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VIEWPOINT

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LATIN AMERICA: STORMS OVER THE ANDES

DEBT RELIEF: MUCH ADDO ABOUT NOTHING

INTERVIEW: THE NEW IMPERIALISM

GREECE: A TRAUMATIZED LEFT

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A strange defeat

THREE dominant characteristics emerge from the Mexican elections of July 2:

- 1) the electoral victory of the modern conservatives headed by president-elect Vicente Fox.**
- 2) the overwhelming defeat of the PRI and the dissolution of the close bond between this party and the State, in other words the disintegration of the party-state regime**
- 3) the defeat of the Cardenista opposition and the PRD as an alternative to the PRI regime and, from the declarations of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas on the evening of July 2, its constitution as a democratic opposition from the left to Fox's modern conservative government**

ADOLFO GILLY

TO return to each of these points: The PRI regime was not defeated by the democratic left, as was the case in 1997 in Mexico City, but by the modern conservatives, distant heirs of their 19th century ancestors. It would be superficial to reduce the importance of the historical dimensions of this fact: for the first time in living memory Mexico will have a president who specifically denies the tradition of Benito Juárez.

The underlying factors in Fox's victory are, in my opinion, not located in market research and opportunist alliances. They reside rather in the displacement towards hard-line conservatism and the political right of a significant sector of Mexican society, that today amounts to much more than the traditional 20 percent who have always voted for the conservative PAN party.

The Salinista reforms have led to socio-economic and to some degree cultural changes. The young people who voted for Fox did not consist only of the gilded youth but also others for whom the Mexican Revolution and the rituals of the PRI state which emerged from that revolution (together with the lies which accompany them) mean nothing.

Lies

Fox's lies are of another type and so far the voters have not stopped to think about them, because they only thought about removing the PRI. The emptiness of Fox's speech on the night of July 2 was not because he has nothing to say, but rather

because he does not wish to enter into conflict with any part of his heterogeneous electorate.

It is obvious that the new conservative president of Mexico — in the style of Thatcher, Reagan, or Menem — will not be able to fulfil his contradictory and incongruous promises on jobs, wages, education, privatization, tax cuts, Chiapas, annual 7% increase in GDP and all the rest. But once in power, he will be the Commander-in-Chief of the army. I am not suggesting a dictatorship, but his program will demand a certain use of force.

Reforms

Vicente Fox seeks to complete the program of Salinista reforms, following financial and commercial deregulation and the big privatizations; an education system dictated by the demands of the market, the final dismantling of social protection, regressive taxes, the reform of the Federal Labor Law to make employment relations more flexible, the elimination of rights and guarantees at work and the final destruction of collective contracts (and, by extension, the corporate trade unions of the PRI).

It is possible that Fox will discover that six years are not sufficient for this project and will wish to promote constitutional reforms to allow his re-election. The golden rule of his government will be the opening up to private capital of everything which is the common heritage of the nation, taking to the limit the Salinista spirit: cultural goods, oil, communal lands,

THE stunning defeat of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate in the Mexican presidential elections of July 2, 2000 has brought seven decades of one party rule to an end in the country. We print here a commentary by the veteran Mexican journalist and historian Adolfo Gilly who is a member of the Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD). The article first appeared in the newspaper *La Jornada* of July 4, 2000. ★

forest reserves.

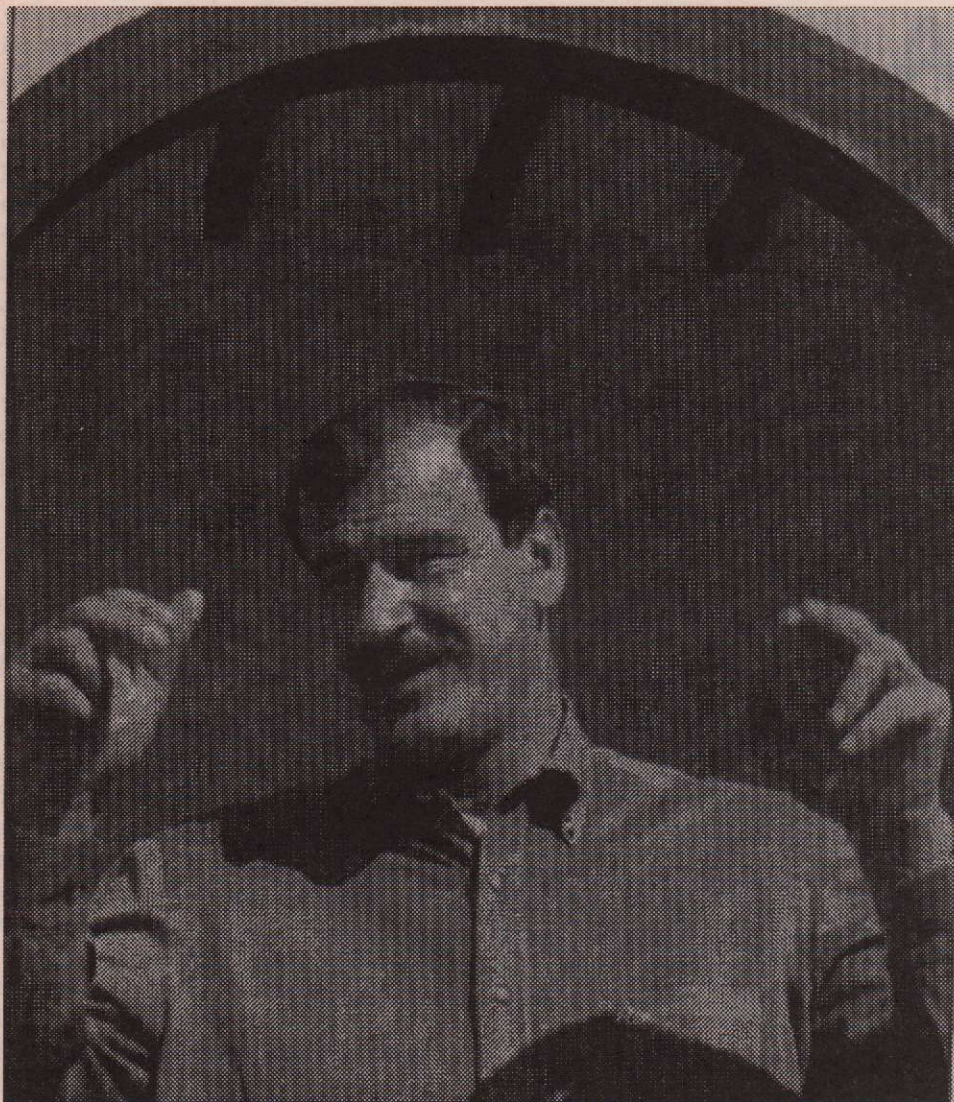
If nobody stops him and his friends, we will have an atomized country of golf clubs and some very rich people driving this year's model. The framework for such a country has already been erected by Salinas, who was the big winner in this election even though he was not a candidate.

Those who will pay the price will be the poor and the peasants. As Fox has quickly stated, his macroeconomic policy will be the same as that of Ernesto Zedillo and Carlos Salinas. He has promised to include some prominent advocates of that policy in his economic cabinet. In this area, there will be no change, but rather a firm continuity.

Dismantling

Vicente Fox will have in some cases to dismantle and in others reshape to his service the subordination of the mass media: the press, television, radio, this empire that the PRI have always maintained under their control. Much more work will be necessary with the PRI's regional fiefdoms; here he will have to negotiate and incorporate them in his "plural government".

Nevertheless, the great new development is that these clientalist regional, agrarian, economic fiefdoms of the corporate state have lost their matrix and point of unity: the federal government, the state and the relation of unity with their party, the PRI. It is too soon to know how it will recycle its political apparatus and its crew of politicians, operators and raccoons. But



Victorious Mexican presidential candidate Vicente Fox

it will not disappear, so it will remain a significant part of political reality.

It is possible that the PRI will initially break up into a kind of confederation of chieftainships and Mafias at war with each other, a regression to its origins. But the world of today is another one and its interests and symbols are different: finance, contemporary divisions, economic empires, the Mafias and the drugs trade. The safe bet is that the first part of the empire to recycle itself will be drug trafficking.

Big losers

The big losers, however, are the peasants, that vast portion of Mexico. Fox's victory means the final rupture of the prolonged pact between the Mexican state and the peasants, that pact whose last and most perverse form was still the rural bases of the PRI.

Fox's reforms, the continuation and culmination of the Salinista reforms, will

meet resistance from the people of Mexico. Not initially from those who voted for him in order to see a change.

The resistance will come from another universe, that which filled the plazas and streets during the Cardenista campaign and voted for the PRD, or those who by force or by habit voted for the PRI, or those who did not vote because they did not see any point — that universe of people who in their lives and expectations incarnate a country and a program diametrically opposed to Fox, the PAN and their hangers-on.

Useless

If Cárdenas and the PRD had yielded, as some had argued, to a call for the useful vote, they would have made the most useless of gestures: to dissolve themselves in Fox's majority, to become responsible for what Fox will do, to abandon the poor of Mexico by signing up with the party of the modern conservatives, the rich, the

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Thatcherites and the neoliberals.

They would have disrupted any possibility of fighting back and contributed to a loss of morale and to political and moral disorganization.

If they had thus yielded, those who would benefit from the discontent and resistance of the masses would be the PRI chieftains and the Mafias, who would appear as defenders of the people, as the corrupt heads of the dismantled Communist Party of Russia did with a certain success when people began to resist the excesses of Boris Yeltsin

On the evening of July 2, Cárdenas made two declarations: he recognized Fox's electoral victory and said that his party would constitute the opposition to the new government. Chiapas, social rights, workers, migrants, the indigenous population, the Mexican countryside, secularism, liberties, culture, free education, sovereignty, democracy, tolerance, are some of the themes of that opposition.

The victory of Fox and the neoconservatives it is an overwhelming defeat for the PRI, but also a strange kind of defeat for the PRD, which over 12 years fought the regime of the PRI while the PAN was its accomplice and sustained it.

Strange defeat

A strange defeat because Cárdenas realized his objective of ending the party-state but at the cost of a victory that gave state power to the continuators of the policy of Salinas and Zedillo,

To head the resistance, to defend the rights and the heritage of Mexicans and to prepare the future, the PRD will have to face this new reality with the instruments of renewed thought and organization, not with old themes now overtaken by the facts.

What matters now is developing a correct approach to the regime of the modern conservatives and the risks entailed by the disintegration or fragmentation of the PRI and its form of state.

The declaration by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas on the night of July 2 was the culmination of a three month electoral campaign, the answer to those who in every corner of the country filled the plazas and streets with fervour and enthusiasm, those who voted for his candidacy and his program, and those who will constitute the heart and soul of regroupment, organization and resistance. ★

A "democratic" swindle

GERMAN Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, the man who forced through the decision to bring the German army out of its barracks and borders for the first time since 1945, has reopened the debate on the future of the EU.

FRANÇOIS VERCAMMEN

WHAT he has just said is neither new nor spectacular. But it is certainly not anodyne. The EU should give itself parliamentary institutions and settle once and for all the relationship between the national states and the supranational structure of the UE. And he, Fischer, chooses a Federation of national States, based on a Parliament with two chambers: one would be made up of members of Parliament who would also be members of their national Parliaments (elected or appointed?), the other, the second chamber (of the US Senate or German Bundesrat type), made up of members of Parliament "directly elected" in their respective countries.

In addition, Fischer's speech proposes to put order, "horizontally", in the relationship between the existing Community institutions. Fischer introduces the idea of a (future) European government, without defining its precise form: either by the development of the current European Council (based on the national governments of the member states), or "by directly electing a president equipped with vast executive powers while being based on the current structure of the Commission". He also envisages an intermediary formula.

Three problems

In raising the question of the "political Europe", Fischer is attempting to respond to three urgent problems:

1. The risky turn towards the creation of a European power (after the Euro, enlargement and defence) postulates a new stage in European state institutions.

2. It will be necessary to ensure the success of the French presidency of the EU (July-December). Indeed, the agenda of the Intergovernmental Conference, derisive in relation to these problems, limits

itself (officially for the moment) to some institutional reforms: size of the Commission, changes in the votes of the different countries in the Council and reduction of the veto by extension of the areas decided on by qualified majority vote.

3. Precisely at this time the EU continues to lack popular legitimacy, for historical (no European nation, no pan-European bourgeoisie, multiplication of national States and heterogeneity of economies and societies) and immediate (the progress of the EU has for 15 years coincided with the strongest social regression for 40 years) reasons.

Major obstacle

It is a major obstacle to the settlement of the contradictions between states in the EU. Fischer thus employed a tried and tested method, mixing ideological discourse and political-institutional perspective to allow the maximum of effective measures to be pushed through amid the confusion.

At first sight, the speech, which raises the thorny problem of a supranational political Europe, should have been badly received. It risks recreating and reinforcing polarization between "Europeanists" and "sovereignists" at the head of the established political parties. Actually the solution that Fischer (and his accomplices) propose should help the pro-EU governments facing "nationalist" opposition of the left or right. Not only in France and Germany, but also in the Great Britain of Blair and the City of London.

Because Fischer very explicitly buries the European federalism which has been the official underlying ideology at the summit of Europe. And he buries "the institutional model" which went with it: from now on, the European institutions

will no longer have the vocation of absorbing the national states, replacing them with a supranational federal state of Europe.

This represents the abandonment of not only the European goal of Monnet, but also his method which involved successive transfers of shares of national sovereignty to Europe. For Fischer, the EU will be a federation of states, with the national state as basis. His project also sidelines European citizenship, on the level of political decision-making: "this Parliament would gather the various national political elites (!) and then the various national public opinions".

Two chambers

That means two chambers, both based on elected officials from the member states, and seems to exclude the possibility for all European citizens to directly elect other European citizens, independently of their nationality. As well as unified European lists in all the member countries. The project proposes a strong but partial democratic breakthrough: finally a parliamentary system for the EU! A great innovation, at the beginning of the 21st century!

It would put an end to the current institutional omnipotence of the European Council, which today concentrates in its hands almost the totality of executive, legislative and constitutional power. Legislative power would return to a Parliament (with what powers exactly?).

It also envisages a Constitution, i.e. a new treaty, which would fix the fundamental laws clearly (distinguishing them from the current laws), and would cover "basic rights and human and citizenship rights". It is not certain that Fischer's attempt will hold together until the end of this year, or will succeed in gaining a high political and media profile. But the attempt is serious, decided in high places and targets precise objectives.

Fischer's project is unacceptable, indeed intolerable, for two reasons. The first is that the democratic advance is partial. If the model suggested of the future EU is parliamentary-democratic, this is not the case for the proposed method of getting there. Because who will decide on this "constitutional refoundation of Europe" and its constitution, how will the decision be made, and when?

One can deduce from Fischer's text that it will be the governments. And it will

be "well beyond the next decade"!

There is worse, indeed a real swindle: while we wait for this "democratic" EU, it will be constructed through the "strengthened co-operations" which are the exclusive resort of the EU governments (the European Council). Fischer's real practical-political objective is the summit of December 2000 in France: to register this new constitutional norm in the existing treaties thus widening the agenda of the intergovernmental conferences.

These "strengthened co-operations" between the member states which agree relate to partial but not secondary aspects: currency, army. The idea has always existed. But the "justification" is reinforced because the EU, through enlargement, diversifies. To await the unanimity of a growing number of member states is to risk paralysis: the enlargement of the UE would be done to the detriment of its cohesion (at the state level).

That seems rational. Why is it being done by violating the most elementary democracy? Because, on this occasion, the European Council would see its despotic powers reinforced and prolonged, as Fischer puts it "strengthened co-operation will not mean anything other first of all than strengthened intergovernmentalisation"!

Vanguard

And there's more. By systematically applying the method of "strengthened co-operations" one arrives logically, by selection, at a "vanguard" or "centre of gravity" comprising the most committed, most powerful states. These latter will adopt a new treaty starting from which the other states will be "dealt with".

Thus in the name of a coming democratization, we will "provisionally" (for at least 10 years!) strengthen the anti-democratic character of the EU. Goodbye, the "parliamentarisation of the EU", goodbye "fundamental democratic (and social?) rights"!

The first task is to alert public opinion and the labour and social movement, and to say: stop right there! We have to halt this reinforced autocratic process. And to oppose it, suggest an alternative democratic line of march. It is not in 10, 15 or 20 years that the people should have the right to speak and decide, but immediately. It is now that we need a wide-ranging debate with the support of modern means of com-



EU leaders meet, but democracy is not on the agenda

munication.

