, anthropologists, environmentalists, lawyers, medical doctors, indigenous and Afro-Colombian community activists, and Colombian and North American trade unionists.

The Guajira peninsula is a Colombian department – state – in which roughly one third of the population is indigenous Wayuu, Colombia's largest indigenous group. The Wayuu live primarily in the arid northern area of the peninsula, where the coal port and railroad are located. However, as will become clear in the rest of the review, there are also indigenous Wayuu and Afro-Colombian settlements in the southern part, where the mine itself is located.

The book is structured into four parts. It begins with an analysis of how multinational corporations are structured, helping to explain their brutally exploitative behaviour in the mining zones. Second, the book provides a series of articles written between 1983 and the current period that addresses the multifaceted impact of the mining developments in La Guajira: socio-cultural, environmental, economic, and health-related. A third section provides further documentation of health and human rights problems stemming from the mine's operations, as well as a report by the mine workers union expressing its solidarity with the displaced Afro-Colombian and indigenous Wayuu communities. The last section outlines developments in the growing campaign of international solidarity around reparations for communities displaced by the mine since 2001 and in defence of communities and mine workers still under threat today.

Since there is no way of capturing the sheer diversity of subject matter and important empirical observations offered up in the book in a review such as this, I will simply focus on what I suggest are three major themes running through the text: accumulation by dispossession, social movement unionism and indigenous and Afro-Colombian resistance, and international solidarity.

Accumulation by Dispossession

The Marxist geographer David Harvey recently developed the concept of accumulation by dispossession as a way of updating and refining Karl Marx's notion of primitive accumulation. Marx highlighted processes of capital accumulation based upon predation, fraud, and violence, but saw them as something unique to a "primitive" or "original" stage in the historical development of capitalism. Harvey argues, by contrast, that these predatory practices have in fact been a continuous characteristic of capitalism, a facet of the system intensified during the onset of neoliberalism in the mid-1970s. [9] In the neoliberal era, assets previously held under collective ownership, either by the state or in common, have been forced on an unprecedented scale

into the realm of the market, often through fraud, coercion, and innumerable forms of predation both by the state and powerful private actors. In other words, many forms of public property have been commodified, have entered into the market as commodities for buying and selling. The intensification of commodification has included the commodification of labour on a grand scale, or the proletarianization of huge swathes of the world's population. This process of proletarianization is often engendered through the violent dispossession of the land of peasants and indigenous communities, and the subsequent coercive migration of these populations into urban centres in search of means of sustaining themselves, now with only their labour to sell. The private appropriation of natural resources in the Third World and the manipulation of the national debts of poor countries by the core capitalist state powers are other facets of accumulation by dispossession. Third World ruling classes and states have been instrumental players in these coercive processes, but most important have been the capitalist classes of the core imperial powers, the states that rule in the interests of these classes, multinational corporations, and the central international financial institutions – the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and others.

While Harvey's insights are unexamined in this text for good reason – it is primarily a collection of testimonies and local analyses geared toward a broad audience – we see the processes of accumulation by dispossession unfolding in bold fashion in many of the experiences and situations described. Between 1981 and 1986 the 50/50 public-private partnership between the state-owned enterprise Carbones de Colombia (Carbocol) and Intercor, a subsidiary of Exxon (later ExxonMobil) began the construction stage of a three phase mining development of Cerrejón North Zone. A number of indigenous Wayuu communities, inhabiting the area since before the Spanish conquest, were dispossessed of their lands to facilitate the construction of the mine's railroad and port. In 2001, the Afro-Colombian town of Tabaco was destroyed and the residents forcibly removed by state security forces to allow for the mine's expansion. As of 2007 the communities of Chanqueta, Patilla, Roche, Los Remedios and Tamaquito continued to be threatened with displacement by the mines. In the interim, the resident's lives have become almost unbearable because of the mine's strategic purchase of all surrounding land that used to be utilized by community residents for hunting and farming, or, alternatively, it provided sources of nearby farm employment. As a consequence, traveling to distant locations for seasonal work is increasingly common for men, with all the negative attendant consequences for community and family life. Here is Colombian sociologist María Cristina González Hernández on the Afro-Colombian town of Tabaco, in the municipality of Hatonuevo, in the department of Guajira:

"The population is surrounded by the coal complex. In economic terms, the restrictions on livestock-raising, loss of pasture land, loss of neighbors to ally with, and the diminution of hunting and fishing, have compromised the

community's economic survival. This situation has been aggravated by the State, which has declared the land a mining reserve, approved the town's expropriation, and suspended health, education, and Telecom services. Altogether, these factors have brought about pathologies and crisis for the community" (66).

Anthropologist Deborah Pacini Hernandez observed some of these trends in Wayuu territory in Guajira as early as 1983. In her contribution to the volume she points out that, "There has been and will continue to be loss of territorial rights as the project and others like it intrude into the Guajira. In addition to the loss of land to development projects (whether mining, tourism, military or otherwise), there will be loss of land to entrepreneurs and opportunists who will be moving to the Guajira and will be expropriating, legally or illegally, Wayuu traditional territory" (41). In addition to land dispossessed in the interior, the loss of "coastal land will result in the loss of offshore marine resources, such as fish, shellfish, turtles, etc., that the Wayuu rely upon to supplement their diet and income. These coastal resources will be further reduced as increased commercial maritime activity results in the deterioration of offshore waters" (42). The construction of roads and railroads on the peninsula "will disrupt the traditional patterns of Wayuu transhumance as they move with their herds in search of water and pasture" (42).

Pacini Hernandez goes on to address explicitly the brutal stages of proletarianization that follow: "Traditional land management techniques and knowledge will be lost as the Wayuu are pressured to abandon their traditional subsistence strategies and work for the Cerrejón project and others that will follow.... The loss of this knowledge and of the land on which to practice it will probably result in the further proletarianization of the Wayuu, leaving them at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, without their culture for support. This process has already begun in the case of many Wayuu who have migrated to urban centers.... The Wayuu have become slum dwellers, with unemployment and underemployment rendering them vulnerable to all the social problems typical of such conditions" (42).

In 2000, the Colombian government privatized Carbocol, selling its 50 percent share of the mining company to a multinational mining consortium comprised of BHP Billiton, Anglo-American, and Glencore. The pace of accumulation by dispossession merely accelerated. This is perhaps best reflected in the case of the town of Tabaco. Armando Pérez Araújo – a member of the indigenous organization Yanama, the Mines and Communities Network, and a lawyer for the communities displaced or under threat by the Cerrejón mine – contributes an important article on this topic. Pérez Araújo's analysis illustrates how state coercion and legal manipulation is often a critical component of accumulation by dispossession in the neoliberal age. He shows how the then Minister of Mines and Energy, Carlos Caballero Argáez, "in a clear flouting of national laws, authorized and promoted the administrative phase of the

improperly-tagged 'expropriation' of what was disingenuously termed 'a plot of land called Tabaco.'" The so-called plot of land "was declared necessary for public and social use. The terminology suggested that the 'plot of land' was an uninhabited rural area. It ignored the physical existence of an organized human community.... We have petitioned the relevant authorities to revoke the illegal, unjust and arbitrary administrative act that set the process into motion. Invariably, we have received a negative response that left us no doubt that we were facing a formidable web of lies designed to defend the illegal mining operation at the cost of the social stability of an obviously fragile community" (98-99).

What the different components of the book illustrate together is how mining capitalists are the immediate agents behind the dispossession and displacement of indigenous Wayuu and Afro-Colombian communities in Guajira, and the exploitation of the workers in the mine. Yet, these immediate agents rely on Colombian state power and the power of imperialism enacted through core states in the Global North – and in particular the US state – to enforce the coercive and legal components involved in accumulation by dispossession in the mining industry.