It is not the governments, but the people of Europe who must decide on their future. For that we need the vote for everybody and proportional representation, and the convention of a democratic Congress of the Peoples of Europe. The second reason why we should reject unreservedly Fischer's project is that the priority it gives to the "Europe of nation-states" axis aims at sidelining any idea or discussion of social Europe. Read and re-read the text, the term "social" does not even appear there!

Logical

In the EU it is logical: it fears democracy because it fears the eruption of the popular forces in institutional mechanics. But a Constitution does not speak only about state institutions and their respective prerogatives. It deals above all with society, and its social, economic, ecological, cultural and individual bases. The omission is not a lapse of memory. The social Europe was sidelined in 1989-90 under the employers' pressure, with the complicity of Jacques Delors. The EU is a legally anti-social construction.

While waiting for a really democratic constituent Congress of the peoples of Europe, it is necessary to force our governments, i.e. the Intergovernmental Conference (this closed session Constituent assembly of the elites of the dominant class), to incorporate now in their treaties all the social rights and norms that working people have imposed, through historic struggles, on the bourgeoisies and their states. The democratic and social Europe is well worth the crisis of the EU. ★

“To change the rules of the game”

ON June 30 and July 1st, French farmer José Bové and nine others appeared in court in the southern French town of Millau for demolishing a McDonald's restaurant. The French revolutionary Marxist newspaper *Rouge* questioned him on the case, his fight against neoliberal globalization and the “new internationalism”. The interview was carried out by Mann Arvois and Sylvain Pattieu.

INTERVIEW

■ **IN the book you have written with François Dufour¹ you describe the collusion between the French Farmers' Union and the state to impose a productivist agriculture. How could an organization like yours, which opposes this, have any place in the farming world?**

In the same way as any trade-union organization: when people feel cheated, they understand the logic of an apparatus which is supposedly there to represent them, and in fact betrays them and eliminates them. From there on, people decide. They become conscious of the nature of their work and the way in which they are exploited, and also of how to defend themselves collectively against the multinationals, the banks or the State.

■ **In connection with the repression against you and others in your Confederation, but also the *sans-papiers* or the unemployed, you speak of the “criminalisation” of a social movement.**

I think that it is due primarily to a social climate where the state has a responsibility. The social movements or the organizations are increasingly less taken into account. Things are done above their heads. The second aspect is a change in the behaviour of the magistrates, who are increasingly repressive with regard to small offences, without ever dealing with basic problems like financial rackets and the widespread networks of money laundering.

Today they prefer to crack down on petty crime or the social movement. So we need to rethink the role of the magistrates'

organizations and also the ministry for Justice, so that there is another, more coherent, conception of the kind of society and justice we intend to create.

■ **What link do you make between your struggle as a trade unionist in France and struggles on an international scale, with the peasants of the South or US trade unionists for example?**

Today, the fight against neoliberal globalization cannot be corporatist. It is a fight by everybody who is a victim of this form of globalization. We have to change the rules of the game. At the farming level for example, we have created an international structure which is called *Via Campesina*.

It includes peasants from every continent, who fight together for the same objectives. In Europe it involves a fight against the Common Agricultural Policy

(CAP), its imbalances and its injustices. In South America it involves the fight for land reform or against the multinationals which expel hundreds of thousands of peasants to monopolize their lands.

This struggle is global and not merely rural: during the demonstration in Seattle, the AFL-CIO, the largest American trade-union federation, accepted that a peasant from each continent would be at the head of the demonstration.

■ **There is talk of a “new internationalism”: do you subscribe to this formula and on what bases?**

We subscribe to it insofar as what we have already set up is a form of peasant international. It is the first time that something like this has been set up.

Today, more than 50% of humanity lives from agriculture. To bring together the peasants of the whole world around a global project of agricultural production, to fight against the multinationals, and to make it possible for people to live from their production and to feed their population, is effectively a challenge to an economic order which also implies new ways of conceiving the exchanges between people.

I also think that a new form of international is emerging at the trade union level and through all of the movements which fight today against globalization. It is a form of internationalism which is being built in a very diversified manner, starting from each person and their realities, and where we try to implement common short and long term objectives to transform things. ★

1. “Le monde n'est pas une marchandise” [“The World Is Not For Sale”], by José Bové and François Dufour (éditions La Découverte).



The world struggle — an interview with Susan George

SUSAN George, a president of the Observatory on Globalization and the author of several works, most notably *How the other half dies* (1978), also spoke to *Rouge* on the struggle against neoliberal globalization. The interview was carried out by Eric Lafon.

INTERVIEW

■ CAN we speak, after Seattle, of a form of internationalism against the World Trade Organization?

You can't do Seattle or Washington every 3 months, and besides we won't be given the opportunity to do it. The various national movements are mobilized for different things. For the French, there is Millau which comes after Geneva. There was Bangkok, a meeting for which the Asians mobilized, in particular the Thais. The Koreans mobilize rather around their situation and their immediate economic problems. There are many mobilizations in Latin America.

Now, I don't know if we can say that all that is linked, but so far as the northern hemisphere alone is concerned, the situation has broadly evolved in this direction. Against the MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment), only France and Canada and some other countries had been strongly mobilized. Today, broad coalitions are being set up. It's the case in Italy, where there was a successful mobilization around a meeting of the OECD in Bologna.

For my part, I took part in the press conference announcing the creation of Attac-Germany, which has about sixty member organizations. The next rendezvous is Geneva, after the meeting of Unice on June 9th and 10th in Brussels. All these demonstrations give an idea of the variety of objectives and targets.

That is why they will do everything they can not to have any more inter-ministerial meetings under the conditions of Seattle. Moreover, the next meeting of this type will take place in Qatar. This movement has been launched, and it will not dis-

appear. It is the reflection of a political awakening, of a comprehension that it is necessary to fight on the level of an international economy controlled by transnationals and some big institutions like the IMF, the World Bank or WTO.

■ What are the strong points and the weaknesses of this anti-WTO movement against neoliberal globalization?

We have the numbers, we have the ideas. We lack organization, but this is being developed. We lack especially the means to reach a target as fuzzy as the European Commission. There is certainly Parliament, but that is far from being sufficient.

To influence the WTO, IMF, the World Bank, institutions where the possibilities of intervening democratically do not exist, we need to invent new means, new institutions. Because we cannot have confidence in the institutions which have power. Citizens must inform themselves on everything, however technical and difficult. Another strong point is the significant participation of the younger generations in the various mobilizations.

It testifies to an awakening of consciousness about what is at stake in this fight and a comprehension that the IMF and World Bank's attacks, conducted yesterday in the Third World countries, are happening in the West today. That the neoliberal offensive with which we are confronted does not relate only to the United States, but that European transnationals also press for deregulation, the smashing up of public services.



■ What is the difference between former movements like "ca suffat comme ci" and those of today?

The first difference lies in the importance of the coalitions and their widening. We are no longer in the configuration of gatherings of some organizations, but rather of the convergence of a multitude of forces.

The teacher, the farmer, the ecologist understand that beyond their own battles, they all are confronted with the consequences of globalization, and that if they fight alone they are, we are, sure to lose. The General Agreement on Trade and Services confirms that they have the intention of deregulating education, health, culture, audio-visuals and the environment. Moreover, if governments try to oppose this deregulation, technical means have been worked out to circumvent their political decisions.

The more we understand the level and extent of the offensive, the more we realize that convergences are imperative. We do not agree on everything, but we are convinced that we have common objectives and reasons to fight together. For me, this is the great innovation.

It is true at the national level, but it is true also on an international scale. National coalitions are coming together to create a true "international front". We will discuss that in Millau and we will fix an initiative to come at the time of France's presidency of the European Union, with precise objectives to be realized in each country, with whatever means are judged most suitable. In Geneva on June 22 comrades from the South and North will also meet for discussions of a strategic nature and workshops; a demonstration on Sunday and a symbolic action against the WTO will be organized.

In Paris, the Attac committees in Paris and the suburbs are mobilizing for the meeting of the OECD on June 26. Then it will be Millau on June 30-July 1. The calendar is full, the action is sustained. I have not seen this in France since the Vietnam war. It's exhilarating. ★

As is usual after a G7 summit, the purpose of the autumn meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) in Washington in September 1999 was to orchestrate the intentions of G7. We thus had a media campaign orchestrated in a masterly fashion by the international financial institutions: "don't worry, folks: the debt of the poor countries has been cancelled". The IMF and the WB were bold enough to replace Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) with a new revolutionary terminology: the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

This time, there would be simultaneously debt cancellation and reduction of poverty. Between June 1999 and March 2000 there was an accumulation of announcements. In June 1999, in Cologne, the G7 announced \$100 billion in cancellation of debts. In July 1999, Canada (a member of G7) said that it would cancel 100%. In September 1999, in Washington, what had been decided in June was announced once again.

A few days later Bill Clinton did better: he announced a 100% cancellation of debt for 36 poor countries. At the end of December 1999, Gordon Brown, the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer (Minister for Finance), also announced 100%. His French colleague, Sautter, did not want to be left behind and also announced 100% cancellation. At the end of February 2000 the Italian government joined Canada, the USA, the UK and France in announcing 100% cancellation. The Belgian government emerging from the June 1999 elections also declared its support for the decisions of June 1999.

Can one's reaction be anything other than delight? Hasn't the campaign for the cancellation of the Third World debt largely achieved its goal? No. Because the facts are obstinate: as of April 2000, that is ten months after the meeting of June 1999, only 3 out of 41 Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC)s had benefited from debt relief: Bolivia, Uganda and Mauritania. In the best of cases, for these three countries, the average reduction of the amounts they will have to repay will be about 35%. A long way from the 90% announced in June 1999.

After cancellation, Mauritania, where 62% of the population is illiterate, will still have to devote a larger sum to repaying its debt than it will spend on education! Mozambique and Guyana, two countries

Debt relief — much ado about nothing

THE G7's Cologne summit in June 1999 announced debt relief of up to 90% for some of the poorest countries. These declarations were dishonest and had a marginal impact on both the debt levels of these countries and their servicing.

DENISE COMANNE AND ERIC TOUSSAINT*

which in June 1999 were also supposed to profit from an immediate debt reduction, saw their cases deferred *sine die*. According to calculations carried out by Jubilee 2000 (Great Britain), among the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries likely to profit from debt cancellation in the years to come, 15 will have to repay more each year after cancellation than before cancellation.

How can we speak of improvement then? Only if we are thinking from the point of view of the creditors of the North rather than the peoples of the South. We must, then, relaunch the movement for the cancellation of the Third World Debt. Below we deal with some of the main questions raised by the debt relief granted by the G7, the Club of Paris, the IMF and the World Bank.

■ Why will the debt reductions announced not allow an improvement in the situation of the poor of the Third World?

The creditors who plan to grant debt relief condition this on the continuation of the renamed structural adjustment programmes, "Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers". Many studies carried out by independent economic experts, UN institutions and social movements show that the effects of these policies are disastrous because they increase the fragility of the economies in the countries to which they are applied. Reports by UNCTAD (in particular the excellent section devoted to sub-Saharan Africa in the 1998 report on Trade and Development) on structural adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa show that the African countries have drawn no benefit from more than ten years of adjustment. A fall in household consumption, falls in production by local producers for

the domestic market, an increase in food dependency, an acceleration of the fall in value of the products exported by Africa on the world market, an increase in the tax burden on those on low incomes: such are some of the negative consequences of the adjustment policies raised by UNCTAD.

■ Didn't the World Bank and the IMF take account of these criticisms when announcing in 1999 the installation of a strategy for the reduction of poverty?

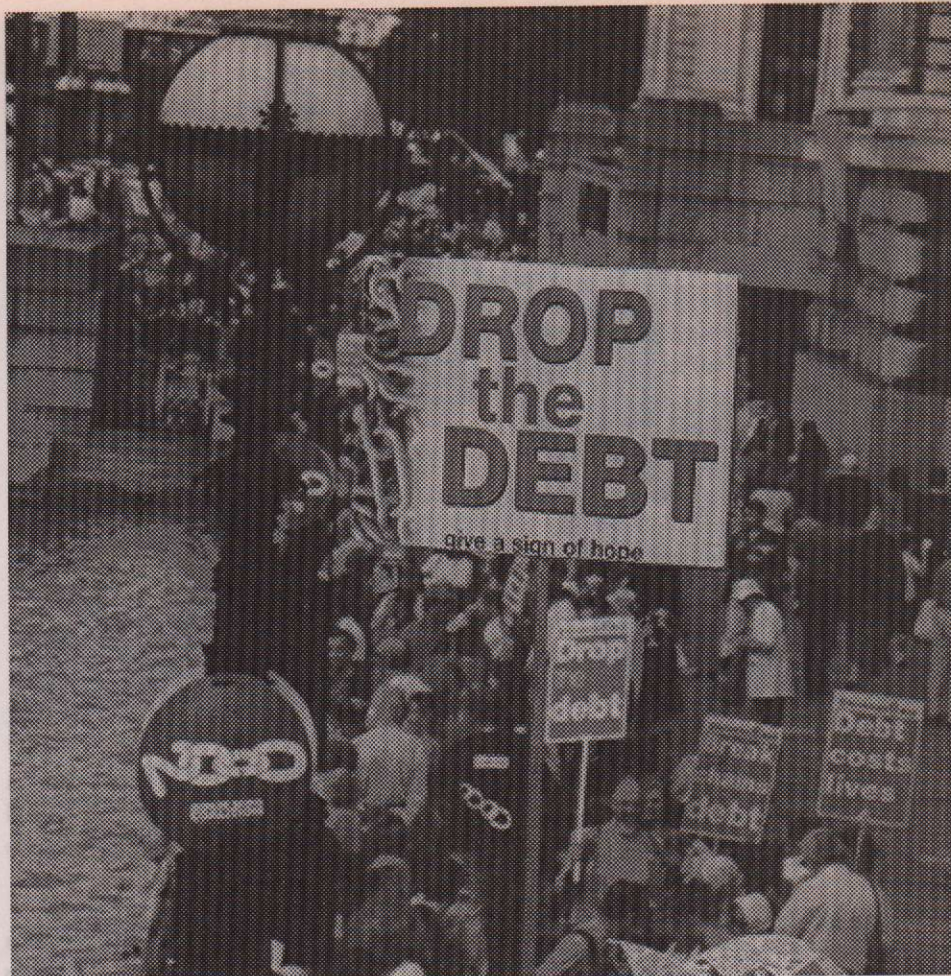
To avoid the increasing criticism they have had to endure from all corners, these institutions announced a rethink which is in fact a fake. The hard core of the adjustment policies will remain entirely in application; the only "improvement" consists in announcing an increase in expenditure on health and education and the taking into account of "civil society" in the drawing up of the "Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper". We have been able to analyze closely, on the ground and in the texts, the policies which African governments are committed to carrying out as from the year 2000. The increases in expenditure on health and education are microscopic. They essentially consist in increasing expenditure by 2% after having reduced it continuously for fifteen years (which is equivalent to a reduction of about 20%). At this rate it will be 2010 before the level of expenditure of 1985 is reached. During this time, the health situation will continue to worsen, deaths due to respiratory, diarrhea and malarial related diseases will not fall, the deaths caused by the AIDS pandemic will increase, and several countries will see the life expectancy of their population reduced (see the recent reports of the World Health Organization for Africa). The growth of malnutrition will continue

to weaken the population, especially women. In terms of education, the young population of school age will significantly increase without finding any adequate framework. The admirable efforts of African teachers and health workers and the few percent increase in expenditure after 15 years of austerity will not be enough to improve the situation. The proof that the World Bank has not really changed is in the area of education, where it has continued to advocate the recruitment as teachers of people with no qualifications on salaries of (according to the country) between 30 and 80 euros per month, for temporary jobs.

■ What has been the attitude of the specialized economic press?

Shortly after the G7 summit in Cologne in June 1999, the *Wall Street Journal* said that the debt relief measures were a technique used by the World Bank and the IMF to balance some bad loans by replacing them with new ones. Which allows these two institutions to finance their recent errors at the expense of the Treasuries of the big industrialized countries. There is not the shade of any generosity here. The extremely pro-market English weekly *The Economist* states in its Christmas 1999 edition that the content of the "presents" recently announced by the United Kingdom, the United States and France in the area of debt relief amount to much less than their "packaging". The title of the leading article says it all: "Who believes in fairy tales?" In fact, the figures announced by the governments of the North in the area of debt relief, in spite of their impressive amount, refer to credits which correspond to nothing more concrete. Thus, the *Economist* reveals that two thirds of the debt incurred by sub-Saharan Africa since 1988 was generated by interest stemming from former loans. In total, for the rich countries to give up hope of recovering similar credits is not to offer millions of dollars to the poor countries. It is simply to stop claiming interest which accumulates in an irrational manner over the years and which keeps the weaker countries in an inextricable situation. "Taken as a group, the fifty poorest countries of the world spend more than twice on the servicing of their debt than they receive in aid. That does not make any sense", recognizes the leader-writer.

■ Which countries could possibly



qualify for a reduction (cancellation) of debt?

The country must be very poor (approximately \$760 annual income per capita) and heavily in debt (here ratios such as "stock of debt/export income" are applied). The criteria are so strict and arbitrary that very poor indebted countries are not regarded as "heavily indebted poor countries" (HIPC). Not included in the category of HIPC for possible reductions are countries like Haiti, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Peru, and Ecuador, not to mention India or Indonesia. However 80% of the poorest people on the planet live in countries which are not regarded as HIPCs.

The country must be considered as offering political guarantees. Thus HIPCs like the Sudan, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia cannot imagine for one moment that they will enter the process of selection as long as they will not radically change their orientation.

The countries must have successfully applied a structural adjustment policy laid down by the IMF and WB over 3 to 6 years. These are the two institutions which

determine if the country has been successful.

In spite of this success attained after 3 or 6 years, the level of debt must be still regarded as insupportable by the IMF and WB. Let us imagine the following case: the performance is such that the country has seen its debt becoming relatively lighter, in particular because the value of its exports has increased (it happened in 1998 for Uganda where coffee is the principal export. The price of coffee had just gone up conjuncturally). As a consequence, the IMF and WB can consider that the level of debt has become bearable, so it is not necessary to reduce the debt burden. Conclusion: the authorities of a HIPC may find it beneficial to worsen the situation just before it is subjected to the examination of the IMF and WB. This seems to have been the case in October 1999 in Mali and November 1999 in Benin.

The country must turn up alone before the Club of Paris (see below). If the Club gives the green light the country must again visit the IMF and the WB to obtain relief on its repayments with regard to these two institutions.

Since September 1999, a new stage has



been added: the authorities of the country must draw up a "Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper".

■ Does the debt relief come all at once?

The relief does not come all at once, the process takes years. The countries must have previously carried out budgetary economic reform and neoliberal austerity policies for 3-6 years. These policies must have received the approval of the IMF and the WB. After this probationary period, the applicant country must go before the IMF which gives (or does not give) the green light to pass to the following stage.

This consists of the country in question presenting itself before its public creditors of the Club of Paris. The Club may decide to grant a reduction, even a cancellation. Contrary to the declarations of the governments relayed by the majority of the media, it is impossible to cancel 90% or 100% of the debt owed to the public creditors. Why? Because this reduction (cancellation) relates only to the amount of bilateral debt going back to the so-called "pre cut off date" of payment.

For the following countries, this is equivalent to the amount of the bilateral debt prior to the year 1983 (!): the Central African Republic, Senegal, Togo, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, and Niger. The bulk of the bilateral debt in the year 2000 has been accumulated after the cut off date and is largely made up of arrears.

An additional stage: if the Club of Paris

gives its green light to apply the Cologne terms to the country in question, the country returns to the IMF and WB in order to demand a reduction in the amounts to be repaid to them.

■ What does the relief granted by the World Bank and the IMF amount to?

The IMF and the World Bank can, if they judge that the debt of a country remains insupportable and if it satisfies the conditions of the Club of Paris, decide to reduce the amount that the country must repay to them. Theoretical example: a country must repay \$52 million to the WB and the IMF over ten years. The WB and the IMF decide to reduce this amount by \$20 million. The country will thus repay \$32 million instead of 52.

Have the IMF and WB forgotten about the \$20 million? No, not at all. In order to ensure that they are repaid, the IMF and WB create a trust fund on which they will draw for ten years until the recovery of the \$20 million. How is this fund paid for? By contributions from the member states of the IMF and WB, mainly but not solely the most industrialized countries.

These contributions are invested by the WB and the IMF on the international financial markets. It is the return from these investments (interest or appreciation) which is used to repay the WB and the IMF. The WB and the IMF thus succeed in making the Treasuries of the member states finance what should be their contri-

bution to the relief. To talk about cancellation in this case thus constitutes a true abuse of language and to add that the IMF and WB are showing generosity is genuinely fraudulent.

As the *Wall Street Journal* correctly puts it, through the HIPC initiative and the mechanism of the trust funds, the IMF and WB have succeeded in making the Treasuries of the member states finance the transformation of old irrecoverable loans. Indeed, the WB and the IMF grant new loans to the HIPCs so that they are henceforth capable of paying on time the remainder of their repayments, in particular to the WB and the IMF.

Better then to speak of a policy of stabilization of the portfolios of the WB and the IMF. And what to make of the fact that the IMF and the WB contribute to the stock market bubble by financing the cost of the operation through new investments on the financial markets!

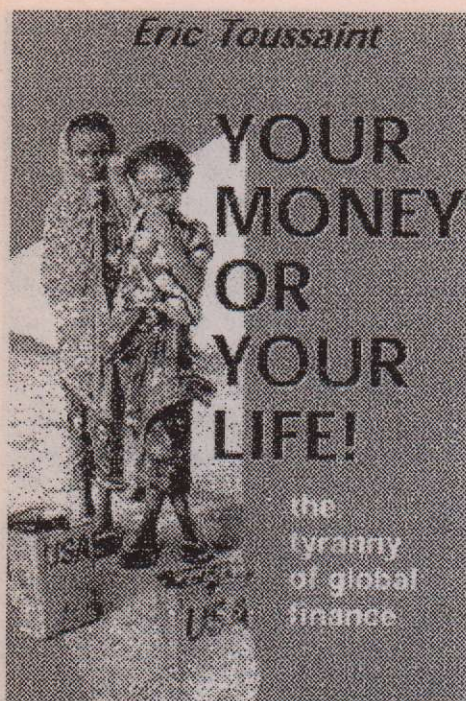
■ What is a "Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper"?

Criticized for twenty years for their policies leading to the increase in poverty on a planetary scale, the WB, IMF and G7 have decided to link the HIPC initiative to the implementation of policies seeking (once more!) to reduce poverty.

Since the September 1999 meeting of the IMF and WB, the HIPC must submit to the international community a program entitled "Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper". This program must be elaborated through a dialogue with the civil society of the country concerned. Let us note beforehand that here again there is an additional condition to be fulfilled so as to benefit from the relief.

The contents of such programmes and the procedure to be followed are fairly ill-defined. Indeed, on the level of content, how can one maintain the coherence of the macro-economic framework of structural adjustment by integrating into it a genuine fight against poverty, which requires a redistribution of wealth, a policy favorable to food security, a reinforcement of the state and public services (health, education, infrastructure). It amounts to a squaring of the circle. Unless we are talking about cosmetic operations of the type mentioned in answer 2.

Another ill-defined zone: what is meant exactly by "the participation of civil society" in the development of the programme? Up to now there is no answer to



this question. One can consequently not base oneself on the concrete experience of the last few months. The case of Mozambique is however eloquent. It was to benefit from "relief/cancellation" of the debt in January 2000. This date had been defined before the meetings in Cologne in June 1999 and Washington in September 1999. In October 1999, the IMF and WB demanded that Mozambique draw up a programme. The government correctly responded that it was unable to draw up such a document within the framework of a dialogue with civil society in two or three months.

Consequence : the relief/cancellation" is put off *sine die*.

What to conclude? Democratic governments which do not have the capacity to really carry out the exercise in the given time are penalized whereas authoritarian governments, with the help of some civic associations under their heels, could receive merit points allowing them to gain relief? We will see.

The case of Guyana is also eloquent. It was supposed to benefit from "relief/cancellation" in December 1999. On the home straight, a complication arose. Faced with popular discontent, the government envisaged conceding a small wage increase of 3.5% (whereas real wages had fallen by

Consulted on this question, the WB and IMF said that if the government took such a decision, the "relief/cancellation" would be put off. They advised that the case be put to the law courts. Which was done. The decision of the tribunal was a surprise: it

awarded a wage increase of 20 %. Consequence: the relief/cancellation" of the Guyanese debt has been put off *sine die*.

■ What does the Third World debt represent compared to other debts?

According to the World Bank, in 1998 the debt of the Third World countries was equal to \$2,030 billion (6% of the world debt) without counting the former Eastern bloc (\$465 billion). These should be placed against the population figures.

The debt of the 41 HIPC countries is \$200 billion. The debt of sub-Saharan Africa is \$235 billion. The national debt of Belgium is \$250 billion. Sub-Saharan Africa with 600 million inhabitants has sixty times more people than Belgium which has 10 million.

The total debt on a world level is \$37,000 billion. The national debt of the United States is \$5,000 billion, the debt of households in the United States is \$6,000 billion (figures for 1999). The national debt of Japan is \$2,000 billion.

■ What do the measurements of relief already carried out since 1996 represent?

The reductions obtained by the HIPCs to date represent at maximum a quarter of one hundredth of the Third World debt (0.25%) or, in terms of the debt of the HIPCs, 5% of their 1996 debt. The reductions granted certain HIPCs hardly compensated for the increase in the debt of some others.

■ At the end of September 1999, Bill Clinton announced that he would increase to 100% the cancellation of the debt which the HIPCs owe to the USA. What does this represent in terms of the US budget in 2000?

The sum allocated by Congress towards the reduction of the debt owed by the HIPCs to the United States represents less than 0.05% of annual expenditure on national defense. It is absolutely ridiculous.

■ What do the measures announced by Gordon Brown in the United Kingdom on December 29, 1999 amount to?

It amounts to 635 million pounds over a 20-23 year period. This sum is equivalent to approximately two thousandths of the UK defence budget.

■ Is it true that part of the debt relief granted by the industrialized countries to the HIPCs will be reflected in reductions in their aid budgets?

Yes, very much so. Part of the debt that the governments of the North are cancelling is made up of debts held by the countries of the South with the companies of the North. These debts are assured by organizations like the Office of Ducroire in Belgium, the COFACE in France, the EXIMBANK in the USA.

For example, imagine that the Belgian government announces that it is cancelling \$ 4 million dollars of Guinea Conakry's debt. What does this amount to? It can mean that the budget of the Belgian Co-operation "will compensate" the office of the Guarantee commission with credits of a value of \$4 million held by Guinea Conakry with Belgian companies which are insured with the Guarantee Commission.

The money will come out of the coffers of the Development Co-operation in Belgium and will pass into the coffers of Ducroire. Ducroire will compensate the Belgian companies concerned. If it has already compensated them, it will use the money received to cancel the credit which it holds on Guinea.

■ In the imaginary case mentioned, Belgium announced that it cancelled a debt of \$4 million, how much does this represent for Belgium?

In reality it amounts to much less because the four million represents the value of the debt at the time when it was contracted. In fact the debt is not worth more than 15% of its initial value, i.e. \$600,000.

For this reason the \$100 billion cancellation of debt announced in June 1999 by G7 represents in reality a good deal less. This also goes for the cancellation measures announced by Clinton and Gordon Brown. ★

*Denise Comanne and Eric Toussaint are leaders of the Comité pour l'annulation de la Dette du Tiers monde (CADTM).

Lexicon :
HIPC: Heavily Indebted Poor Countries, the countries which in theory could claim relief on their foreign debt in the framework of the Cologne initiative launched in 1999 by the G7 (the first initiative of this kind goes back to the G7 summit in Lyon in June 1996).

G7: USA, Japan, Germany, France, United Kingdom, Canada, and Italy.

Club of Paris: a cartel of the most industrialized states as bilateral creditors of the countries of the periphery.

The rebirth of the multitude

FRIDAY February 4. Cochabamba awakes in full mobilization. Thousands and thousands of people, from the earliest hour, start to converge toward the meeting place fixed by the Coordination for the Defence of Water and Life.

RAQUEL GUTIÉRREZ AND ALVARO GARCÍA LINERA*

IT is the day of the “taking of Cochabamba”, a peaceful occupation of the town where thousands of voices unite to say “no to the water law”, “no to the concession of water to the Aguas del Tunari company”, “no to the brutal increase in the price of water”.

The town authorities are also on the move with the aim of countering this convergence of an entire population tired of submitting to unjust decisions imposed without the slightest consultation. For some days, agitation has been at a peak: the political agreement between the municipality and the central government has been broken; police reinforcements are on the road from other departments and troop movements are underway.

Decisive day

Finally, February 4 came as a decisive day for the management of a resource vital for all, water. The first cordons of police who try to block the bridges leading to the town center are broken through around 10 a.m. The multitude who reach the main square don't let the forces of order stop them, despite the gas and the bullets, the blows and truncheons.

The resolute pressure of the crowd, fired by the justice of its demands, throws

Storms over the Andes

THE hurricanes sweeping the Andes evoke the ancestral tempests of a region characterized by poverty, authoritarianism, corruption of the dominant elites and a persistent popular resistance. Here, democracy amounts to voting now and again and economic liberalization destroys elementary rights like the right to work, health, education or a roof over one's head. Bolivia, one of the poorest countries on the continent, provides the clearest snapshot of a real social desolation: 26% of the economically active population is currently unemployed and the monthly wage of a teacher is barely 40 dollars.

International bodies like the IMF and the World Bank have included Bolivia in the framework of a programme of “foreign debt relief”, HIPIC I, on condition that it pursues plans of counter-reforms and privatization; with HIPIC II, Bolivia has received a new allocation of 760 million dollars, to be added to the preceding 1,300 million, to finance projects in the “social area” and the “struggle against poverty”. On April 8th, the government of ex-dictator Hugo Banzer — reconverted into a respectable democrat — declared a state of emergency. The reaction was immediate: roadblocks organized by the CSTCB (the trade union confederation of agricultural workers) to demand a change in the law of agrarian reform, a general strike called by the COB (Central Obrera Boliviana) trade union federation, general assemblies of the people in the popular neighborhoods, students, housewives, the unemployed, confrontations with the army. After one week, faced with the wave of popular protests and so as to avoid the inconvenience of pressure from the “international community”, the state of emergency was lifted. Provisional balance sheet: a few dozen dead, hundreds of union leaders, peasants, students imprisoned and an as yet unknown number of disappeared. The government has presented as primary cause of the crisis the climate of “subversion of the established order” created by the mobilization of coca-cultivating peasants in Chapare, violently repressed. Yet the real point of departure is in the formidable struggle of the inhabitants of the town of Cochabamba, 500 kilometers south of La Paz, who rose up on February 4 of this year against the announcement of an increase in the rates for water, whose exploitation is in the hands of the Spanish company Abengoa.

Faced with the social and political crisis, Banzer had to restructure his government and put off some of the most unpopular measures. This popular revolt is rich with lessons in the area of social demands, methods of struggle and, above all, in what constitutes a real attempt to establish a radical popular democracy. The text that we publish here gives an excellent account of this revolutionary experience and the development of a movement of reconstruction of the social organizations. ★

Ernesto Herrera

back the police who can no longer control that the immediate approaches to the administrative buildings symbolizing power. The entire rest of the town is now in the hands of the people. A great spirit of solidarity arises, fear conquered, hesitations swept away by the grotesque errors of the authorities.

The people of Cochabamba have recovered their dignity, unleashed their anger, constructed a new solidarity, bearer

of hope, victory and elation.

On February 5th, Cochabamba awoke in total uncertainty, but still indignant at the fury and contempt shown on the previous day by the authorities and the police. The radio gave airspace to women who said “they have massacred our children, our peasants; it is intolerable”.

These voices, quickly taken up by some television channels, increase the popular anger. Again the streets fill up, the



crossroads are blocked and the crowd returns to occupy the central square. Solidarity is organized. The doors open to welcome the wounded; fires are lit at the crossroads; people talk, organize, share vinegar to counter the effects of the gas; entire families fill the street; parents want their children to learn how to defend a just demand; canteens are improvised to feed the demonstrators.

The entire population joins the mobilization. All concerned and organized. Nobody leads this multitude now that it is determined to face down repression, that it identifies itself with the objective of occupying the square and defending a primordial right, water. The capacity to decide and to act reappears after some years. The shaken legitimacy of the authorities has shattered in pieces, reduced to violence and lies.

At 11 p.m., the square is filled. The police have had to fall back, the detainees are released and feted by the multitude which surrounds them. "We have won, we

have taken the square and we are here. We have said no to the increase in water and they have backed down. We have demanded that the legislation on water takes into account the respect of use and custom and the government has agreed". "We have made them respect us."

Four forces

There are essentially four forces involved in the Coordination for Water and Life. The first and most important is formed by the local peasant organizations practicing the irrigated culture which has developed over the last six years in the valleys and suburban zones. The utilization of water in the Andean region has always been based on a system of communal authorities, of regulation of debts, collective controls and ceremonial practices, as complex as the regime on the land.