The book is not a one-sided description of the indestructible power of capital, state and empire, however. Indeed, it documents in detail how the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and the labour movement have fought back – in the face of a fiercely hostile environment – seeking to alter the balance of power and achieve at least a modicum of dignity and social justice in the short term. More recently, international solidarity has been added to this equation, with important consequences.

Social Movement Unionism

Social movement unionism, as labour historian Kim Moody has pointed out, seeks to multiply "its political and social power by reaching out to other sectors of the class, be they other unions, neighbourhood-based organizations, or other social movements. It fights for all the oppressed and enhances its own power by doing so." [10] Another important contribution The People Behind Colombian Coal makes is its description of the way in which the mine workers union at the Cerrejón Mine, Sintracarbón, came to adapt a perspective of social movement unionism near the end of 2006, in the sense of making solidarity with displaced indigenous Wayuu and Afro-Colombian communities a central facet of its struggle.

Four members of the union were participants in an international delegation – organized in part by Chomsky, Leech, and Striffler – that traveled to several of the affected communities in Guajira and listened to testimonies of residents about how the mine had negatively impacted on their lives. The delegates subsequently went back to their union and successfully argued for the inclusion of the struggles of the communities into the union's bargaining at the mine. A national and international declaration of Sintracarbón,

issued after the international delegation, includes the following passage: "Sintracarbón has committed itself to the struggle of the communities affected by the mine's expansion. We invite all other unions and social organizations in Colombia, and especially La Guajira, to join in the struggle of these communities for better conditions and quality of life, and to take on the communities' problems as our own. As a union committed to the struggle of these communities, we have established the short-term goal of working to help unify the affected communities, to participate in their meetings, to take a stand with the local and national authorities regarding the absence of public services in the communities, and to begin a dialogue with the company about the reality we are now aware of, and to take a public stand locally, nationally, and internationally about the situation of the communities affected by the Cerrejón mine and its expansion" (125).

At the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007 the union entered into bargaining negotiations with the company. The bargaining process quickly broke down and 98 percent of the union members who voted – there was a turnout rate of 76 percent – favoured a strike. Sintracarbón's communiqué calling for a strike vote makes the following statements that reiterate its position in solidarity with the indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities in conflict with the mining capitalists:

"In addition to labor demands, our petition includes social demands, such as those regarding subcontracted/temporary workers, and those regarding communities. The communities near the mine, and the communities displaced by the mine's expansion, also have the right to collective negotiations. All of the communities should be relocated [the eventual demand coming from the communities themselves given the dire environmental pollution and social conditions established by this point]. They should be paid compensation for the loss of their cultural patrimony, and the loss of their ancestors [in reference, it seems, to the displacement of community cemeteries described elsewhere in the book].... The Cerrejón Company and its enormous profits should not be based on leaving behind sick workers and impoverished communities" (131).

Aviva Chomsky explains how Sintracarbón representatives first came to be aware of and involved in community struggles in 2006, after an extended period in which the union's struggles had been quite separate and distinct: "... the union president accepted our invitation to the conference, and I think that he was very moved by hearing the testimonies from the people from the communities, and also by the level of international interest. He asked us if we would return in November to accompany their upcoming contract negotiations, and vowed to work to raise consciousness in his union about the dire situation of the communities. The union designated three people to accompany our delegation for several days of intense meetings with the communities. They were appalled to see the conditions there, and worked to incorporate language requiring the mine to

negotiate with the communities into their own collective bargaining proposal. They also began to work on other ways they as a union could support the communities' struggle" (154).

Jeff Crosby, President of the North Shore Labor Council in Lynn, Massachusetts was part of the international delegation that visited indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities affected by the mine in Guajira in November 2006. He connected the efforts in Colombia to build union-community linkages to his own experiences in Massachusetts as a worker at a General Electric aircraft engine plant. He notes that it is "possible for members of my union to drive through the poorer new immigrant communities from Central and South American and Southeast Asia each day on their way to work, with little understanding of the life conditions of these communities" (165-166). Looking at the Colombian and American scenarios, Crosby concludes that, "overcoming the chasm between the organized and unorganized sectors of workers, between those with a decent living and those living on the edge, and between native-born workers and migrant workers, is a critical challenge facing trade unions in both the United States and Colombia" (166).

He was impressed with Sintracarbón's emerging commitment to this sort of solidarity, and the eventual success the union had at forcing the mine's management to accept discussion of community issues as an acceptable topic at the negotiating table. Management had been vociferously opposed for obvious reasons: "The statement by Cerrejón management inviting the union into its discussions with the community about the impact of the mines on those communities is an important step, since it accepts in principle that the communities and the union have joint interests and a right to negotiate together with the employer" (167).

International Solidarity

Undoubtedly one of the most valuable components of this book is its step-by-step description – through the narratives of various key organizers, including the editors – of how international solidarity was built around the defence of displaced communities and workers struggles in Guajira mining zones in a manner that responded to the interests, needs, and visions of the communities and workers themselves. This final section of the book achieves two important objectives that are undoubtedly important to the editors. First, it shows readers in imperialist countries without a personal history of activism how they might become involved in these struggles and why it's important that they do. (It also provides additional arsenal for more seasoned international solidarity activists.)

Second, the section on international solidarity illustrates how the struggles of oppressed groups and exploited workers at home are often integrally connected to the struggles in seemingly far-off Guajira, Colombia. There are abundant examples pointing to the necessity of international working class solidarity. One participant in the international delegation in November 2006 was

Richard J. Charlo, a member of the Dene, Dogrib First Nation in the Northwest Territories, Canada. He has been employee of a diamond mine owned by BHP Billiton Diamond Inc. for eight years. Charlo describes how the same employer of Colombian mine workers in Guajira also exploits indigenous populations in Northern Canada. Charlo explains how he "had an important opportunity to visit the coal fields of Colombia and learn about the displacement of Aboriginal people by the Cerrejón Mine. I also learned about the treatment of the mine workers. The culture and customs are very different from our own and the working conditions are deplorable. However, the local people living near the mine are affected in similar ways as we were here in northern Canada. In the back of my mind, I know that if BHP could get away with it, they would treat us the same way they treat their workers abroad" (179).

The volume shows how unions in Colombia often feel that international solidarity is not simply a symbolic gesture. International consciousness and solidarity, in fact, can provide a certain amount of coverage and protection to union activists working in what is often referred to as the most dangerous country in the world for union activity. Thus when the International Commission in Support of Sintracarbón and the Communities Affected by Cerrejón was established and travelled to Colombia to monitor the contract negotiations, Sintracarbón's bargaining power – and those of the displaced communities – was measurably enhanced (154).

Shortcomings

The People Behind Colombian Coal contains some weaker material that diminishes the books overall impact. S.L. Reiter's chapter on "The Ethics of Cerrejón and the Multinationals," is one example. In effect, it amounts to a moral critique of the ethics of multinational mining corporations without a corresponding critique of the underlying system of capitalism. Reiter's muddled conclusion is that, "Members of Cerrejón and the parent companies are responsible for their actions that have led to serious human rights violations against the people of the Guajira region. They are blameworthy and have a responsibility to remedy the situation" (36). A resistance based on appealing to the moral conscience of corporate officials is irredeemably naïve. Again, the rest of the book yields substantial empirical evidence that rebukes the implicit politics behind Reiter's chapter. A second, more serious, failing of the book is the contribution by Jaime Ernesto Salas Bahamón, described in his bio as, "a civil engineer and specialist in environmental policy and energy technology who coordinated Cerrejón's Environmental Management Plan in 2002-2003" (84). Why his chapter – a none-too-subtle defence of neoliberal mining capitalism – is included is difficult to comprehend. Finally, the book would have benefited from an additional introductory chapter on the basic contemporary context of Colombia's war economy and political history over the last three decades. There is a useful timetable at the outset, but this is insufficient in my view. The rest of the book is highly accessible, but such a

contextual backdrop would undoubtedly help the uninitiated reader digest some of the empirical detail with greater ease.

Conclusion

These shortcomings should not take away from the very important achievements of this book. The editors have very clearly been intimately involved with the developing international solidarity campaign and, in their interactions with community struggles and the labour movement in Guajira, are living examples of what scholarly-activism, rooted in real struggle, can achieve. *People Behind the Coal* is full of useful testimony, analysis, and reflection on the state of contemporary capitalism as it expresses itself in the mining zones of Guajira, Colombia. The book provides empirical verification of Harvey's notion of accumulation by dispossession, reveals the potential power of social movement unionism, opens a window into courageous indigenous and Afro-Colombian resistance, and explains the existing foundations and future possibilities of international solidarity with Colombians struggling against the economic and state terror of the status quo. *People Behind the Coal* will therefore be a valuable resource for activists, students, and critical scholars alike.

► *Jeffery R. Webber is an editor of New Socialist and a PhD candidate in political science at the University of Toronto. He first visited Bolivia in 2000, and has been following events in Latin America intensely since 2002.*

NOTES

[1] For the best account of the Colombian military's incursion into Ecuador and its regional effects see Forrest Hylton, "Colombia's Cornered President Raises the Stakes," *Nacla News*, March 5, 2008, available at: www.news.nacla.org.

[2] See William I. Robinson, "Photo Essay: Colombia – Massive Demonstrations against Paramilitary and State Terror," *Upside Down World*, March 7, 2008, available at: www.upsidedownworld.org.

[3] Adam Isacson, "Human Rights Takes a Beating in Colombia: Paramilitary Threats and Assassinations," *Counterpunch*, March 21, 2008, available at: www.counterpunch.org.

[4] For the important role played by Canadian capital and the Canadian state see Todd Gordon and Jeffery R. Webber, "Imperialism and Resistance: Canadian Mining Companies in Latin America," *Third World Quarterly* 29, 1: 63-87, 2008.

[5] William Avilés, 'Paramilitarism and Colombia's Low-Intensity Democracy,' *Journal of Latin American Studies* 38 (2), 2003. p 380.

[6] Forrest Hylton, *Evil Hour in Colombia*, London and New York: Verso, 2006, p. 4.

[7] Francisco Ramírez Cuellar, *The Profits of Extermination: How US Corporate Power is Destroying Colombia*, pp 84-85.

[8] Aviva Chomsky teaches Latin American History at Salem State College in Salem, Massachusetts. She is the author of *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia and the Making of a Global Working Class*; "They Take Our Jobs!" and 20 Other Myths about Immigration; and *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870-1940*. She is also co-editor of *The Cuba Reader*

and *Identity and Struggle at the Margins of the Nation-State*. Garry Leech is a journalist and teaches Political Science at Cape Breton University. He is the author of *Crude Interventions: The United States, Oil and the New World (Dis)Order and Killing Peace: Colombia's Conflict and the Failure of US Intervention*. *Colombia Journal*, the on-line publication he edits, is available at: www.colombiajournal.org. Steve Striffler teaches Anthropology at the University of Arkansas. He is the author of *Chicken: The Dangerous Transformation of America's Favorite Food* and *In the Shadow of Capital: United Fruit, Popular Struggle and Agrarian Restructuring in Ecuador, 1900-1995*. He is also co-editor of *Banana Wars: Power, Production and History in the Americas*.

[9] See David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; and David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism*, London and New York: Verso.

[10] Kim Moody, *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy*, New York and London: Verso, 1997, p. 207.

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Fourth International

Greg Tucker: towards a tribute

International committee member, and IV's webmaster

Terry Conway

[Greg Tucker was a key and irreplaceable member of the team producing International Viewpoint. The move to producing it as an online magazine only would have been impossible without Greg who, despite his many other commitments, conceived and built the site and right up to his death continued to be the central webmaster. One of his primary concerns at that last meeting only a week before his death was that we should find somebody able to take over that role.]



Greg Tucker died on April 6 2008 at St Thomas' hospital following an arterial bleed. He was 54. Greg had been ill for some time with throat cancer and had a first arterial bleed in October 2007 which landed him in intensive care and left him seriously weakened. Greg had learnt in recent weeks that the cancer had spread and knew he was dying. No one expected the end to be so quick but his quality of life had been badly affected by his illness.

In what was to be the last week of his life Greg attended the national conference of the International Socialist Group and the Annual General meeting of his union branch, Waterloo RMT. He was determined to get to both even though he was very frail.

We have lost an irreplaceable comrade. He was a bolshevik trade unionist, a tireless activist, Trotskyist train driver, a committed internationalist. He lived with Joan since 1976 and our thoughts are with her and Tim in the days and weeks ahead.

Greg first became politically active as a squatter in Jericho in Oxford in 1971. Moving to Birmingham and then London he became involved in Tower Hamlets around 1976 and was active in the claimants union, in anti-fascist activity and in the Trades Council.

Greg joined the Fourth International in 1979 and died a member of its International Executive Committee as well as of the Central Committee of the International Socialist Group, British section of the Fourth International.

Greg began working on the railways at Waterloo in 1980 when he and Joan moved to Lambeth. The story behind that was that Greg had to leave Tower Hamlets after he was arrested on an anti-fascist demonstration in Brick Lane and his bail conditions preventing him living in his home!

In 1992 Greg was elected Secretary of RMT's newly formed National Conference of Train Crews and resigned from this role only just before his death. In his letter of resignation, read to conference delegates by Alex Gordon he said: "I am proud of the role that I have played in

building one of the best parts of one of the most progressive, fighting democratic unions in this country."

Delegates carried the following resolution unanimously and with acclaim:

'Recognition of Brother Greg Tucker "This Conference thanks Brother Greg Tucker for his long-standing service as Secretary of the Train crew & Shunting Grades Conference. "Greg is a tireless advocate for the members we represent, a proven fighter for our class and a good friend to us all. This Conference pays its deepest and most sincere thanks for his contribution and commitment to our movement and we send our best wishes to him and his family. "We agree to hold a minute's applause in appreciation of the role Greg has played in our trade union. Furthermore we agree to send flowers to Greg and Joan. "Viva Greg Tucker!"

He became branch secretary of Waterloo RMT from 1993 and resigned only last week when he knew that his illness prevented him carrying on.

He battled to attend the branch meeting in person and told me this was a very emotional occasion for him, taking leave of a role that was very close to his heart. He received a life time service award from the President of the union, John Leach.

Greg took on many other roles in the union. He was keenly committed to building links with other transport workers across Europe in particular and saw the importance of the union using the European social Forum process to strengthen such links. He sat on the National Executive from 1997-1998 where he distinguished himself by winning a successful strike ballot by RMT Guards and Driver members against plans by South West Trains to introduce Driver Only Operation trains on their suburban services.

On 10 June 2001, following his return to work after standing for the Socialist Alliance in a parliamentary General Election campaign in Streatham against sitting Labour MP, Keith Hill, Greg became the latest victim of SWT management who sought to sack him as a train driver and permanently exclude him from any safety-critical position.

Greg fought the victimisation and triumphed at his Employment Tribunal, which found: "the dismissal was part of a concerted manoeuvre involving several influential members of the Respondents' management". Commenting on the veracity of the SWT managers the Tribunal noted: "Like that of Mr Cook, and in striking contrast with the frank and straightforward testimony of the Applicant, we found much of Mr Marsden's evidence incredible, and some of it risible."

Greg served as a councillor for Larkhall ward in Lameth between 1986-1994. He was suspended from Labour Group in 1991 for opposing cuts in services, the poll tax and the first Gulf War. He was subsequently expelled from the Labour Party.