Lack of water in the valleys of the Cochabamba region, the regrouping of trade unions in investment projects for the sinking of wells, the purchase of pumps,

the digging of canalizations have all given the water committees an importance of the first order in social life.

Faced with the drying up of their lands, the cultivators have for some years engaged in radical struggles and set up the most powerful organization in the rural regions. With the adoption at the end of last year of law 2029, whose object is to treat water as a simple commodity and not a public good, they have been led to seek new allies and to build increasingly wide mobilizations.

The second force is the Federation of Workers of Cochabamba. The most conscious and active sector of what remains of the traditional workers' movement, under the leadership of Oscar Olivera, they have developed a long-term campaign to reknit the union and associative tissue of the proletariat, encourage the unionization of women and seasonal workers, defend the rights of the youngest who from the age of 14 or 16 work in unhealthy surroundings, with working days of 12 hours, and renew the culture of the working class.

Authority

They have acquired a great political and moral authority. More than a force of mass mobilization, they count because of their legitimacy, their capacity to analyze reality and grasp the complexity of it, which gains them recognition at the level of the whole region and even at a national scale.

They have made the question of water a problem assumed collectively in a single organizational framework, that of the Coordination. Where the COB has always failed, they have succeeded in unifying under the workers' leadership the workers of town and country, transport workers and market traders, the pauperized middle class. It is a gain whose significance will undoubtedly appreciate in the coming years.

Classically, the COB organized workers on the basis of their workplaces. But the restructuring of social classes has created a vast and essentially nomadic salariat, of multifunctional workers who combine the sale of their labour power with the sale of products, independent work and petty trade, without any stability.

The Coordination offers them a space of multiple participation where the peasant is as welcome as the worker trades unionist, the inhabitant of a popular neighbor-

★ Bolivia

hood, the organizer of an association of cultivators, the "young activist" or again the citizen who feels concerned.

This allows us to understand the extraordinary potential for urban mobilization from February to April, the capacity to involve thousands of youths with no future, working occasionally, with precarious contracts, in little family workshops or again artisans, ice cream sellers, pupils and students for whom study is no longer a form of social ascent.

The third force comprises groups and professionals who have got involved in the legal area and mastered the technical questions in the negotiations to renew the contract of the Aguas del Tunari company. This has allowed the Coordination to involve some sectors of the middle classes of Cochabamba.

The fourth force, but not the least, consists of the unions of coca cultivators and traditional communities, the *ayllus*, from the Altiplano regions. Bearers of an ancestral tradition and a very strong communal cohesion, they joined the mobilization with all their qualities of discipline, the weight of memory and history.

"These are primitive Indians" said the minister Hoz de Vila when the leaders of the Coordination refused to decide to lift the blockade without first consulting their rank and file. The "Indianisation" of the enemy is an atavistic recourse to symbolically denigrate any opposition. It is not astonishing then that sharpshooters should open fire on a crowd that they see as a horde of savage beasts.

Rage and fear

This reflects above all a colonial feudalism, rage and fear faced with forms of citizen organization which break with the insipid normality of the state, with the fallacious forms of representation, high level political deals and general irresponsibility. The Coordination has pushed back the state not only because it forced the troops to return to their barracks and negotiate for their supplies. The state has lost authority because the multitude has created forms of collective political participation in the assemblies which return to the citizens control over and direct responsibility for their affairs and decisions.

These are the forms of democratic practices of mass currents in the workers' mobilizations, the neighborhoods, the peasant trade union or the ancestral com-

"Coca or death!"

DURING a visit some months ago General Barry McCaffrey, the tsar of the anti-drug struggle in the USA, paid homage to the "anti-drug policy" of the Bolivian government: to believe the official figures, which should always be taken with a pinch of salt, in two years the area of coca plantation has been reduced from 36,000 to 18,000 hectares. What is not said is that the problem gets worse day by day. The result of this "success" is that thousands of peasants see their very existence threatened. In the region of Chapare, 300,000 people, in the majority below the "poverty threshold" cynically defined by the international bodies, live by cultivating coca. For whole families, it is the sole source of income. Under US pressure, the Bolivian government committed itself to implementing programmes of eradication and offered to pay 2,500 dollars per hectare for the plantations destroyed which would be replaced progressively (in other words never) by palm, citrus or banana cultivation. This is like a bad joke. When Banzer was elected in 1997, he announced a complete eradication in five years. It was necessary to destroy 50,000 hectares of plantations, 35,000 in Chapare alone, without taking into account the social and environmental consequences.

Faced with the hostility of the peasants, the government has reacted only with expulsions and violence. "Coca or death" has become the symbol of the struggle of the peasants, with Ivo Morales, now a deputy, at their head. The region is now one of the main fields of battle against the government and policy of the United States which, under the pretext of struggling against the drugs traffic, is implementing a strategy of intervention (as in Colombia and Ecuador) in what

Treasury Secretary Laurence Summers calls "weak states". ★

E.H.

munities. What is new is their generalization, the creation of a democratic tissue on a regional scale, prefiguring a network of assemblies which could be set up all over the country.

The forms of organization of the Coordination have developed on four levels during the mobilizations of April. The first and most important is formed by the assemblies of water committees and cultivators, the neighborhood and community assemblies.

Here the people make the link between their specific problems and the general interest, discussing which actions to carry out and their translation at the local level. Thus was born the decision to form a collective popular force to surround the square and organize what became, in the heat of the barricades, "the war of the water".

The second form of organization has functioned for several months as a popular Parliament. It is the assembly of representatives of the Coordination. It is formed from rotating delegates representing the committees of water and local cultivators, farming trade unions, neighborhood committees, water associations, urban unions and federations, the "young" and the stu-

dents. During the April mobilizations and before the declaration of the state of emergency, this parliament functioned daily and it was its plenary assembly which led the movement.

Assemblies

The third level is that of the municipal assemblies. There were five held in a week with the participation of a crowd of tens of thousands of people (from 5,000 to 100,000). They witness to an unprecedented democratic thirst, a multitude tired of others thinking and deciding in its name.

In the heat of these events, these people wish to represent and rule themselves. They block the streets, bar the roads, go to the square with their children, armed with batons and slings, debate in assemblies and then carry out the decisions taken.

The final level of organization is the executive committee of the Coordination led by Olivera and Omar Fernández. Its uncontested authority comes from the fact that it is content to implement the decisions taken daily in the assembly. It is the most authentic embodiment of the extraordinary democratization of the public arena that this revolt has represented.

The consolidation of the social order

and the neoliberal ideology in Bolivian society have not been only the result of a set of decrees and propaganda operations. They result from a transformation of social and symbolic structures.

The discourse of commodity efficiency, governability and commodification of the vote, the internalization of social impotence experienced as an individual deficiency, the breaking of solidarities, all this has entered into the collective consciousnesses of the governing and governed to the extent that the old structures of social cohesion become degraded and give way to atomization, competition and loss of memory.

Crisis

The crisis of traditional trades unionism, of cooperative forms of unionization and of the COB which symbolized this political expression of society allowed neoliberalism to succeed. This has marked the end of the workers' movement incarnated by the miners, of the range of associative structures of universal significance of the latter decades.

A profoundly atomized society emerged. But these destructive mechanisms did not have local networks in the neighborhoods or agglomerations. Appearing around very concrete problems, limited to the community or neighborhood and in a certain sense very fragile in terms of their dimensions, these elementary networks have given birth in record time to a new tissue on a regional scale, with a significance of national scale. The Coordination incarnates the formation of a new plebeian social identity which cuts through the traditional regionalist discourse of the gilded elites but also creates practices of self-determination in the political area.

The COB has suffered 15 years of defeat not so much because of repression as the absence of an alternative social horizon. The legitimate defence of rights conquered related to past agreements with the national state and the reference to socialism hardly went beyond an enlarged vision of state capitalism.

Soulless

Basically, for some decades the people and the left have been nationalist and their dreams have foundered with the nationalist state to give place to a soulless society. Cochabamba and to some extent the



Aymara Indians of the Altiplano have broken this torpor.

The Coordination's project of the creation of a self-managed society has broken the fallacious private/state duality which was at the heart of these political projects.

In the image of politics treated as a self-managed question, collective goods like water should be everybody's business: to be managed by those who need it and use it, self-managed by the citizens themselves. Thus was born a new idea of social sovereignty until then incarnated by the state.

Marx's dream

The rehabilitation of usage and custom as part of law, incarnated in the strength of the multitude in revolt, make that which is abusively called archaic a vector of the future, of modernity. One sees reborn the

dream of the old Marx of transcending the rule of capital through the reconstruction, "in superior conditions", of the communal rural ancestral structures.

Two new social propositions are affirmed here in the long term: self-management and community. As the diverse currents of the workers' movement are fed in a common way from the social dissidence of the 1940s, a new sense of dissidence and social insubordination has surged with the impetuosity of a social rebellion at the dawn of the 21st century. The construction of an alternative horizon of action to the existing order now passes inexorably by these two dimensions of the masses in movement: political-economic self-management and the *ayllu*, the enlarged ancestral community. ★

* Raquel Gutiérrez and Alvaro García Linera are journalists in La Paz, Bolivia.

Face to face

THE echoes of January 21, when an indigenous mobilization and the uprising of a group of young colonels forced the exit of ex-president Jamil Mahuad, resonated in Ecuador's ballot boxes on Sunday May 21. Even though the provincial electoral tribunals have not given the final results, already it is clear that the provincial and municipal elections in Ecuador showed a deeply divided country, with the rival forces staring at each other face to face.

JUAN ADOLFO MONTENEGRO*

THE elections saw the triumph of the Social Christian Jaime Nebot for the mayorship of Guayaquil, the country's most populous city, and General Paco Moncayo, Social-Democratic candidate for the mayorship of Quito. But another big winner was the indigenous organization Pachakutik which experienced a spectacular leap in support in the mountainous provinces and the east.

On the coast the winners were the Social Christian Party of ex-president Febres Cordero (1984-1988) and the Roldosista Party (of Abdalá Bucaram, removed from the presidency by a massive social mobilization in February 1997, after barely 6 months in government).

Social fracture

In the mountains, on the other hand, the voting was reversed in favor of the left and center left (represented on the one hand by Pachakutik and the alliance between the Democratic Popular Movement and the Socialist Party, on the other by the Democratic Left-Social-Democratic current). The political-electoral divisions on May 21 practically reproduced the same social fracture that we witnessed barely four months ago.

After January 21, the new government installed by the generals of the High Command under Gustavo Noboa, Mahuad's vice-president, had reaffirmed the dollarization of the Ecuadorian economy announced by its predecessor, as well as the acceleration of the privatization programme and the application of a tough adjustment program.

Mahuad's fall had pushed the business groups to regroup, and that new alliance was expressed in a clear way in the make-up of the cabinet, which includes big industrialists from areas like floriculture,

mining, textiles and fishing.

With that capital, and the endorsement of the US government, Noboa did not offer any changes in social policy that went beyond promises and words. Meanwhile, the reinforcement of dollarization sent prices rocketing at rates previously unprecedented in Ecuador.

Even an official organization, the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses, revealed at the end of April that the cost of the basic basket had gone up by 50% in barely four months to 240 dollars. However, wages stayed below 50 dollars a month. In order to complete the panorama, fares on public transport were doubled on April 15.

On the other hand, the government and the High Command of the Armed Forces had difficulties in "healing the wound" left by the revolt of the colonels. The initial

announcement of a speedy judgment and punishment for those implicated in the uprising was followed, immediately, by the beginning of proceedings against the social leaders who appeared publicly at the head of the mobilizations.

Amnesty

Nevertheless, soon after, Noboa and his minister of Defence asked Congress to approve a political amnesty for all the accused. The turnabout reflected the continued restlessness inside the Armed Forces, especially the Army.

In this atmosphere, the government negotiated a new letter of intent with the International Monetary Fund. As one might easily anticipate, this letter contained promises to privatize the state petroleum companies, electricity and telephony, as well as social security. Specifically, the letter of intent fixed the application of an austerity package that included increases in domestic gas, fuels and electricity.

In June, prices are to go up by 60%, as against 20% in October and another 20% in December.

Also, it was laid down that the fund from the international credits would have to be used to complete the "banking rescue", and to capitalize the private banks that, having failed, have been administered by the State. Once adjusted, the banks will again be delivered into the hands of private capital.

In these conditions, it was hardly sur-



prising that the dialogues entered into by the government with the CONAIE (National Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities) and other social organizations broke down: the government's commitments were evasive and ultimately of small account.

Coup rumors

Meanwhile, rumors circulated about the imminence of a military coup. Two coups, in fact: on the one hand, a rerun of January 21; on the other, a counterstroke by the right, alarmed by the social resistance that continues to frustrate its political plans.

In short, the conflicts that led to the mobilizations of January had not in the least attenuated. Since then, strikes and mobilizations of health workers, teachers, public employees and peasants had exploded. And the social atmosphere had received a jolt from the presidential announcement that the economic measures would be introduced after the elections.

So the May elections could not be contained within the simple framework of a renovation of the local governments, in spite of the efforts made by the main traditional parties. By necessity they expressed the social consciousness located in the fights against neoliberalism, privatization, dollarization, the rise in the cost of living, impoverishment, corruption and the austerity package.

For that reason, the main electoral upheavals happened in the areas where a greater popular participation in the uprising of January 21 had taken place: the mountain range and Amazonia.

The Social Christian right and the Populist Roldosista Party (of ex-presidents Febres Cordero and Bucaram, respectively) maintained their ideological and political control on the population of the coast and they alone shared the mayorships and the provincial prefectures in that region.

The Social Christians gained the mayorship of Guayaquil with Jaime Nebot, Febres Cordero's dauphin, but the Roldosistas obtained four of the five provincial prefectures. In this panorama, the only exception was the triumph of the candidate of the Democratic Popular Movement (MPD, ex-Maoist) for the mayorship of the small city of Emeralds (in the province of the same name, located on the border with Colombia).

In the mountains and the east, on the



contrary, the big loser was the Popular Democracy (Christian Democrats, the party of the recently dismissed Mahuad); they lost the mayorship of Quito, which they had held for 12 years. Quito, especially in the popular districts, turned to the candidate of the Democratic Left, general Paco Moncayo.

Moncayo, ex-head of the joint command of the Armed Forces, was a deputy during the January 21 uprising, and he and general René Yandún were the only parliamentarians to endorse the rising. Congress dismissed them and the public prosecutor requested that they be tried. Yandún, also a candidate for the Democratic Left in these selections, gained the prefecture of the province of Carchi, bordering Colombia.

Triumph

On the other hand, the Democratic Left obtained less posts than it had won in the elections of 1996. The reason for this was the growth experienced by Pachakutik. This movement, related to the Conaie, won a triumph without precedent.

With still partial results, it obtained 5 provincial prefectures, 3 in the mountain range and two in the east, and will obtain between 15 and 23 mayorships, distributed, also, in the Andean and Amazonian provinces. Still more, two indigenous activists who participated actively in the January rising were chosen as mayor of Guaranda, in the province of Bolívar, and prefect of Cotopaxi.

However, in the provinces of Cañar

and Azuay, what was noticeable was the high vote obtained by the alliance between the MPD and Socialismo, which won the prefecture of Cañar and the mayorship of its capital, Azogues.

In Azuay, although the prefecture was retained by the Popular Democracy, and the mayorship by Nuevo País, the biggest increase was that of the MPD-PSE alliance. Finally, broad center left alliances including the Democratic Left, Pachakutik, MPD, Socialismo and Nuevo País obtained the mayorship of the Andean cities of Ibarra, Ambato and Riobamba.

Polarization

To sum up: the May 21 elections reflected the social and political polarization that January 21 had shown in a more explosive way, and it located it as a regional fracture. So, when on the night of Thursday May 25 the government announced the economic measures, these were much less drastic than what it had previously announced.

Although the price of petrol was raised, the price of gas remains frozen for at least three months, and wage increases of up to 60% were announced. We will see if this succeeds in deactivating the social mobilization against dollarization, privatization and poverty.

We are about to see what steps the right will take. Each step, it appears, takes us closer to confrontation. ★

Juan Adolfo Montenegro is a leader of Socialist Democracy (Ecuadorian section of the Fourth International)

“We are tied to the pain of the people”

FOR Lucio Gutiérrez, leader of the colonels who supported the January 21 indigenous rebellion against the government of ex-president Jamil Mahuad, the results of the recent provincial and municipal elections show the support of Ecuadorians for the insurrectionists. He is currently detained but when free intends to continue his military career. In this interview given to Kintto Lucas of Inter Press Service he criticizes the repressive role of some Latin American armies.