Greg was active in the Socialist Alliance for whom he stood as a Parliamentary candidate in Streatham and also for the GLA. He was active in Respect and then a supporter of Respect Renewal although his illness prevented him becoming more involved.

Greg was active in so many different places it is impossible to recount them all here. He seemed to have boundless energy before his illness and a huge commitment to encouraging people to stand up for their rights, especially in the work place.

At the same time he enjoyed life.

He liked to eat well and I remember him rushing away from meetings and conferences to cook the fish he had left marinating before he went to work. I remember ringing him up to talk through an issue of political tactics and him going off for a minute to turn off or down the piece of music he was relaxing too (often while updating a website at the same time).

I remember sharing a drink together and him waxing lyrical about Belgian beer. I remember walking through a park in Amsterdam together and getting lost because we were too deep in conversation – or was it argument. I remember being imprisoned by the police in on May Day for hours on end – and there being plenty to talk about. I am angry and sad that there will be no more such moments to share

Greg is deeply missed by many people with whom he worked in different capacities over the years. One of the telling things is that even though the blogworld can be pretty cruel, almost all the comments I have seen – even those from people with whom he had deep political disagreements are positive remembrances.

His wish was that his funeral would be a testimony to the ideas he fought for. We do mourn, but we will also organise!

► *Terry Conway is one of the editors of International Viewpoint and a leading member of the International Socialist Group, British Section of the Fourth International*

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International Committee of the Fourth International

Report on the International Situation

François Sabado

This report presents what in our eyes constitute some of the most important features of the international situation. It does not take up every question. It may be marked by a certain Europeocentrism, leading to a partial approach to certain questions. It will in addition be followed by a report on the problems of building the International and on what is at stake in the next world congress.



The international situation is marked by the financial and economic crisis which has struck the world economy since the end of the summer of 2007. The onset of this crisis constitutes a turning-point. It is an important turning-point because it represents a moment which covers several processes and which is part of the change of historical period that took place at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, marked by capitalist globalization and its contradictions.

On the crisis, we have worked from the analyses of Francois Chesnais, Eric Toussaint and the Economics Working Group of the LCR.

1. It is a turning-point in the sense of the end of a cycle of the American economy which followed the upswing of 2003, marked by an explosion of domestic consumption and by massive debt, on the basis of very low interest rates and a lowering of financial costs, mechanisms which led to this "housing bubble". Thus there developed the system of "subprimes", of risky loans at fluctuating rates, granted to the most fragile households. This was, along with the financing of its deficits by foreign capital

and the fall of the dollar, one of the principal mechanisms of the American model of growth from 2003 to 2008... But when in 2005 the Federal Reserve (FED, the Central Bank of the United States) increased interest rates, it threw the machine out of gear, causing insolvency and the collapse of millions of indebted households, which led to the bankruptcy of important credit institutions and made the banking system wobble. Because credit was the centre piece of this American economic growth. In fact, to maintain high and regular profits, dynamic demand is necessary. It could not come from wages, held down by the employers' attacks, nor from the internal markets of the sufficiently developed emergent countries, nor from the revenues distributed to the shareholders, whose mass is insufficient to support demand. So contemporary capitalism found this demand in the credit granted to households. This process reached its paroxysm in the USA

2. We are confronted not only with a financial and banking crisis but also with a crisis of the real economy. The crisis of the "subprimes" was propagated by the mechanisms that are proper to the globalized financial system on a world scale. It provoked a crisis of solvency and liquidity which has struck the entire international monetary system. This has led to massive injections of capital into the US economy - more than 168 billion dollars from the plan to re-inflate the economy adopted by Congress - to a fall in interest rates and on the other hand to new tensions due to the refusal of the European Central Bank (ECB) to lower its rates. But this policy is not sufficient to get the machine started again...

Because the forecasts of recession in the American economy are being little by little confirmed. The real estate sector in the US has collapsed. Other countries such as Spain, Ireland and Australia which used the same mechanisms of housing loans as the USA have also been struck by the crisis.

- ▶ In the United States, economic activity is decreasing.
- ▶ The forecasts for growth are around 1.5 to 2 per cent in the United States and in Europe.
- ▶ In January 2007, the balance of job creation in the American economy was negative. In January 2007, the American economy lost 17 000 jobs.
- ▶ In real estate and industry there were respectively 27 000 and 28 000 jobs lost. The markets were counting on the creation of 70 000 jobs. In France, there were 300 000 jobs created in 2007, but more than 50 000 lost in industry.
- ▶ More than 3 million households will find themselves homeless.
- ▶ We are headed for restructuring which will cause tens of thousands of lay-offs. The International Labour Office (ILO) envisages that there will be more than 5 million more workers unemployed.

The cost of this financial crisis is, at this stage, the loss of tens of billions of dollars.

This crisis of the international financial system is causing a contraction of credit and thus a deceleration of economic activity. The purging that is required from the big banks - to sort out the "rotten debts" from the "good investments" - is contributing to slow down activity.

The administration and the American Federal Bank are faced with a frightening dilemma: either they re-launch the economy, by lowering interest rates, injecting liquidities, by aggravating deficits and debt, by amplifying inflationary pressures, and there is a risk of worsening the depreciation, even leading to a brutal fall of the dollar - and it is a real risk: in 5 years the dollar has lost 25 per cent of its value and its depreciation increases the risks of crisis - or else they try to reduce the imbalances, but by raising interest rates, or they reduce debt and that leads to a sharp drop in economic activity, and they find themselves in a recession...

3. At the origin of this crisis, there is what Chesnais calls a "very long phase of unbroken accumulation", i.e. an uninterrupted accumulation of capital - without war or revolution - since 1950. This is the longest phase of this type in the history of capitalism. The origin of this financialisation is consubstantial with capitalism, i.e. with the accumulation of profits which are not reinvested in the direct production of value and surplus value. These profits are valorised outside the processes of production and only through transactions on the financial markets. There are also two other sectors related to financial transactions which experience the same type of valorisation: private pension funds and flows of money linked to the oil rent.

Because in the capitalist system the production of goods is unceasingly limited by the capacity of absorption of the markets. If the production of goods and services is not profitable enough, then one invests elsewhere: for every dollar or euro invested in the production of goods, how much more capital seeks to valorise itself on the stock exchanges, the speculative funds, property speculations, gold, financial and monetary transactions... This is the logic of the capitalist accumulation of profit and of the private ownership of capital and the means of production.

There is also the turning-point of the end of the 1970s, with the liberal counter-reform and the Washington Consensus, which led to what we call "capitalist globalization", that is to say, a society, marked by "the domination of capital, well beyond just the economic sphere", a market society through an explosion of the "commoditisation" and "financialisation" of the economy. This globalization was only able to take on the dimensions it did through the reintegration into the capitalist world market, by a process of restoration of capitalism, of giants like Russia, the Eastern European countries and China. That strongly stimulated the growth of world capitalism, but of a capitalism wracked by the contradictions linked to this explosion of financial capital.

But this growth has also resulted from a certain type of accumulation over about thirty years, in particular by the fall for more than twenty years of the share of wages in

the economy, of that part of the production of wealth which is allocated to the workers. As a result this surplus value, which increases more quickly than the national revenue, is monopolized by a thin layer of possessors of wealth who are engaged in a frantic search for more and more profitable investments. This leads to an enormous superabundance of liquidities and financial capital, which becomes autonomous from the real economy and which has its own logic... This functions up to the point where the imbalance is too great, and then there is a crisis: that is what is happening in the United States, where there has been, throughout the 2000 decade, a contradiction between the slowest growth of the real economy since the Second World War (even though there was some growth) and the strongest expansion of the financial economy. This is the limit of the American model of growth, which today is weakening and even becoming exhausted.

New world relationships of forces

4. But it is also a turning-point in the sense that it illustrates new world relationships of forces, new relationships between the United States, Europe and the new countries like China, India, Brazil, Russia, Indonesia, South Africa, Malaysia.

The crises of the 1990s touched almost only the so-called developing countries: the Mexican crisis of 1994-95, the Asian crisis of 1997-1998, the Russian crisis of 1998, the Brazilian crisis of 1999, the Argentinean crisis of 2001-2002... This time the crisis has exploded not on the periphery but in the centre.

The crisis in the financial system of the North is such that we are witnessing capital flight towards stock exchanges in countries like India, China and Brazil. The countries of the North are forced to accept the rescue of their financial institutions by the "sovereign wealth funds" of the South.

These movements of capital also express in a financial form the changes in the real economy:

► Changes in the distribution of world GDP: over the last ten years, according to all estimates, the share of Chinese GDP in world GDP has doubled, going from 6 per cent to 12 per cent. Certainly, the statistics on China are not reliable: in December 2007, the World Bank recognized that China's GDP in purchasing power parity (rendering equivalent what we can buy with the same given sum of money) was overvalued. In 2005 GDP should not have been 8,819 billion dollars but 5,333 billion. That has a major consequence on the calculation of the number of poor families, making a difference of several tens of millions, but these differences between this or that figure do not call into question the general tendency of the development of the Chinese economy, a tendency which is modifying the equilibriums and the relationships of forces in the world economy.

► The rise in rates of growth, the increase in the production of goods and services, the changes in the world division of labour are obvious. China, "workshop" or "factory" of the world, has benefited from a whole

movement of delocalization and relocalization of a part of the world's productive apparatus, in particular American, and from massive subcontracting. This reorganization has produced, at the same time, a strengthening of Chinese capitalism. It is now the third or fourth world power. It is already the third world exporting power, after Germany and the United States. It is the second power in production of information technologies. Although its share of consumption remains weak, there is an impressive increase in productive investment in fixed capital, in particular in infrastructures and in the key sectors of the economy, leading even to risks of "overheating", with an increase of more than 25 per cent.

► It is the first recipient country of direct investment of foreign capital (foreign direct investment, FDI). And there is a question that needs to be studied and clarified: what is the share, in foreign investment in China, of capital from the Chinese diaspora of Hong Kong, Taiwan, of Sino-American capital..., which, by amalgamating with indigenous capital can give considerable strength to Chinese capital as a whole. The growth rates of China and India are between 8 and 9 per cent, whereas those of United States and Europe are between 1.5 and 2 per cent. China's exports of manufactured goods have accumulated an impressive quantity of reserves of foreign currency: in December 2007 they were worth more than 1,400 billion dollars. It has a market of between 250 and 300 million inhabitants.

The economic weight in GDP of the group consisting of China, India, Russia and Brazil is potentially equivalent to that of the United States - I say potentially because it is the weight of "four national economies" and not of one single economy with one single state. The reserves accumulated by the Asian countries and the oil countries are considerable. At the end of 2007, the developing countries together held more than 4,600 billion dollars of exchange reserves, while the industrialized countries held less than a third of that. The commercial surpluses and these reserves of foreign currency of the Asian countries were placed in Treasury bills, in shares, in private bonds in the United States. It is they which in fact finance America's deficits.

5. Now, of course, we should not underestimate the dependence of these new giants of the world economy on the American economy. It continues to play the role of locomotive of the world economy. It represents more than 25 per cent of world GDP, not forgetting Europe, which with its 27 countries, represents around 25 to 30 per cent. The American market remains one of the principal markets for Chinese production. More than 35 per cent of China's GDP is dependent on its exports, even though some experts explain that the sensitivity of the Chinese economy to exports is decreasing. The Chinese internal market does not have sufficient capacities to absorb Chinese production. A serious recession on the other side of the Atlantic would inevitably have consequences on world economic activity and on China, even if they were limited. But what weighs more heavily on China are enormous levels of social inequality, brutal tensions

between the countryside and the cities, poverty which has certainly been reduced but which is still very important, affecting several hundred million people. The statistics on poverty tend to underestimate it.

But there is a new configuration of the world economy which leads us to pose the problems of analysis of the world economic crisis in a way that integrates the emergent powers.

Two alternative hypotheses

A large part of the answers on the way out of the current crisis lies in the relations between Asia, the United States and Europe....

► Either the current financial crisis reveals a process of over-accumulation and overproduction in all the Asian economies - China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, India... which would mark a general deceleration of world demand that could then lead to a general crisis of the type of 1929... The limits of the Chinese internal market, a rise in inflation to around 6 to 7 per cent, the increase in social inequality, the explosion of pockets of poverty, in particular in the countryside, the problems of the food crisis and the dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) which prevents a certain flexibility of structures, weigh rather on the side of the explosion of the crisis... but there is also the other hypothesis:

► Or the contraction of external demand is compensated for by an increase in internal demand and by new capacities for absorption of Chinese production by the internal market, and then there would be new possibilities for re-launching the economic machine. The only remedy for Chinese overproduction would be a reorientation of economic activity from export-based growth to more internally-centred growth... If this were the case, the combination of the "anti-crisis" mechanisms in the United States and Europe and the new Asian capacities could contain the crisis... • It is necessary in any case to study and study again what is happening in China, especially since we lack internal knowledge, and since the traditions and the implantation of our international current are especially concentrated in a series of European and Latin-American countries. Work on Asia must become a priority.

Deteriorated relationships of forces for the working class

6. The economy-world is changing its axis. But these economic processes express changes in the panorama of world politics, changes in the relationships of forces.

a) This new phase of capitalist globalisation is situated within the long period in which the relationship forces globally deteriorated from the point of view of the working class. The liberal steamroller that started at the end of the 1970s, combined with the reintegration of Russia, the countries of Eastern Europe and China into the world market, gave new capacities for initiative to the ruling classes. The liberal counter-reforms, the deregulation of social relations, combined with the introduction of new technologies, transformed through flexibility and

precarious work the forms of capitalist exploitation. There was a considerable increase in workers being placed in direct competition with each other in the framework of a process of constitution of a world labour-force market.

b) Moreover, with the change in the world economy, there are also new relationships of forces between capital and labour. From the point of view of the total relationship of social forces, this reorientation of the world is taking place in countries where the independent workers' movement, in its trade-union or political form, is structurally weak. In the USA trade unions exist, but there have never been mass workers' parties. The destruction caused by Stalinism crushed what might have remained or emerged as forms of an independent workers' movement in Russia and in Eastern Europe. In China and in India, there is the entry of tens of millions of human beings into the wage-labour economy, but so far without political or trade-union representation. The dictatorship of the CCP has so far prevented the development of independent workers' organizations, even though there are more and more conflicts and social explosions in China, indicating the existence of embryonic forms of associations or trade unions. In India, the situation is more complex because there are in many states organizations that originated as pro-Soviet or pro-Chinese Communist parties...

The existence and the development of independent social organizations in Asia, in particular in China and India, will be decisive for world socio-political relationships of forces. The partial political revivals in a series of Eastern European countries - including trade-union renewal, bitterly-fought strikes conducted by a new generation of workers and the rebirth of a political Left, in particular in Poland and Russia, as well as the trade-union battles in Slovenia - must be followed attentively. c) But in spite of these working-class retreats and the changes that have taken place, globalized capitalism is not succeeding in stabilizing the world situation. There is not a new world order:

► First of all, for reasons related to internal contradictions of capitalist globalization, in particular the limits of the mode of capitalist financial accumulation, the risks of war...

► Secondly, by chronic social resistances, including elementary class struggles, explosions or riots against the high cost of living, movements for control of natural resources, democratic rebellions.