INTERVIEW

■ WHAT is your balance sheet of the recent municipal and provincial elections in Ecuador?

The result is a clear demonstration that the Ecuadorian people want a change in the forms of governing and in their majority agreed with the desire for justice and equity expressed in the rebellion of January 21. In Quito, general Paco Moncayo gained practically double the votes of the candidate of the Democracia Popular party. The Pachakutik movement, which belongs to the Conaie, with little economic infrastructure or electoral propaganda won various prefectures (provincial governorships) and many mayorships. All this shows that the people approve the national effort to give a new orientation to Ecuadorian politics.

■ In Venezuela Hugo Chávez became leader of the country some years after carrying out a rebellion that, although is not comparable, has some similarity with that which you led on January 21. What do you think of that process?

I believe that both movements have a few similarities and quite a few differences. One was military while ours was originated by a social base, which united us with the indigenous people and the different social sectors in their legitimate demands. In Venezuela confrontations with deaths occurred, ours was absolutely peaceful because we were not willing to fire a single shot. There they did not change the government, here we have, and a new hope for the country has been born. Lamentably the expectations of the

Ecuadorian people have not been fulfilled because the same form of governing persists, benefiting a few bankers to the detriment of 85 percent of the poor. The similarity is in that both rebellions were against corruption, the main enemy of the Latin American democracies. The crisis in Venezuela has been very severe.

■ Passing to another country, but again speaking of the military. A few days ago sectors linked to general Lino Oviedo tried to carry out a coup d'état in Paraguay. What do you think of that?

A fundamental difference between the Ecuadorian armed forces and those in the rest of Latin America is that we have a great integration with the more marginalized people and within this with the indigenous peoples, with whom we have worked in multiple projects of development. We are tied to the pain of the people, we did not go to help them only in the case of catastrophe as some Armed Forces do. Also it has much to do with our training, in which the solidarity principle is accentuated. In addition in our schools for training officials and volunteers we studied the national problems with a vision based on shared, common solutions. That marks a difference with other more elitist Armed Forces, who repress the people when they should be on its side.

■ With the base of Manta given to the US army and the implementation of the Colombia Plan many fear that Ecuador will become involved in the internal conflict of another country. What should the attitude of the

Ecuadorian government be to that?

Governing is not difficult if it is done on the basis of what most of the people want. The problems appear when the governors do not listen to the majority and act for the benefit of elites, that is why uprisings and popular protests like in Ecuador and other Latin American countries take pace. The great national problems must be resolved by the people. On the installation of the base at Manta, the acceptance of the Colombia Plan, the polarization system, and even the signature of peace with Peru, these should be settled through means of a plebiscite. Together with many comrades we think that Ecuador does not have to get involved in Colombia's internal war because it is a problem of a brother country sufficiently sovereign to resolve it. If Ecuador becomes involved in the Colombia Plan it can become a new Vietnam and it would be obeying foreign interests.

■ If we analyzed the facts of January 21 and subsequent events it seems that you did not manage to fulfill your objectives. Was it a defeat?

No, because there are many positive things. Now the people knows it has the right to rise against oppressive and corrupt governments, and to overthrow those who do not fulfill the popular mandate, because that is part of democracy. Also the self-esteem of the country rose. Our youth was asleep and the social movements were disunited. Now a unity of these sectors has been created, and the university population has woken up. Another positive fact was to bring down a bad government. Hopefully the new one fulfills the expectations of the country, although only four months old until now it has not done so. Also our national identity was awakened. Considering all that it was not a defeat but a civic victory.

■ Would you accept being described as a leftist?

No, because I do not agree with being described through predetermined concepts. Our ideology has deep national roots and fundamentally it is based on the solidarity and the ways of coexistence that our indigenous peoples have constructed in centuries of existence. It is this ideology that drives us to change the structural injustices of our country so that one day the poor are privileged. ★

“Chávez has compromised with the dominant class”

NATIONAL sovereignty is undoubtedly the dearest inheritance of our nationality, transmitted by the patriots of the 21st century. And with it the value of liberty in its different expressions, the exercise of the rights of citizens, the unending democratization of power, the reinforcement of human dignity, constitute the foundation of our behavior. Our people have always shown a significant capacity for resistance and integrity throughout its history.

DOUGLAS BRAVO

THANKS to this capacity, the popular forces rose up on February 27, 1989 in the most splendid, legitimate and radical insurrection of the Venezuelan 20th century.⁴ This event inaugurated a new role for the people in that the immediate response to the implementation of the model of neoliberal globalization unleashed by Carlos Andrés Pérez constituted a new reawakening of the people.

It is for this reason that February 27, 1989 was the real point of departure for the new revolutionary changes that the impoverished masses of our country demand today. That is why we arrive in year 11 of the new cultural, political, economic, social, religious and military confrontation, the most important of our recent history, led by the forces of emancipation and sovereignty, popular fervor and dignity and authentic patriotism, on the one hand, and the forces of globalization, oppression and humiliation on the other.

Reality

Such is the reality, the fundamental historic conflict of these last ten years, not yet resolved and in virtue of which our country has lived, lives and will continue to live under tension.

President Hugo Chávez, with a considerable skill which must one day exhaust itself, adopts a double language which is

increasingly discredited among the public. On the one hand there is his apparently redemptive role. On the other, the reality of his political project is found in the agreements with the multinationals, the international sectors of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie like the Cisneros, the US and the World Bank to whom he has guaranteed a continuity in their regime so that they can continue to devastate our basic wealth, hold us in poverty and limit our sovereignty.

Referendum

The decree for the convocation of the referendum in favor of the National Constituent Assembly has legalized the international agreements which affect our sovereignty, accords signed by Caldera⁵ with the transnationals in the matter of oil, mining and forestry exploitation, which had been challenged before the old Supreme Court of Justice. Now, paradoxically, with the misnamed peaceful revolution carried out by the commandant, our sovereignty is — as the writer Luis Brito Garcia puts it — dismembered.

Little by little, we are today less independent and less sovereign than before. “The Decree enjoying the status of law on the protection of investments authorizes foreigners to buy Venezuela and modify the laws as they see fit. The treaty on dual

VENEZUELA under President Hugo Chávez¹ is undergoing a political-institutional transition characterized by the breakup of the traditional bi-partyism, a sharp economic crisis (nearly 80% of the population lives below the poverty level) and by power vacuums. On May 28th, in line with the new constitution, presidential, legislative, regional and municipal elections were due to take place, but they were postponed at the last minute. Eleven million electors (including soldiers, allowed to vote for the first time) were due to elect a president for a 6 year term, 166 members of parliament, 223 regional deputies, 23 governors and 333 mayors, as well as some hundreds of municipal councillors.

The electoral contest takes place against a background of a crisis and fractures inside the Fifth Republic Movement (Movimiento V República, MVR) and the Patriotic Pole (Polo patriótico — PP). Last March some commandants who had fought with Chávez in the uprising of 1989 broke with him and one of them, Francisco Arias Cárdenas, is a presidential candidate, with an anti-corruption and neoliberal discourse.

Meanwhile, Country For All (Patria para todos, PPT), one of the main left forces making up the Patriotic Pole² distanced itself from Chávez. Aristobulo Isturiz, a leader of the PPT, announced the intention of his organization to leave the PP coalition, saying that Chávez could “go to the devil”. Pablo Medina³ added: “we will leave PPT militants without a candidate and everyone can do as they wish”.

“Super Chávez” must then face tensions with his allies of yesterday whereas at the same time there are social tensions appearing and some trade unions are entering into resistance. It seems improbable that he can repeat the electoral score of more than 70% he recorded in the last elections.

The article presented here offers some explanations of the political panorama and the Chávist project. Above all, it is a very hard and critical assessment coming from the left. Its author is a former leader of the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN), a Venezuelan guerilla organization of the 1960s. ★

Ernesto Herrera.

★ Venezuela

taxation authorizes foreigners not to pay the taxes that they should on the wealth that they have accumulated in Venezuela. These two norms submit the country to the judgment of foreign tribunals or commissions of arbitration. We can neither freely adopt laws, nor apply them, nor interpret them.”

Privatization

To these two aspects described by Brito Garcia we could add the incessant privatizations of the essential enterprises of Guyana, the agricultural legislation which places the lands in the hands of the big capitalists of the agro-alimentary industry, and on the military level the acceptance of overflying by US forces on the pretext of the struggle against the drugs trade, with the new plans for strategic occupation of our territories concealed behind this.

We quote again from Luis Brito Garcia: “After the overflying comes the bases, after the bases the reinforcements, then the continuous military presence, then the “joint maneuvers” and our real subjection to the strategies of the power of occupation.” (*El Nacional*, March 4, 2000).

As to the the struggle against corruption, it is obvious that until now nobody has been jailed for this. The big capitalists who have indebted the country and posses bank accounts abroad which bring them substantial interest continue to enjoy a good financial health and freedom of movement.

Not one of our super-devalued bolivars has been recovered from the suspect coffers of the corrupt rich. Nothing significant has happened except the simple change of an institutional name, of judicial power and the removal of some former judges and civil servants to be replaced by others who have shown themselves to be less honest and more perverse than their predecessors.

In this way the aspirations of the poor and the middle class of Venezuela are again cheated. Indeed, what is imposed today is the economic, social, cultural, political and military model of globalization and the persistence of corruption, reflected inevitably by the chronic presence of poverty with the specter of unemployment, promiscuity, hunger and criminality. Inflation, lack of housing, insecurity, demoralization, stress and collective neurosis, despair and psychic and spiritual depression haunt the existential landscape

of our people as evidence of the new fraud perpetrated by a government which has not even honored its first image as rebel son of the Republic and inheritor of the army of Bolivarian liberation.

Faced with this pathetic reality, some sectors of the popular forces have begun to sketch out some kind of alternative. Concretely, it amounts to the struggles of indigenous and peasant communities for the recovery of lands where the conceptions of collective property — maintenance of the soil, forms of conviviality, organization and struggles — correspond to alternative viewpoints and aspirations for a change of society.

In the same way, in the different towns of the country, organized communities in the neighborhoods, student sectors, workers, ecologists and other are no longer content to wait and lead important struggles around demands. On the political terrain, one observes that the regroupments of parties has degenerated into bureaucratic battles to gain a little more power.

On the other hand, some patriotic and revolutionary sectors appear so confused as not to have clearly identified the fundamental historic enemy at this stage. It is obvious that the old pact of Punto Fijo approved by AD and COPEI⁶ is no longer the main political enemy, even if they are still there, as the guardians without scruples of globalised capitalism.

Globalization

It is then necessary to state that the main enemy of the Venezuelan people and the sovereignty of the country is globalization because its unique and absolute law is that of the limitless gain and accumulation of capital and power, that is why its nature is anti-popular and anti-national. President Chávez remains at the Palace of Miraflores precisely because he has compromised himself with certain sectors of the dominant classes and carries out the essential projects of globalization.

Thanks to this, he enjoys the support of big multinational capital, the conservative high command of the armed forces and the most illustrious sectors of the Pentagon. The prolonged fight against Puntofijism⁷ was a farce through which the president sought to disqualify the revolutionary dissident sectors and catalogue them as Puntofijists. It is an old strategy which seeks to neutralize the opposition while advancing the alliance with the oil compa-



nies and the US.

Today, we are in a situation where vanguards exist with a new emancipatory thought, with real roots in significant sectors of the population and intellectuals sensible to the manifestations of the sovereign power of the organized communities. Today, unlike the past, many of us understand that the revolution is above all a gradual process of the struggle of values against other values, in which is forged and emerges a new civilization, that the main contradiction of our society is between emancipation and globalization.

Concepts

That the concepts on which the new civilization is built are: the entire sovereignty of the people faced to any oppressor, foreign or national, economic and social self-management to build a proper and technologically independent economy, the direct exercise of political, social and military power by the organized communities, the preservation, care and defence of natural resources and of the environment, and so on.

We start from the conviction that the apprenticeship of the peoples is not static but dynamic. It is opportune to recall again the credo of the poet Aquiles Nazoa to confirm our faith in the creative power of the people. Around the mega-elections, it is obvious that a pitiless bureaucratic competition is underway, revealing the political mediocrity and personal appetites which reign inside the leadership of the PP and

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the MVR. As for Commandant Francisco Arias Cardenas and the group which follows him, they are like Chávez very far from the programme and the postulates that the country had hoped for on February 4 1992.⁸

As they say, the struggle continues. It is then, up to the sectors and forces of emancipation to assume the decisions, compromises and risks that the moment demands of us. In the first place, we must recover the slogans and ideas for philosophical and political reinforcement of the popular van-

guards.

To develop a plan for the resurgence of the popular movement through the organization of struggles for its own demands. To impel all possible demonstrations, firm and resolute, for the salvaging of the sovereignty and independence of our country. To stimulate, create, support, consolidate all the forms of construction of the new civilization, which has as its foundation the age-old aspiration to liberty and happiness. We are in a time where false myths fall because of their own falseness and where



the true myths resurge in the paradox of human existence.

Neither the democracy of the old pact of Punto Fijo, nor the globalised militarism of Chávez guarantees the happiness of the people. A new social, political, military and cultural regime of the organized communities is the way to refine the utopia where dreams meet reality and the people are absolute masters of their destiny. Chávez has capitulated. The struggle continues. Until victory. ★

1. President Hugo Chávez was elected on December 6 1998 with 56.2% of the vote
2. The Patriotic Pole is a coalition comprising the Fifth Republic Movement, the PPT and the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), founded in 1971 by former guerrilla Teodoro Petkoff.
3. Historic leader of Causa Radical, a radical left organization which split during the presidential campaign of 1998.
4. Following an austerity plan imposed by president Carlos Andrés Pérez, the poor rioted in Caracas, looting the shops. Ferocious repression (246 deaths officially, 500-1,200 according to the opposition) followed, but hunger riots took place again in 1990.
5. Rafael Caldera Rodriguez was president from 1974 to 1978 under the label of Democratic Action and again from 1994 to 1998 under the label of Democratic Convergence, a coalition of 17 parties (including the conservatives, the MAS and the CP).
6. Democratic Action (AD, social democratic) and the Committee of Political Organisation of Independent Electors (COPEI, Christian Democratic) are the two traditional bourgeois political parties. Their unlimited corruption and aggressively neoliberal policy lost them all legitimacy, opening the way to the victory of Hugo Chávez in the presidential election of 1998.
7. Adjective derived from the Pact of Punto Fijo, signed October 31, 1958 between the three parties who were going to support Romulo Betancourt (AD, COPEI and the URD, the latter reduced to the role of "small party") which instituted the "Venezuelan model of democracy", a de facto bipartite system which collapsed in 1998.
8. Reference to February 4, 1992, day of the arrest of 1,098 soldiers during the defeated coup d'etat of Hugo Chávez.

Chronicle of a detestable regime

NEOLIBERALISM: Fujimori has sold off more than 150 state companies, 80%, basically in the areas of the main export products and services, like mining, fishing, oil, telephones, electricity, mail, and so, many of them at derisory prices, probably in exchange for the payment of "commissions". As we will see later, most of that money has disappeared. Almost all the workers were dismissed, many without receiving compensation.

He closed the farming development bank. He opened the doors for the free import of industrial products, thus destroying a great part of national industry. Also he opened the doors to the free import of agricultural products, some subsidized in their countries of origin, crushing national agriculture which does not receive subsidies or any help. He significantly reduced payments to pensioners and expenditure on health and education. This policy has elevated Peru to 4th place in world poverty, with 49% of the population living in poverty. More than 10 million inhabitants have an income of less than a dollar a day. He has been enthusiastic and exemplary in paying the foreign debt. When he entered government Peru owed \$13 billion. Now it has paid \$13 billion and owes \$19 billion.

CENTRALISM: Centralism has worsened: his constitution abolished local parliamentarians, now all are chosen at national level. Until today he has not called regional elections as the law requires, the governors of the regions are civil employees named by him. The municipalities only receive 3.8% of the national budget. Their members are the only elected authorities, in addition to the president and members of parliament, the rest consists of authorities named by Fujimori. The "Ministry of the Presidency" is responsible for works in all corners of the country, where big announcements appear to remind everyone that it is the Presidency of the Republic that has carried them out.

ROBBERIES: \$8 billion of the priva-

THE people of Peru continue to mobilize against the fraudulent election victory of President Alberto Fujimori in May. In this contribution a veteran Peruvian revolutionary lists the crimes of the Fujimori regime.