► Finally, political crises. Crises of bourgeois leaderships combined with crises of political representation, on the right and on the left, and even open crises of political institutions. The rejection of Bush, the impotence of the Grand Coalition in Germany, the carnival in Italy and the escapades of Sarkozy are examples of such phenomena, and this is happening in the imperialist centres.

The United States bogged down

7. These new configurations have consequences in the field of international politics, where the interests of a weakened American bourgeoisie and those of European

powers which want to maintain their rank in this new world competition, make them converge in new systems of alliances, in particular faced with China and Russia. That does not exclude, far from it, the aggressive search for new market shares for each bourgeoisie, and the development of protectionist tensions in the world economy, but the political ties between the United States and the European Union are tending to be reinforced. The new relations between the France of Sarkozy and the United States of Bush are a good example of this inflection or change. Chirac was against the war in Iraq. Sarkozy is for it. He is even in the front rank in the confrontation with Iran. But more generally the envisaged return of France into NATO and the integration of the European military force within this alliance show clearly the type of reorganization that is in progress.

The United States is on the eve of new elections (at the end of 2008), which can lead to inflections or modifications of American policy. The big question of American and international politics will be to find out whether or not there will be withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.

Most probably, there will be continuation of the occupation, for fundamental reasons. Over the last long period, American imperialism has confirmed its policy of strategic politico-military redeployment. As Ernest Mandel pointed out, already more than twenty years ago, it is confronted with a contradiction, with an asymmetry between the declining tendency of the economy and the American dollar, and the hegemony of its politico-military apparatus, backed up by a central place of armaments in its economy. These profound tendencies relativise the nuances or differences between Clinton, Obama, and even McCain, even though the way in which the American election campaign is unfolding expresses in a certain fashion the erosion of the American political system. But when it comes to the fundamental interests and the policy of the ruling classes in the United States, it is a question of compensating for a certain economic weakening by an aggressive military policy, of occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan, of confrontation with Iran, and to a lesser degree with Russia and China. This orientation also comprises a policy of "recolonisation" of certain countries, aiming to maintain or even to extend control over natural resources or strategic raw materials like oil.

But military superiority does not automatically mean military victory. The expression "new Vietnam" is habitually used by the American media to describe the situation of the American army in the region. The Bush administration is really bogged down, politically and militarily. The United States is not winning the war, neither in Iraq nor in Afghanistan. Israel did not win the war against the Lebanese and the Hezbollah. They cannot repeat an "Iraqi scenario" in Iran. The tensions between Russia, which is rearming, and the United States also influence world relations. Finally, whole zones of conflicts are appearing, as in Pakistan, in Afghanistan or in certain areas of Africa, zones which are "out of control" That creates factors of uncertainty and unknown

elements of the international situation, with unprecedented risks of war. From the military point of view, even though the USA remains the "number one", after a unipolar world order we are seeing the emergence of elements of a multipolar relationship of forces.

8. It is also within this framework that it is necessary to take into account new social and political phenomena which do not take the form of class contradictions or polarizations and which are marking or will mark the evolution of the world situation. I will not go into them in detail, but they have important consequences:

a) The ecological crisis and the consequences of global warming are beginning and are likely to cause, in the long term, new catastrophes - ecological, social, and human. We have just held in these walls a seminar to develop our ideas on the question of the climate... b) The existence of organizations, currents, clans or religious groups, which it is necessary, of course, to analyze in their specificities, but there is a general tendency. There can be progressive religious currents, but the majority of these currents are globally reactionary. That is what is involved in the situations in Pakistan and in Afghanistan. It should be noted that the increase in religious phenomena is also affecting the countries of the centre: the calling into question of secularism by Sarkozy, the rise of the evangelists in the United States...

c) It is also necessary to take account of the tendencies towards the break-up of a series of states in Africa, but also of the unfolding and the consequences of other crises, like that of the Balkans.

Consequences in Latin America

9. The way the US has become bogged down in Iraq has international consequences, and in particular in Latin America. It is not a question of underestimating the pressure that "the empire" still exerts on a continent that it continues to regard as its back-yard, as the attacks of Colombia against Venezuela and Ecuador have recently reminded us. In the same way it is necessary to integrate into our analysis the possible consequences of an international economic crisis on the Latin-American continent, with a deterioration of Latin America's position, in particular in relation to agro-exports and certain raw materials. Such a deterioration in its position would reinforce the pressure of the North. It is even necessary to point out, in the current economic situation, the capacity for initiative of the pro-American Right on the continent, in particular with its vanguard: the Colombian regime of Uribe. The "Plan Colombia" is there, all the more so as the defeat of Chavez in the referendum of December 2 has again given US imperialism some capacities for initiative, as the attempt to freeze the assets of PVDSA shows: but there are also the military bases in Paraguay.

Support is still given to the "golpist" (putschist) Right in Bolivia and the "liberal-authoritarian" Right in Peru and Mexico. The Free Trade Area of Americas (FTAA; in Spanish, ALCA) is a failure, but bilateral treaties between the United States and a series of countries of South

America have been concluded. But, in spite of these manoeuvres and the inflection in the Latin-American situation over the last few weeks, to the advantage of the United States, Colombia, and the forces of the most reactionary Right, we must underline the weakening of the capacities for intervention of American imperialism on the continent. On the military level, it is difficult for it to intervene in Iraq and Afghanistan and to prepare interventions in Latin America, and although the United States is maintaining the pressure on South America, it is undeniable that there is a new relationship of forces between American imperialism and a series of countries of the Latin-American continent, and not the least important ones. This relationship of forces favours two groups of countries.

The first group is made up of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. Benefiting from a phase of economic development and from the ability of the governments in power - Lula in Brazil, Kirchner in Argentina, Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay - to channel, control and integrate their mass movements or, more exactly, whole layers of their leaderships, in particular those of the Workers' Party (PT) and the United Trade Union Confederation (CUT) in Brazil and the political and trade-union wings of Peronism in Argentina (even though Lula is further to the right than Kirchner), the ruling classes of these countries have conquered new room for manoeuvre to negotiate with and impose a series of economic objectives on American imperialism. They are pursuing, on their own account and in their own manner, neo-liberal policies, accompanying them by an aspect of "social assistance". They have reinforced a certain insertion in the world market, in particular by their policies of agro-exporting and their specific relations to the international financial system. This group of countries, headed by Brazil and Argentina, today occupy a central position.

The second group, which is today imposing a new experience of partial rupture with American imperialism, is led by Venezuela, followed by Bolivia and Ecuador, all of them supported by Cuba. These countries, each one with its specificity, are trying today to loosen the stranglehold of the debt, to take back ownership and control of their natural resources, to ensure social programmes for food, health and education, to restore their national sovereignty against American and European (particularly Spanish) pressure. Underneath these political and institutional changes, there is a dynamic of the social movements and mass movements which continue to act across the continent. Of course there are inequalities. The situation in Brazil expresses a drop in the level of social mobilization. Argentina continues to have a high level of struggle, with strong trade-unions and associations, but their political expression is extremely weak. The election results of the three electoral blocs of the Trotskyist far left came to less than 2 per cent. It is in the processes of the Bolivarian, Ecuadorian and Bolivian mobilizations that the social movements are maintaining a certain degree of self-activity. In a number of countries these movements are

linked to the advance of radical or revolutionary nationalist currents.

Venezuela, a key country

From this point of view, many things depend on what happens in Venezuela. The revolutionary process remains open, but Chavez is at a crossroads: either he goes forward, links up again with the most combative sectors, satisfies the fundamental popular demands, and the Bolivarian revolutionary process will start again and deepen; or else he gives in to the pressures of a whole sector of the state bureaucracy and the employers, including from within the Bolivarian process, seeking to channel, moderate and block this same process... and he will lose the support of important sectors of his social and political base. The interventions of certain trade-union leaders of the UNT or of Marea Socialista (Socialist Tide) alert us on the current course of the government. But there too, everything is in movement...

The crisis is accelerating in Bolivia, where the adoption of the new constitution defended by Evo Morales and the large majority of the population, workers, peasants, Indians, is not recognized by the Right and the "rich white classes" concentrated in Santa Cruz and in the provinces of the West, of which four regions have just proclaimed their autonomy. Revolutionaries are on the side of the Movement towards Socialism (MAS) of Evo Morales, for the application of this constitution and the satisfaction of the vital needs of the poorest sectors of the population in Bolivia.

But the key country is Venezuela. If there were a defeat of the Bolivarian process, that would have immediate repercussions in Bolivia and Ecuador, not to mention Cuba. The withdrawal of Fidel Castro opens a new political situation. There is always the risk of direct or indirect intervention, which leads us to remember more than ever our solidarity with Cuba against imperialism. But, as Fidel said, the risk is that the revolution is consumed from the interior, and there is now a debate opening up: what relationship should there be with the market, should they follow or not the Chinese road, what revolutionary democratic spaces can there be... in short, a whole series of questions which we must follow.

Social resistance in Europe

10. Europe, in spite of its more reduced place in the world, a weakening in terms of economic competition and a political paralysis, remains one of the major terrains of the central confrontation for the defence of rights and social gains. These policies have, in particular, a series of consequences in capitalist Europe, where the principal European bourgeoisies, in order to ensure their place in world competition, are frontally attacking the "European social model", in fact, the systems of social security, the social rights of workers, public services. This policy is concentrated in the new "European treaty" which takes over the broad outline of the project of European Constitution that was rejected in 2005 by the peoples of France and the Netherlands. It is being reinforced by the

integration into the European Union of the countries of Eastern Europe.

This integration has led to the dismantling of a series of social rights and has consequently pushed downwards all the living and working conditions of the popular classes of these countries. In France the ideologists of the Sarkozy government have openly declared: it is necessary to destroy the programme of the National Council of the Resistance (CNR) of 1945 and all the social conquests which have been obtained since then. Sarkozy declares that he "wants to reform more than Margaret Thatcher"... but he has neither the relationship of forces nor the political instruments to apply his programme.

The crisis of bourgeois leadership and political representation weighs on the political life of a number of countries. The ruling classes continue to score a series of points, in particular by applying their counter-reform of pensions and of special pension systems for some sectors of workers, by pushing down wages and calling into question social rights, but they have not yet beaten the workers' movement. There is social resistance in countries like France, Italy and Germany. There has not been a major defeat of the workers' movement in Europe of the "British miners" type in the 1980s, important struggles and major confrontations are still in front of us...

... and its weaknesses

But three remarks should be made:

► The struggles are defensive. They do not succeed in blocking, far less reversing the course of the counter-reforms. They manifest themselves as explosions or partial struggles. They can destabilize the regimes in place... but that does not stop the process of counter-reform.

► These struggles are unequal across Europe, depending on the country. The level of class struggle remains quite high in France – people in Europe speak about "the French exception" - and also in Italy, where at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000 decade, there was a combination of days of general strike by the trade-union movement and strong global justice and antiwar movements. Recently, there was an important strike of rail workers in Germany, even though it was a strike which did not receive solidarity from the other trade unions and from a large part of the trade-union left. In Spain and in Portugal the level of social struggle remains very low. In the countries of the North of Europe, in spite of rather strong attacks, the situation is under the control of the governments and the leaderships of the trade-union movement; the level of struggles is rather low.

► In the countries where there is a certain level of struggle, it is necessary to underline a contradictory situation: there is a real imbalance between the level of struggle and the level of consciousness. There can be partial struggles and explosions but there is no organic growth of a wave of class struggles – with a global level of struggle, an increase in the membership of trade unions and workers' parties, and of class-struggle and

revolutionary political currents - as there was at the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s in Europe, particularly in Southern Europe. Consequently, the struggles that exist have difficulty in finding political expression in class-struggle terms.

To accept or to refuse capitalist globalization – the two Lefts

11. In the current international economic situation, the Left, the workers' movement, the social movements are confronted with two main trends in the face of capitalist globalisation: an orientation of adaptation to liberal capitalism and another - our - line of resistance, struggle, and anti-capitalist combat. We have, in France, a formula to describe this situation: "There are two Lefts", we say. Of course, there are in reality several varieties of "left", but we are really confronted with a fundamental choice: to accept or to refuse this capitalist globalization!

The big majority of the traditional leaderships of the workers' movement - social democracy, ex- or post-Stalinism, Greens - and in certain developing countries bourgeois nationalism, chose adaptation. This is the result of a whole process of integration into the institutions of state and the capitalist system. But this process of integration into present-day capitalist globalization leads to qualitative changes, to structural changes, in all these political formations, with increasingly strong bonds not only with political institutions but with capital. The choice of Strauss-Kahn (one of the principal leaders of the Socialist Party in France) to head the IMF is the proof of it! The demands of capitalist globalization are such that the room for manoeuvre to conclude social compromises between the ruling classes and reformist movements has been considerably reduced.

The big economic groups, the financial markets, the higher levels of the state are summoning the reformist leaderships to accept the framework dictated by the search for maximum profits, by an increased financialisation of the world economy. As a result social democracy has been transformed into social-liberalism. From a social democracy which, faced with the class struggle, traded its support for the capitalist order against social improvements, we moved to socialist parties which became "reformist parties without reforms", before becoming "parties of liberal counter-reforms".

In Europe, the European Union provides the framework of collaboration between Christian democracy and social democracy, in order to deploy counter-reforms on pensions, and the liquidation of systems of social security and public services. That does not exclude a finely balanced combination of programmes of assistance to the poorest layers - a system of minimum incomes, the programme of the "Family Grant" in Brazil... - and counter-reforms which tackle the hard core of working-class rights and social conquests.

But it is on the political level that these choices are most manifest: in the evolution of European social democracy towards a "third way" between Right and Left, in the call - now in Italy and in France - to transform the historical

socialist parties into American-style democratic parties... This is also what we saw in Brazil, where the Workers' Party (PT) completed in only about fifteen years the trajectory of almost a century of historical social democracy: from a class party, the PT was transformed into a social-liberal party. This evolution does not exclude, once again, policies of social assistance which provide a social base for these parties.

This social-liberal evolution represents a general tendency. In a series of countries it is not a completed process. The ruling classes need, moreover, in a political system of alternating governments "to be able to choose between the Right and the Left". These social-liberal formations are thus not bourgeois parties like the others. Inflections "to the left" remain possible to save the enormous interests of the bureaucratic apparatuses. This is the case of the German SPD, but within limits which remain compatible with the current course of world capitalism. On another level, there remain differences between the Right and the Left, especially in the way they are perceived by popular sectors, but overall social democracy and its allies are experiencing, everywhere, this process of integration into capitalist globalization and a movement "towards the right".

A series of forces try to dissociate themselves from the social-liberal forces – for example, the Communist parties, certain ecologist formations and left reformist parties. They call themselves "anti-liberals". The problem is that their own integration into the institutions of state or their subordination in a system of alliances to nationalist-Peronist or social-liberal forces, leads the CPs and the Greens to remain at the level of anti-liberal proclamations while clearly participating in parliamentary or governmental coalitions with the centre-left or social democracy: this is the case of the French Communist Party (PCF), Die Linke in Germany or Rifondazione Comunista in Italy.

A Left for a break with capitalism

12. At the other pole of the Left, there are the forces which refuse capitalist globalization, which resist and defend an anti-capitalist orientation.