HUGO BLANCO*

tization receipts have disappeared. Fujimori says that it was used to buy arms and that he cannot give any account of it because it is a "military secret". It is calculated that Vladimiro Montesinos, the power behind the throne, has \$55 million in various foreign banks, the interest being paid monthly to a bank in Peru, but it is prohibited to investigate this. Fujimori says that the work of Montesinos as real head of the National Intelligence Service (SIN), (the apparatus of espionage for the government against its political enemies, the independent press and "friends", to blackmail them) is ad-honorem.

MASSACRES: Of the massacres in Lima, the most significant are those of professors and students at a teaching university, participants in a popular neighbourhood fiesta and the members of the MRTA that surrendered in the Japanese embassy. In the interior of the country there have been many more, especially of peasants. In addition there are the individual murders, like that of the main leader of the General Confederation of Workers of Peru, supposedly carried out by Sendero Luminoso, but later discovered to have been perpetrated by SIN.

There are two new developments: One is that Fujimori has announced that SIN will be "redimensioned" to impel the democratization of the country. The other is that general Russel Paredes Loop, who was commander of the "antisubversive" unit Sinchis, active in one of the areas where more innocent blood was shed, Ayacucho, now will be in charge of "secu-

rity" in Lima. We can calculate what awaits the popular movement against the dictatorship in the capital of the country.

FRAUD: The electoral fraud was prepared from 1996, when Congress approved the "Law of Authentic Interpretation", authorizing Fujimori to run for a second term against the stipulations of his own Fujimorista Constitution.

The Fujimorista parliament removed the autonomy of the judiciary and thus the National Jury of Elections (JNE) was changed to the taste of the government. The regime had three bodies in charge of the elections, one them, the ONPE, was in charge of directing the operation of falsification of more of a million signatures for the inscription of Fujimori's organization "Peru 2000".

State funds have been used for the electoral campaign of the President. All the state apparatuses, as well as the army, have been used for the same aim. The television channels were electoral instruments of the government, closed to the opposition. The same was true of a series of very cheap semi-pornographic newspapers. An independent channel was seized from its proprietor. Exit polls showed Toledo winning in the first round. Nevertheless, the official figures indicated that Fujimori was the winner.

Toledo's programme was essentially no different from that followed by Fujimori. But, increasingly dependent on popular support, he radicalized, promising decentralization, support for agriculture, the fight against corruption, wage increases, an end to government intervention in the universities, and so on. Luckily, on the night of the first round, when the nature of the fraud was clear and with an enormous demonstration before him, he followed the people and went with them to the government palace to protest against the fraud.

With the reaction of the international press and various governments Fujimori had to back down and change his plan to win on the first count. Soon, the O.A.S. mission, the Carter center and other international and national observers requested

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that the governmental apparatus and the television channels were neutral. The O.A.S. mission demanded two weeks to check that the software was correct and was not manipulated. The JNE refused to delay the date of the second round. This was carried out without national or foreign observers and without the participation of Toledo, who called on his supporters not to vote or write "no to fraud" on the ballot paper.

In Peru it is obligatory to vote, a heavy fine is paid if you don't, in addition the electoral authority threatened many additional punishments for those who did not vote. Even so, there was little voting, but this was not recognized by the governmental machines. Luckily Toledo did not let himself be intimidated by being called a "rebel" and a "terrorist". Between the first and second round he continued participating in enthusiastic and large demonstrations as opposed to the few Fujimorista demonstrations which people were taken to by force. In the afternoon and night of the day of the second round, the squares of the country were filled by the "losers", whereas the "winners" could only meet in a few corners and Fujimori did not appear to celebrate his "triumph".

The Constitution recognizes the right of insurgency against an illegitimate government. We are living through the final days of Fujimorismo. Fujimorista masses are not seen, although they are there as a minority, but they are not used to mobilizing, the pro-government assemblies have always been prefabricated. However anti-dictatorship people are in the streets, sometimes attacking the police. We know that these demonstrations cannot continue indefinitely, but the people will know how to organize itself, how to fight in a more prolonged resistance. The people have taken Toledo as a flag, but a great part of them are not necessarily Toledista, they are anti-Fujimorist, anti-dictatorial and anti-

neoliberal. That is what worries imperialism.

The peaceful replacement of Fujimori by Toledo is one thing, another would be Toledo's coming to power on the back of the people in movement – the peasants, the students, the pensioners, have made him make commitments. If he does not fulfill them, the movement will continue. That also worries imperialism. One neoliberal lamented: "Fujimori is to neoliberalism what Sendero is to the left". Fujimori destroys the image of democratic neoliberalism. Today we read in the newspaper that a father, dismissed from a privatized company, seeing himself without work, tubercular and in poverty, poisoned himself and his four daughters. We do not want that to happen again, and for that reason we have risen. ★

* Hugo Blanco is one of the historic leaders of the Latin American revolutionary left. He is a leader of the Confederacion Campesina del Peru (see interview in IV no 321, May 2000).



Primaries in Porto Alegre

THE primary elections to choose the Workers' Party (PT) candidate for the mayorship of Porto Alegre, Brazil's "capital of democracy" in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, took place in a tense climate on April 9, 2000.

LUÍZ MARQUES*

THE contenders were the current mayor Raul Pont, the first assistant José Fortunati and former mayor Tarso Genro.¹

The process mobilized the PT's militants and sympathizers and contributed to politically legitimate the choice of Tarso Genro. The PT thus comes out reinforced for an electoral confrontation in which the conservative camp is finding it difficult to define its candidates. The sad aspect of the story is that, in various aspects, the political victory of the PT choosing its representative for the October election went hand in hand with the risk of a serious cultural defeat in relation to the fashion of making policy followed by the right-wing in our country.

Seduction

The processes of seduction of the electorate used to accumulate votes through the transport of voters in rented buses and paid meals, like the participation of hundreds of electoral organizers² coming from remote municipalities (in particular Gravataí) to give spectacular dimensions to the campaign and the stuffing of ballot boxes, showed that the PT in the capital of democracy is also threatened by anti-democratic methods. Such is the specter that we must vanquish in our political practice henceforth, although this specter cannot be used to challenge the cleanness and the honesty of the majority choice.

As Raoul Pont stressed after the final

★ Brazil

calculation of the votes, “the problems which have occurred did not alter the final result, but deeply disturbed our relations in the party and must be discussed internally”. Thus, the relations between militants in the party are no longer the ethical and moral anticipation of the future that we want for all citizens. Worse: they run the risk of reflecting in an uncritical way the mentality of “what is good is what works” stimulated by neoliberalism.

The process of the primary elections in Porto Alegre closed a cycle of illusions in the imagination of the militants of left. It is not true that the PT *gaucho*³ is immunized against the ideological degeneration affecting the left in the contemporary world, which, in a vertiginous way, relegates principles to the second level in the name of a pragmatism directed by a “policy of results” in accordance with the dominant rules of the game.

Depoliticization

The increasing depoliticization of the PT during elections — no longer characterized by the necessary programmatic debate between militants, increasingly treated as spectators to decisions taken by the leadership — reveals that the global adaptation of the left to the limits of capitalism has been facilitated by the processes legitimized by the national leadership of the PT itself. The means, in this way, absorb and compromise the ends. In this atmosphere, it is impossible that the defects of the traditional policy should not affect Rio Grande do Sul, although to an incomparably lesser degree than other States, like Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo, for example.

The difference, however, is quantitative and not qualitative. In the municipalities and at state level, the PT *gaucho* is the administrative symbol of humanity’s fight against neoliberalism in political terms, because it continues to base itself on popular participation in policies opposed to privatization and social exclusion. But it should not be seen as an invulnerable fortress against the assaults of the dominant wisdom, in cultural terms. Such is the best lesson of the primary elections for the militants of left: the political (in the short run) and cultural (in the medium and long terms) maintenance of the socialist origins of the party, against the social-democratic inflections of which it is currently victim, is a national and not only regional task.

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

fsm2001@uol.com.br

Porto Alegre, Brazil

January 25-30, 2001

THE World Social Forum will be a new international arena for organizing against neoliberal policies and for building economic alternatives that prioritize social justice.

It will take place every year in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, during the same period as the World Economic Forum, which happens in Davos, Switzerland, at the end of January. Since 1971, The World Economic Forum has played a key role in formulating neoliberal policies throughout the world. It’s sponsored by a Swiss organization that serves as a consultant to the United Nations and it’s financed by more than one thousand corporations.

The World Social Forum will provide a space for building economic alternatives, for exchanging experiences and for strengthening South-North alliances between NGOs, unions and social movements. It will also be an opportunity for developing concrete actions, to educate the public, and to mobilize civil society internationally.

The World Social Forum developed as a consequence of a growing international movement that has gained greater visibility since the mobilizations against the Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI), which happened in Europe in 1998, the demonstrations in Seattle, during the WTO meeting in 1999, and the recent protests against the IMF and the World Bank in Washington, DC, among others.

For decades, these international financial institutions have been making decisions that affect the lives of people all over the world, without being subject to any sort of democratic control. People in Third World countries, as well as the poor and excluded sectors of industrialized countries suffer the devastating effects of economic globalization and the dictatorship of international institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO and the governments that serve their interests.

We need to continue pressuring these institutions to be accountable to our societies. Similarly, our governments must be made aware that this oversight will be exercised with increasing intensity over their actions. Many of us have struggled in our own countries, regions, or cities, thinking that we were isolated. Recently, we have begun to realize that together we can constitute a planetary archipelago of resistance. The World Social Forum represents a new opportunity toward the construction of an international counter-power.

Brazil is one of the countries that has been greatly affected by neoliberal policies. At the same time, different sectors of Brazilian society are resisting these policies, in rural and urban areas, in shantytowns, factories, political parties, churches, schools, etc. The richness of Brazilian grassroots organizations represents a source of inspiration for the development of the World Social Forum.

The Brazilian Organizing Committee invites international networks of NGOs, unions and social movements to help us build the World Social Forum. We hope to receive support from organizations in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe with a commitment to contribute with this organizing process and to send delegations to Porto Alegre in January.

We are asking for a special commitment from organizations in the First World to help funding delegations from their partner organizations in Third World countries, in order to guarantee diversity within the World Social Forum.

The World Social Forum will represent a historic moment for organizing and social change. Let’s build it together! ★

Brazilian Organizing Committee: The Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (Associação Brasileira de Organizações Não Governamentais, ABONG); Action for the Taxation of International Financial Transaction in Support of Citizens (Ação pela Tributação das Transações Financeiras em Apoio aos Cidadãos, ATTAC-BR); The Brazilian Commission of Justice and Peace (Comissão Brasileira de Justiça e Paz); CIVES - Brazilian Association of Businesses for Citizenry; The Central Union Federation (Central Única dos Trabalhadores, CUT); IBASE - Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Analysis; Global Justice Center (Centro de Justiça Global); The Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, MST)

None of the historic virtues of the old PT *gaúcho* can survive if they are not articulated nationally with changes in the principal vector of the party. That the organizations of the left are nevertheless directed towards a regionalistic pragmatism is a sign that they have lost during these primaries the principal (national) reference of the objectives pursued by the party. They repeated, voluntarily or involuntarily, the traditional error of reformism; to take the short cut of inconsistency at a time when the path reaches a crossroads. In this way, intending to take a step forward, they made two backward.

Watchdogs

An internal tendency in the PT, Socialist Democracy (DS), to which vice-governor Miguel Rosseto belongs, has been identified by the media "watchdogs" of the bourgeoisie as controlling the greatest number of positions of responsibility in the state administration. That the facts contradict the assertion does not matter. Inside and outside the party, the "hegemonist intentions of the DS" have been invoked to disqualify the pre-candidature of Raul Pont.

This fallacious argument pins on DS all the collective responsibility for the government of a state cut to pieces by the preceding administration of the PMDB; encircled by a media monopoly; with a majority of hostile deputies in the legislative assembly and confronted with tensions with public servants, particularly education workers. Thus the electoral defeat of DS and its allied currents has been interpreted by the media and the enemies of the popular and democratic camp as a political defeat of the government of Olívio Dutra.

The PT in Porto Alegre has opted for Tarso Genro, the candidate they consider as the most adequate to win the forthcoming ballot. He can transform into reality the fourth mandate of the PT and the Frente Popular in the capital of democracy, where around 70% of the electorate still approve of the current administration. The struggle continues! Until victory! ★

*Luiz Marques is deputy secretary for culture of the government of Rio Grande do Sul, of which Porto Alegre is the capital.

1. Raul Pont, currently mayor of Porto Alegre, is a member of the Socialist Democracy tendency of the Workers' Party (PT).

2. Electoral organizers paid for by the candidates are typical of the Brazilian bourgeoisie but have not until now been employed within the PT.

3. Gaúcho is the term used to refer to the cowherders of southern Brazil and Uruguay. By extension the population of the whole state of Rio Grande do Sul are known as gaúchos.

Three questions about imperialism

GILBERT Achcar teaches at the University of Paris VIII in Saint-Denis and the American University of Paris. He has recently edited "The Legacy of Ernest Mandel" (Verso). This interview appeared in the first issue (June 2000) of the new Greek radical left monthly *Manifesto*, whose editors we thank for providing it.

INTERVIEW

■ **CRITICS of NATO's policy of expansion towards the East have advanced the argument that this will lead Russia to strengthen its collaboration with China. On the other hand the partisans of enlargement have stressed the necessity of protecting eastern Europe against a resurgence of Russian imperial ambitions. What is your position on this subject ?**

I am firmly in agreement with the former view. The perspective of a Sino-Russian rapprochement no longer amounts to speculation on the future. Already, Russia has become China's purveyor by appointment in the area of sophisticated military material (planes, submarines, destroyers, and so on).

In fact, Moscow now provides Beijing with the kind of armaments that the Soviet Union used to refuse to its most faithful allies. This does not correspond only to an economic interest for Russia, for whom arms are, with hydrocarbons, the only immediately solvent products on the world market.

It is clear that the fact of being the purveyor by appointment to a country in high-tech arms creates strategic links wholly more significant than those that result from the sale of mobile phones. These links are strengthening on the basis of an increasingly sharp political convergence between the two countries: Moscow and Peking denounce together US "hegemonism" and the temptation of a "unipolar world".

They support each other mutually (Chechnya, Taiwan, and so on), and both have privileged links with the states that Washington qualifies as rogue states, like

Milosevic's Yugoslavia, Iran, and so on.

This is the normal consequence of a western policy still based de facto on the containment of Russia and China.

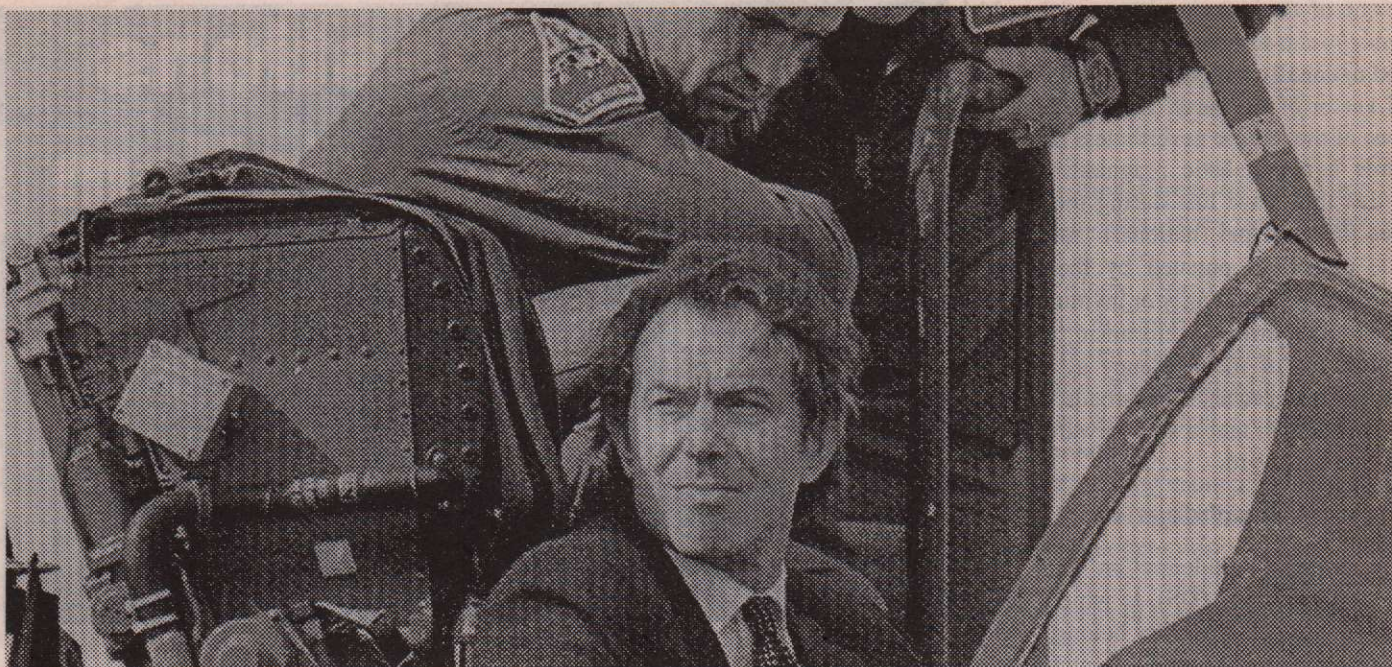
As to the argument about Russia's imperial ambitions, I would say two things: on the one hand, that it amounts quite obviously to a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that the more Russia feels threatened, the more it will have a tendency to tighten its control on its traditional imperial borderlands.