Our project, our Left, is an anti-capitalist Left, a Left of revolutionary tradition, a Left of rupture with capitalism. It is within this framework that we think that we can have a new stage in the construction of new, broad anti-capitalist parties. "New period, new programme, new party" we said at the beginning and in the middle of the 1990s. We think that capitalist globalization and the contradictions that are proper to it, and its effects on the evolution of the workers' movement are evidence of this new period.

From a certain point of view, the current crisis of international capitalism gives flesh to this project. There are more internal contradictions in the system, there are more spaces opened up by the evolution to the right of the traditional leaderships, there is recurrent social resistance in a series of countries, there is the development of new experiences of left reformist or anti-capitalist formations... In this new historical period, it is

not only a question of posing the problem of building our own organizations, but of tackling again the perspectives for the reorganization and rebuilding of the workers' movement and of social movements, associations, trade unions.

The problems of the crisis of leadership are posed in their broadest dimension: consciousness, experiences of self-activity, construction, organization. It is necessary to reformulate through a series of struggles of resistance, a new project, new demands, new forms of organization, taking what is best in the old workers' movement but rejecting the worst. The axis of self-organization and self-emancipation in all its forms is decisive in these processes of rebuilding. But there is also posed the difficulty of building new anti-capitalist parties... Of course, that depends on the accumulation of revolutionary and anti-capitalist forces, and there is no world or continental line of building the party.

Nothing is mechanical, but on the basis of recent experiences, in particular in Brazil - and it is necessary to underline the high price that we paid in Brazil, but also what we learned from Brazil - in Italy and in France the main programmatic and political lines of these new parties are emerging.

New anti-capitalist parties: "a common understanding of events and tasks"

13 We want to build anti-capitalist parties which oppose the current crisis of capitalism, not in order to reform it or to defend a capitalism with a human face or to tackle the excesses of liberalism so as to return to the capitalism of the post-war period, but to attack the logic of capitalist profit. We need a new programme against capitalist globalization. A programme of action or of anti-capitalist transition, which defends immediate demands (wages, jobs, services, land distribution, control over natural resources, feminism, the fundamental dimension of ecology...), democratic demands (problems of popular and national sovereignty in the countries dominated by imperialism, the indigenous question in Latin America) and transitional demands, which lead on to the need for another kind of distribution of wealth and a questioning of the capitalist ownership of the economy.

The implementation of these programmes requires governments in the service of the workers, based on the mobilization and the self-activity of the popular classes.

This battle - and it is a central battle today - implies the rejection of any participation or support for social-liberal governments which manage the affairs of state and the capitalist economy. It is what separates us from the projects of Die Linke, Rifondazione Comunista, the Communist Parties which are part of the European Left Party and the policy of the majority of the Socialist Democracy tendency (DS) in Brazil....

So the question of participation or not in this type of government has again become a cardinal question of the strategy for power in Europe and in the principal countries of Latin America.

But these parties which we want to build have as a reference, what Trotsky called "a common understanding of events and tasks", not all the programme, not all history, but strategic and programmatic references that are sufficiently solid to build in the medium and long term. We do not start from ideological or historical criteria to delimit these parties, but from key references linked to the class struggle, and to the best revolutionary traditions, in order to work out a programme of transition to socialism.

We want these parties to be pluralist, to be places of the convergence and coming together of all anti-capitalist currents and activists. Revolutionary Marxists will constitute a current within these parties. But we must go further: while leaving open a series of strategic and programmatic questions, it is necessary to examine again the socialist and communist project, to take our full place in the debate on the socialism of the 21st century. Those are the new formulas which try to respond to the new historical period.

These are the references which constitute the basis of the anti-capitalist parties which are being built – such as the new anti-capitalist party (NPA) in France, Sinistra Critica in Italy, the Red-Green Alliance in Denmark, the Left Bloc in Portugal, the PSOL in Brazil and other experiences which will not fail to emerge over the coming years. It is also within this framework that we are preparing the conference on May '68-May 2008 in Paris.

► This is the written version of the report that he presented at the meeting of the International Committee of the Fourth International, as introduction to the debate on the international situation, on March 1, 2008.

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Fourth International

The main body of the Fourth International between world congresses, the International Committee (IC) held a regular session in Amsterdam (Netherlands) at the beginning of March 2008.

Its debates centred on the evolution of the international situation, the ecological crisis and climatic warming, the political situation and the activity of the organizations present in Latin America, Pakistan and Russia, the experiences of the construction of new parties in Europe (Britain, France and Italy), the research and training activities of the Amsterdam Institute and the preparation of the next world congress.

Members and permanent observers from thirty countries were present: Germany, Algeria, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bolivia, Canada, Denmark, Ecuador, Spain, the United States, Euzkadi, France, Britain, Greece, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Pakistan, Netherlands, Peru, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Portugal, Quebec, Russia, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey. The delegates from Colombia, Hong Kong, Morocco, Poland and Uruguay could not come for material reasons. Among the guests was a representative of the International Socialist Organisation of the United States, while the representative of Marea Socialista from Venezuela who had planned to attend had to drop out at the last minute because a strike had broken out at Sidor, the principal iron and steel company in the country.

On the international situation, the discussion, introduced by the report that we reproduce (in this issue of International Viewpoint, related to the recent developments in the economic crisis. The debates also turned around a fundamental question for the medium and long terms: changes caused in the world economy and the international relationship of forces by the rise of capitalism in the emergent countries, and especially China. This discussion was extended by three points in the debates: the ecological crisis and climatic warming (enriched by the report from the seminar which had been held in Amsterdam the previous week), the situation in Latin America and the situation in Europe.

On Latin America, a report was presented followed by a discussion. If the general tendencies of the current situation in Latin America were confirmed – loosening of the US grip, emergence of the Brazil/Argentina bloc, the reality of a series of social movements, the rise of radical nationalist or revolutionary currents linked to the

Venezuela/Bolivia/Ecuador/Cuba bloc - it is necessary to note a turn in the economic situation with the offensive of Colombia supported by the United States. A declaration on Colombia was adopted by the IC.

On Europe, the representatives of the British, French and Italian sections presented reports on the experiences in progress. The parliamentary campaign of the comrades of [Sinistra Critica](#), which is running candidates almost everywhere in Italy, was noted. A point of discussion was devoted to the conference of the European anti-capitalist left, convened by the [Ligue communiste révolutionnaire](#) of France on the topic "May 68-May 2008". All the sections will take part in this initiative by inviting other "class struggle" or revolutionary currents. Beyond the national electoral tactics, the European organisations, notably the LCR in France, Sinistra Critica in Italy, [Espacio alternativo](#) in Spain and the [Socialist Party](#) in Sweden are discussing the possibility of having a common expression at the time of the next European elections.

This session of the International Committee met for the first time in the new buildings of the International Institute of Education and Research in Amsterdam, which prompted a discussion on its operation. The Institute must at the same time ensure the educational initiatives of the International and open its infrastructures to the anti-capitalist currents of the Dutch and European labour movement for meetings, training schools and educational seminars. This IC ratified a report on the axes of activity of the Institute.

Finally, the IC decided that the next world Congress would be held in the first quarter of 2010. An introductory report on the issues at this congress was presented by comrade Laurent and an outline presented by comrades Laurent and Olivier in the name of the Executive Committee was used to launch the debate. This will turn around two questions:

- * How can we reinforce and redeploy the Fourth International during the current political period?
- * How can we advance towards new gatherings, convergences or frameworks of international cooperation?

A timetable for the international discussion, which must also include the development of theses on climate change and the fight for socialism, was adopted.

► *The Fourth International - an international organisation struggling for the socialist revolution - is composed of sections, of militants who accept and apply its principles and programme. Organised in separate national sections, they are united in a single worldwide organisation acting together on the main political questions, and discussing freely while respecting the rules of democracy.*