In this sense, the war in Chechnya is the natural consequence of the Kosovo war! On the other hand, are those who oppose Russia's imperial ambitions motivated by noble and humanitarian feelings? Only simpletons could believe such balderdash. The imperial ambitions of the one are no more legitimate than those of the other. All are equally execrable, and they feed off each other.

■ **Can we fight these contradictory imperial ambitions by rejecting them equally? Isn't it necessary to exploit the contradictions between them, supporting the weaker against the strong?**

That would amount to supporting Russia and China against NATO. I think that this type of argument, the famous argument of the main enemy and the secondary enemy, is particularly pernicious.

To identify with one of the existing camps by considering its aims as legitimate, to support a policy pursuing illegitimate goals under the pretext that it was opposed to other illegitimate aims of a bigger power, would be completely wrong. To identify with the victims of the two



Tony Blair: central to EU military strategy

camps, as much with the Iraqi and Serb peoples (the peoples not the governments) as with the Chechnyan and Tibetan peoples, is the only attitude that can form the basis of a consistent policy of opposition to all world hegemony. It is necessary, against all imperial ambitions of every kind, to defend the progressive principles of international law: the right of peoples to self-determination, sovereign equality of states, prohibition of any use of force in violation of international law, and so on.

And to promote these principles, it is necessary to defend a policy of world disarmament and the elimination of tensions. It is in this framework that it is necessary not only to oppose the enlargement of NATO to the East, but also to demand the dissolution of NATO, all the more so in that it has been reconverted from a defensive alliance into an interventionist organization.

It is true however that the most dangerous policy for world peace today is that of the USA, which should on those grounds be the main but not the exclusive target of the international peace movement.

We only have to see how the US seeks, at present, to revise or abrogate the ABM treaty limiting the deployment of antimissile networks, at the very moment that the Russian Duma has ratified the START-II treaty for the reduction of strategic nuclear weapons.

The US plans for the deployment of anti-missile networks on US territory and in Northeast Asia are likely to considerably heighten tensions between

Washington on the one hand and Moscow and Peking on the other.

■ **The creation of a European army is now on the agenda of the European Union. Do you believe that western Europe is ready to “free itself” from the military tutelage of the United States? What is the US attitude on this subject?**

We should first get things in their correct proportions. The European summit at Helsinki decided to establish a European capacity for the deployment of 60,000 soldiers in 60 days and to maintain this strength for a duration of one year, which implies the mobilization of more than 60,000 soldiers taking rotations into account.

This is certainly not negligible, but it is far from being a “European army” which would suppose in the first place air strike capabilities. It amounts only to a force of intervention in the framework of operations of the “peacekeeping” type, in the manner of the troops currently deployed in Kosovo.

The experience of Kosovo was moreover one of the main motivations for the decision taken at Helsinki: the European members of NATO can hardly provide the contingents that they had committed themselves to deliver, at the very moment when pressure is growing in the US for a withdrawal of US troops from Kosovo.

This is also what explains why Washington is pleading constantly for the reinforcement of the European capacities of intervention: the whole experience of

Bosnia was already there to show the serious consequences of European impotence in a situation where US intervention was blocked by a Congress which was hostile to it.

That is why Washington wants its European partners to increase their military expenditure and their capacity of autonomous intervention. Nonetheless, for Washington, this autonomous capacity should be exerted in the framework of NATO, as the “European pillar” of the Alliance, and should only intervene with the blessing of the US.

And it is there that the tensions are felt between Washington and some European capitals, Paris in particular, who would like to supplement their technical autonomy with an independence of political decision-making, by which the European Union could decide on certain interventions without reference to Washington.

But as yet things are far from that. A lot more would be needed for the European armies to be able to emerge from the US infrastructure available in the framework of NATO. And moreover it is quite difficult to believe that someone like Tony Blair, who has been completely central to the decision to set up this EU force, is motivated by a desire for “emancipation” from the military tutelage of the United States.

Those who believe they can combat US hegemony by calling for the strengthening of the European power only contribute to the strengthening of the global Western power against the rest of the world. ★

Existential dilemmas for a traumatised left

OBTAINING between them almost 87% of the vote, the two big parties, PASOK and New Democracy, dominated the Greek general elections of April 9. Although this high percentage was not new, it represented an absolute innovation this time for two reasons: a) because there no had been significant polarization between these two parties and b) because their respective programs resembled each other like two peas in a pod

GEORGE MITRALIAS*

THE figure of 87% is then politically significant given the general political calm, which contrasted with the traditional passionate rivalry between the electorates of the two big Greek parties. It is a clear and overwhelming vote in favor of their common orientation, that is in favor of the neoliberal policies accompanying Greece's (imminent) entry into European economic and monetary union.

In spite of the successive waves of big popular mobilizations during the arrest and trial in Turkey of the Kurdish militant Oçalan or the imperialist intervention in Yugoslavia, in spite of the very significant struggles of high-school students, peasants and teachers in the year prior to April 9, Greek society voted practically en bloc in favor of the policies which it seemed so virulently opposed to (according to all the polls, 90-95 % of Greeks opposed NATO's war against Yugoslavia, as well as the presence of NATO in Greece!). This phenomenon deserves explanation.

Blackmail

If one leaves side the usual "analyses" of the "schizophrenia" of the Greek electorate, as well as the denunciation (very justified) of various blackmails exerted especially by PASOK on left voters, it only remains to note that the spirit generated by all these struggles was not translated into votes. The reason is obvious: none the parties of the left was able to "inspire" the voters of the left. This being the case, the two big parties with identical programs were able to profit from the fact that there was no competitor on their left. Their neoliberal project thus appeared credible in the

absence of an adversary and a coherent alternative project. Deprived of any real political expression, the various popular resistances remained atomized and uncoordinated.

The fact that left electors voted without much enthusiasm for PASOK in order to avoid the return of the hard right does not soften the blow; the defeat was crushing, almost "historic". And it does not portend anything good for the period to come.

More concretely, the elections were marked by the resurgence of New Democracy who, obtaining 42.7% and improving its score by 5%, were able to pose as the big "moral" victors in their duel with social democracy. The performance of the traditional formation of the Greek right deserves attention because it witnesses to a progressive slippage of the popular electorate towards the right. According to all the polls, this phenomenon, formerly unthinkable, is due to the erosion of the deep anti-rightist reflexes which existed in Greek society at least since the fall of the dictatorship of the colonels (1974).

Cataclysm

To vote for the right no longer causes "remorse" or existential crisis! The reason for this cataclysmic change is located in the evolution of PASOK. Indeed, it is this party, dominant on the Greek political scene since 1981 (if one excludes the interlude from 1989-1993), which has contributed as much as any other to the "fall of the wall" separating the left from the right. On top of the disillusionment created by the policies followed by the governments

of its founder, Andreas Papandreou, its turn to the right under the leadership of the current Prime Minister, Kostas Simitis, have made the right-left distinction inoperative. It is not a question only of "objective" fact, but of the dominant impression among even the most faithful PASOK voters. According to all the polls, only a minority among them still dares to qualify "their" party as Socialist, while a crushing majority of Greeks of any party now characterize it as an inter-class party "of the center" which follows a neoliberal policy!

Disproportion

Moreover, the disproportion of financial resources between the two great parties was manifest. Thanks to the unrestrained support of big capital and all the media "empires", PASOK's campaign had surpassed that of New Democracy to such an extent that the right dares to speak (with reason) of a true scandal. It is thus not a surprise if, benefiting from the Chiracian accents of its new leader, Kostas Karamanlis, New Democracy was able to capture a large part of the popular discontent. Although every bit as pro-European, pro-NATO and neoliberal as PASOK, New Democracy contested the elections cultivating its traditional profile of a party of the "popular right", not hesitating even to criticize the government for its "servility" towards the European Union, the US and NATO!

In reality the course followed by PASOK is not very original, and its evolution is comparable with that of the majority of European social democratic parties. On the basis of the structural changes in Greek society, the openly neoliberal PASOK of the last decade has kept its hegemony in the trade union movement while loosening its links with its bureaucracies. At the same time, its leadership began its transformation of a "socialist movement", albeit bureaucratized, into an electoral party obeying only its deputies and especially its government. Then it was time to bring to heel the "nostalgics" for a populist past, and all party structures which could serve as transmission belts for

the demands of the rank and file.

The new "standardized" PASOK of Simitis is now aligned with Tony Blair rather than Lionel Jospin. Obviously, such an evolution legitimates the opening of a debate on the nature of PASOK. However, the fact that even under the pressure of blackmail, there are always many people who vote for this party in order to stop the right deserves attention. Although it has been a bourgeois party or rather, a party of Greek and international big capital, for some time, PASOK continues to be different from New Democracy. Its transformation is a process which is not yet over and any final conclusion on its nature remains premature and could have disastrous consequences for the left.

But from now on one thing should be clear: the old internal opposition of the Papandreïsts and other populists and nationalists is so marginalized and discredited that it no longer represents any danger to Simitis and his "modernizers". Any attempt to build a left tendency inside PASOK must necessarily start from other bases and especially not entertain illusions of a return to a mythical past.

Defections

PASOK's victory (43.8%) was made possible thanks to defections from a significant fringe of voters for left parties, the principal losers being the least solid of its components: the DHKKI (Democratic and Social Movement) and Synaspismos (Coalition of the Left and Progress). The result is eloquent; the DHKKI, which got more than 7% at the European elections, fell under 3% and did not elect any deputies. Synaspismos lost 2/5 of its electoral strength and with its 3.2% of votes elected only 6 of the 11 deputies it had previously. As for the KKE (Greek CP), it maintained the bulk of its support (5.5%), although it remains very far from the 8.7% it achieved at the European elections.

The overall result for the parties of left was, then, catastrophic. For the DHKKI, it was predictable since this old left nationalist split from PASOK awaited in vain the transfusion of new blood which was going to come from the explosion of an internal crisis in the latter party. A hybrid formation deprived of cadres, hesitating permanently between its nationalist aspirations and its anti-liberal discourse, the DHKKI is now threatened with extinction.

The case of Synaspismos is rather dif-

ferent. Its defeat is also crushing, but its causes relate to the traditional dilemmas of the reformist left in our time. According to all its organized tendencies, the mass defection of its voters to PASOK is due to its unclear and confused orientations as well as its programme, which remains halfway between clear opposition to and collaboration with the Simitis government. Currently, Synaspismos is now paying dearly for what formerly constituted its strength: its contradictions. Emerging from Greek Eurocommunism, this party offered refuge to a multitude of "dissidents" from the traditional left.

Blur

Ex-Communists, ex-Social Democrats and ex-leftists could all coexist under the same roof, by cultivating the artistic blur which was to lead to the formation of a party without true organization and frontiers, inside which one could find the best and the worst — some social democratic tendencies which flirt with neoliberalism and a heterogeneous "Left Current", which dares to speak (and sometimes to act) on the need for a united front against neoliberalism and imperialism.

And in the middle, a president (Nikos Konstantopoulos) and his faction in permanent and unstable balance, pulled about everywhere by forces that only a miracle could hold together. It is precisely this miracle which is now approaching its end. Synaspismos is now wedged between the KKE and PASOK and is at a crossroads. Its extraordinary congress in June 2000 will test its capacity to survive.

But to do so, Synaspismos must change radically: position itself definitively to "the left of the left", giving up all its moderate and reformist illusions, i.e. rejecting once and for all the temptations of "governability" which periodically transform it into a simple appendix of the PASOK in the eyes of society. Hostage to the illusion that it will be able to take control of the party through its alliance with the "centrists" around the president, the "Left Current" unfortunately does not seem ready to take the step.

However, nothing is given in advance. Much will also depend on initiatives which will come from outside, like the KKE or the extreme left. An affair, then, to follow with the greatest attention, especially as a possible evolution of Synaspismos towards the left will inevitably have repercussions

within the KKE (and vice versa). In reality, in spite of their visceral sectarianism which renders them unattractive and not very credible to the mass of workers and left voters, Synaspismos and KKE resemble more than ever communicating vessels: even the beginning of the radicalization of the one will influence the other. And especially, any position taken by one in favor of unity of action, or better in favor of the united front, will spark off a crisis in the other! Both parties have forces inside them who have already shown themselves in favor of a new course for the Greek left as a whole. This is also true for the myriad far left organizations who saw their electoral influence reaching a historic low (no more than 0.12% for each of them).

Demoralized

Having witnessed the development of the KKE which was able to capture the youth radicalization, the main Marxist-Leninist organizations and especially the NAR (which emerged from a split in the KKE's youth organization in 1990) are currently completely disorientated and demoralized. Their persistence in the practice of unlimited sectarianism and/or delirious leftist triumphalism will seal not only their disappearance, but also the final loss of hundreds of militants devoted to the cause of the anti-capitalist struggle. It is in this context of defeat and general demoralization that revolutionaries must work as a priority for unity of action and the recomposition of the Greek left.

Already voices are being heard almost everywhere against sectarianism and in favor of coming together, collaboration, unity and debate. Part of the far left (including OKDE-Spartakos, the Greek section of Fourth International) is active on the ground in favor of this coordination and recomposition. Militants or currents coming from Synaspismos, the KKE and the far left have also come together around the project of a common monthly review. This review, to be called *Manifesto*, will appear in June and could be useful as a framework for this much needed dialogue, but also as a kind of "collective organizer" and point of reference for all those who want to fight together against neoliberal aggression.

All things considered, in the grimness of the Greek political scene, there is a beginning of hope. ★

*Georges Mitrailias is a journalist.

No to Eppawala!

IN a landmark judgement in June the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka temporarily blocked a controversial mining project of a US trans-national in a victory for an environmental campaign uniting the affected people, environmental and religious groups, and the country's leading private sector trade union, the Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers Union (C.M.U.).

B. SKANTHAKUMAR

ANY future exploratory work and negotiations between the Sri Lankan government and IMC Agrico for a phosphate project must await a comprehensive environmental impact assessment and farther scientific evidence. The Court has also ordered the public disclosure of the draft investment agreement between the parties, which was kept secret.

In 1993 the previous government began talks with IMC-Agrico for the exploitation of phosphate (an ingredient in the production of chemical fertilisers) near a small town called Eppawala, in the remote North-Central province of the country. In spite of promises made during the 1994 general election campaign, the present government continued secretive negotiations and on at least one occasion the president herself had directly intervened to speed it up.

Archaeological sites

Eppawala is in an area of historical and cultural importance dotted with numerous archaeological sites and is today farmed by peasants cultivating paddy rice, coconut and market vegetables.

Local people do not object to the extraction of phosphate, which a state-owned company has been doing anyway since 1977. This small-scale mining of low-grade phosphate for the domestic fertiliser industry is a sustainable operation and ensures there will be deposits for the next 200 years. They do object to the proposed project which aims to exhaust the entire reserve within 30 years, will cause massive ecological and human dislocation, and is being undertaken by a company with a record of environmental crime.

About 12,000 peasants will be displaced from the area, 54 villages with their homes, schools and temples must be aban-

doned, six miles of the Jaya Ganga (river) dried up, water supplies inevitably polluted by effluents and the eco-system with its flora and fauna lost forever.

Project

The project includes the construction of a processing plant in the Eastern port of Trincomalee. The government has agreed to alienate 450 acres of land in that area for the dumping of radio-active waste generated, with neither consultation nor due care for the people of Trincomalee.

In Eppawala itself, besides the 56 square kilometres of the "exploration area", 300 acres of land to the east will be reserved for the company and the mine itself surrounded by a ten kilometre buffer zone. Therefore bringing the total land grab in that area to 800 square kilometres!

Critics of the scheme point to the appalling record of IMC Agrico's parent companies (IMC Global and Freeport McMoran) in other parts of the world where they have ruined the natural environment, violated human rights and been deaf to the demands for justice of communities.

In Florida, IMC Global has an appalling record in phosphate mining where it has wreaked devastation on 200,000 acres as well as polluted waterways in the Everglades, in defiance of United States environmental standards and regulatory agencies

far tougher than those in Sri Lanka.

West Papua

In West Papua, Freeport McMoran has for thirty years operated the world's largest copper and gold mine. The Indonesian army act as security guards, the nearest town is a de-facto military encampment to protect the mine, and local people have been killed, tortured, raped and intimidated because of their consistent opposition to the mining. The Amungme people has been dispossessed of their lands, denied access to its resources, their river and water system polluted by tailings from the mine, and the Jayawijaya mountain which is sacred to them decapitated and now disembowelled in the greed for gold.

A class action suit has been filed by Amungme leaders in the U.S. courts against Freeport McMoran but the firm has powerful friends. Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is a Director and lobbied successfully for it at a private meeting last year in Jakarta with Indonesian president Abdurahman Wahid.

The suffering of the West Papuans is a familiar story to the people of Eppawala through an Australian Broadcasting Corporation documentary, *Blood on the Cross*. This film has also been shown at meetings throughout Sri Lanka.

Over the last five years the Committee



★ Sri Lanka

to Protect Eppawala Phosphate, has protested the re-colonisation of their region. Its spokesperson is a Buddhist priest, M. Piyarathana Thero, who has made alliances not only with environmental and religious organisations but also with the scientific community, trade unionists, the Left & Democratic Alliance and international environmental groups.

While there have been significant environmental campaigns in Sri Lanka over the past decade, none have matched this one in its mobilisation of the affected community, its breadth of support and the coalition created. Credit for which belongs to the priest, according to C.M.U. leader Bala Tampoe who has hailed him as "the most unique person whom I have come across" in his fifty year trade union career.

Death threats

Facing down death threats, disapproval from the Buddhist hierarchy and a demotion by his Order, he has led demonstrations and protests including at the regional city of Anuradhapura in February 1998 when 20,000 supporters staged a sit-in and fast and most recently this year on March 30 in a 10,000 strong mass picket and impromptu demonstration in the capital city, Colombo, which is a great distance from Eppawala. In solidarity with that protest there was a half-day work stoppage by C.M.U. members in workplaces in and around Colombo.

There is growing international awareness of the campaign too. In March, Bala Tampoe testified on its behalf at a hearing of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal on Global Corporations and Human Wrongs, held at Warwick University in England.

In Japan, where the campaign has focused on a minority shareholder in the Eppawala project, the Tomen Corporation informed activists that it is reconsidering its participation since the Supreme Court ruling. A conference in Japan including representatives from the Sri Lankan Committee was scheduled for June to publicise the issues better.

Even in the euphoria of the legal ruling the Eppawala Committee knows that the struggle is far from over and that the government cannot be trusted to protect the interests of its people over those of transnationals. Minister of Science and Technology, Batty Weerakoon who is also leader of the left-wing Lanka Sama Samaja Party, has claimed that the government will

Sri Lanka Press Council equates lesbianism with sadism [BS]

THE Sri Lanka Press Council has outraged human rights activists in a disgraceful ruling on June 2 which condones an incitement to rape lesbians and which brands lesbianism "an act of sadism" and an offence under the penal code. The Council, which is the regulatory body for the Sri Lankan print media, had been asked to adjudicate on the conduct of an English-language daily newspaper which in August last year published a letter calling upon the police to let loose convicted rapists on a proposed lesbian conference in Colombo (that conference, which would have been the first in South Asia, was postponed when its timing clashed with snap Presidential elections and it is now scheduled for later this year). While that letter appeared without comment by the newspaper, it refused to publish a letter of reply by "Companions On a Journey" (COJ), which is a Sri Lankan organisation working on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention as well as lesbian and gay rights. Sherman De Rose, Director of COJ, approached the Press Council arguing that his right to free expression had been denied. Unfortunately its intervention has set back the human rights agenda in Sri Lanka and legitimised hate crimes against lesbians and gays. Not only did the Council find against the complainant (and fine him), it then went on in violation of its mandate and powers to offer its opinion on the content of the letter and the general subject of homosexuality. While conceding that the letter encouraged rape, the Council argued that it was only the writer manifesting his disapproval of lesbianism. The Council then scolded De Rose for encouraging and promoting "abnormal or immoral acts" and for denying the right of others to criticise homosexuality. Its final insult was to conclude that as De Rose is male and would not have been harmed or in danger of being harmed he had no standing before the Council on the issue! In fact De Rose responds he was only asserting his equal right to free expression and asking the Council to take action against the incitement to violence against women which is a criminal act. There has been no comment or action taken by the Media Minister, Mangala Samaraweera, to whom the Press Council is accountable, and whose own sexual orientation is well known. ★

"Companions On a Journey" request letters of protest to:

The Chairman
Sri Lanka Press Council
No. 346 Nawala Road
Rajagiriya
Sri Lanka

FAX: 00-94-1-876-511 or 00-94-1-876-512

and

Minister of Posts, Telecommunications and Media,
West Tower
World Trade Centre
Echelon Square
Colombo-01
Sri Lanka
Fax 00-94-1-440-488

not continue negotiations with IMC Agrico, but has also said that he cannot be responsible if the Cabinet changes that decision!

Trade unionist Bala Tampoe protests, "The government has absolutely no right to barter the rights and future of the people of Eppawala and this country to any glob-

al corporation," adding, "this is a crime which we must prevent by national action with international support." Meanwhile Piyarathana Thero vows a campaign of mass resistance to prevent the passage of any earth-moving machinery to the area. "We will not kill," he says, "but we are willing to die". ★

THE continuing chaos in Mindanao has attracted great attention not only in the Philippines but also in the entire world. The decision of the Philippine state to launch an all out war against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is the main reason the Mindanao trouble has erupted.

But the situation became complicated and more confused when the Abu Sayyaf group kidnapped not only local residents but also international tourists. This incident is not co-incidence but a part of the over-all scheme of the Estrada regime.

Basically, the all out war is the decisive use of all the weapons and armaments of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to wipe out the MILF and other revolutionary groups that have become an impediment to the economic interests of the ruling class in Mindanao and in the Philippines.

The role of Abu Sayyaf

The all out war carried out by the Estrada government as the solution to Mindanao problem was implemented with due consideration to all the lessons they learned from the past. The ground, air and naval assaults against Camp Abubakar, the MILF's biggest camp, fitted in very well with the Abu Sayyaf's kidnapping and terrorist activities. The purpose of Abu Sayyaf is to sabotage the struggle of the MILF and the Bangsamoro in general by ensuring that the sympathy and the popular support of the masses will not go to the MILF, while international Islamic communities would be too confused or divided to support the MILF and the struggle of the Bangsamoro for the right to self-determination.

Let us review the packaging of the military offensive launched by the AFP against the MILF: before the military launched its offensive against Camp Abubakar, in the guise of clearing the Narciso Ramos Highway, there was first a series of bombings all over Mindanao (later in part extended to Metro Manila), which the AFP was quick to blame on the MILF. Again, before the military attacked the Narciso Ramos Highway where the MILF established their military check-points there was the kidnapping of the foreign tourists by the Abu Sayyaf group in a world class diving resort in Sabah Malaysia.

This incident fuels again the sensitive

War continues in Mindanao

WHILE the hostages held by the Abu Sayyaf group have still not been freed, the Philippine army is pursuing its offensive in Mindanao against the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front — see *IV* 321, May 2000). According to local sources, several hundred thousand people have been made refugees in the central region of Mindanao following this brutal offensive. Bases of the Revolutionary Workers' Party of the Philippines (RPMP — an organisation which has observer status in the Fourth International) located in the centre of Mindanao are also directly threatened by the army and are having to cope with influxes of refugees. The sections of the Fourth International have launched a fund drive to aid the RPMP in its attempts to protect the civilian population and help the refugees. Send contributions to the IIRF (mention "Philippines fund"), account number 630-0113884-65 at the Caisse Privée Banque, place Champs de Mars 2, Brussels, Belgium.

We print here an analysis of the Mindanao conflict based on RPMP documents. ★

issue of the so-called Muslim-Christian conflict. In this context, the AFP justified its offensive against the MILF and has tried to get the support of the media, Congress, the local populace and the international community.

Afghan origins

The Abu Sayyaf group originated among Moro people in the Southern Philippines that were trained in Afghanistan by the United States to fight against the Russian military forces. Almonte, the former military adviser of Fidel Ramos, who is connected to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), was responsible for forming this group. Edwin Angeles, the former tactician of the Abu Sayyaf who was killed in his house with his family after his release from jail, was a military agent. The other leaders of this group were confirmed as military agents, one is an army captain and the other two are military sergeants.

Janjalani Khadaffi, one of the known leaders who escaped from his cell last year in dubious circumstances, had frequently been seen meeting with General Panfilo Lacson, the new National Police chief. It is reported that a certain army general is the handler of commander Robot, one of the

military leaders of Abu Sayyaf who kidnapped the foreign tourists.

After the killing of the Abu Sayyaf founder-leader Abdul Rajak Janjanlani and the killing of other leaders by the military this group was silent. The AFP declared last year that the group was finished. But surprisingly in the first quarter of this year Abu Sayyaf reemerged with more kidnapping and terrorist activities that victimize both Moro and Christian innocent civilians alike. The terrorist activities of the group fueled anew the so-called Muslim-Christian conflict.

This has been used by the military as a pretext to reestablish the dreaded fanatical and armed vigilante groups throughout Mindanao to fight against the Moro rebels and the Bangsamoro.

Economic interests

Mindanao's development framework is anchored to the globalization program especially in relation to the BIMP-EAGA (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines-East Asian Growth Area) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). These are manifested in the following development projects: the 25,000 hectares sugar plantation and sugar central at Maguindanao; the 100,000 hectares palm-

oil plantation at Lanao and oil basins in the provinces of Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat and South and North Cotabato; and hundreds of thousands of hectares of gold and copper mining in the Western Mindanao region and elsewhere. Not to mention the remaining vast hectares of fertile agricultural lands, forest and seashores. *Moreover, all development aid to Mindanao is directed to pave the way for foreign investors and to facilitate the massive integration of the island in the global economy.*

The integration of Mindanao in the neo-liberal globalization process is the priority for the ruling class and key to the economic development of the Philippine nation, especially the BIMP-EAGA and its strategic role in the comprehensive economic-political interest of the US and big capitalist states in the Asia-Pacific.

So, in order to effectively and systematically implement the program of globalization, it needs to destroy and to smash all forces that impede it. The areas where the economic projects are located and subject to foreign capitalist exploitation are areas where the revolutionary armed forces are basing and operating, such as the MILF, the New Peoples Army (NPA), or the RPA-ABB.

Oppression and exploitation

The problem of Mindanao is mainly based on a long history of oppression and exploitation by the imperialist nations, using the Philippine state against the Moro people as well as the Filipino and Lumad peoples. History has shown, especially during the time of the Marcos dictatorship, that the military solution is not the answer to the Mindanao problem. Even the AFP have stated that military means are not the main answer to solve the insurgency problem; the socio-economic problems of the people must be addressed. Needless to say, the Estrada regime is expected to blindly continue with its all out military solution to the Mindanao problem.

History shows that while both the colonial and neo-colonial states have failed to address the basic problems and issues of Mindanao, the armed and non-armed struggles of the three peoples (Moro, Lumad and Filipino) have continued to persist. The Estrada regime has been trying to solve the problem through economic means, for example the "angit pinoy" program, but failed since it has no clear cut

NEWS FROM THE RPMP

RECENT reports from the Revolutionary Workers' Party of the Philippines (RPMP) indicate that military operations in different areas of Mindanao are still intensifying. The AFP's objective is to capture more MILF camps to project a picture of military victory but at the same time to prepare for the impending ceasefire that might result because of the pressures on the Estrada administration from all sides. So if there is a ceasefire tomorrow, the AFP will be in the positions previously held by the MILF. However, the MILF has not been following the conventional/positional warfare. They have shown that they can tactically abandon their camps and reclaim them later. The MILF has strongly suggested also that the next talks with the government will be in July. So what will happen to the June 30 deadline set for the peace talks by the Estrada government?

The influential Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and the Business Group have been pressing the Estrada government to extend the deadline. The OIC (Organisation of Islamic Congress) met in Kuala Lumpur and the Mindanao crisis and the MILF position were discussed. The so-called internal conflicts will be internationalized. The MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front) through Nur Misuari (and with the blessing of the government) has tried to sabotage the MILF international offensive but without success. Misuari has tried to block the entry of the MILF as an observer in the OIC but appears to have failed in this goal. The RPMP is currently involved in the second round of peace talks with the government.

The talks are sponsored by religious groups.

During the May 1 (Labor Day) Celebration the RPMP was able to initiate the broadest mobilizations composed of the five biggest coalitions of labor in the history of the country (including a progressive section of the TUCP), of around seventy thousand (70,000) workers. The party has also launched a National Congress of the Rural Poor and next month is launching a National Machinery for Electoral and Parliamentary Struggle.

The RPMP has also recently concluded the fifth plenum of its 1st party Congress. Among the items discussed were the peace talks and the situation in Mindanao. A document is to be produced containing a new analysis of the national situation with the Mindanao crisis as the main consideration. ★

economic development program and economic and political structures are defective and biased to foreign capitalists. When Estrada's popularity dived sharply he easily gave in to the dictats of the militarist people surrounding him. Now, the military solution became a key factor and a short cut towards developing Mindanao and forcibly integrating it to the global economy.

Teaching a lesson

Even though the Estrada regime knows that all out war is not the right solution to the Mindanao problem it continues implementing it because it wants to teach a lesson to all armed revolutionary groups. If the government, for example, could pin

down and crush the MILF, this will serve as a message to other revolutionary forces that want to topple the administration.

But in the long and rich history of the revolutionary struggle throughout the world, the military approach has always failed to stop the mass struggle of the people.

Never in history have the revolutionary forces born out of the oppression and exploitation of the masses stopped because of all out military war waged by the state. Only solving the basic problems of the people and putting an end to the oppression and exploitation of the masses can create a situation where genuine revolutionary forces and mass struggle fade away and lose their grounds of existence. ★

India's nuclear question

■ **IT seemed at the end of the cold war that the nuclear question was not so important anymore. What happened?**

PB: There were positive developments: a new kind of movement emerged on nuclear disarmament, not just around arms control. Nuclear weapons were reduced from 70,000-100,000 at the peak around 30,000. Tactical nuclear weapons were removed from warships, even though this was not formalised by treaty. Three countries abandoned nuclear weapons; Byelorussia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, while South Africa, Brazil and Argentina pulled back from threshold status. Two nuclear weapons free zones were set up in South East Asia and in Africa.

These were positive developments but in the last two or three years things have almost ground to a halt. You had a series of negative developments: in 1995 indefinite extension of the Non Proliferation Treaty, then there was the expansion of NATO, then of course the India/Pakistan tests.

If there was to be one simple one line answer as to why this has happened it is that after the end of the cold war, in the game of nations, the United States has emerged as the unrivalled dominant power.

What you now have in the US is the emergence of a strong, aggressive unilateral, isolationist approach which says: "we're the top dog and nobody else can rival us. To justify the retention of nuclear weapons they invent all sorts of rogue states.

Now the crucial issue, apart from the US senate non-ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) is the whole question of the National Ballistic Missile Defence. This is justified with rhetoric – we want to make the United States of America safe in this particular way and we're going to go ahead – we don't care what other countries want whether its Russia or the Chinese or anybody else. Behind this is a deeper ambition of trying to control space – the United States is now dominant and pretty sure of dominance for the future – and space is also a domain that it wants to move towards. That's the kind of political perspective I think is driving the situation.

■ **There is some debate about how**

ACHIN Vanaik and Praful Bidwal are leading Indian anti-nuclear campaigners. Terry Conway interviewed them for the British socialist newspaper *Socialist Outlook* during their recent visit to London

INTERVIEW

much the Indian/Pakistan tests came out of a continuity of Indian policy and how much they represented a rupture. Could the tests only have happened under a BJP government?

AV: Its hard to speculate about what might have been – I think its more productive to say that there was both continuity and a rupture. There was continuity in the preparations. From the 60s onwards India started to acquire a nuclear weapons capability and then to upgrade. Capability was established and demonstrated in May 1974 when India conducted its first nuclear test. However they claimed, disingenuously, that this was "a peaceful explosion".

Way back in the 50s, India built a nuclear reactor called Sirius – the Canada/India research reactor. This was funded partly by the US who donated the heavy water – and the Canadians designed it. The Indian government signed an agreement with Canada and the US which said that the products of Sirius would only be used for peaceful purposes.

But then, against this agreement, they used the product in the 1974 tests which is why they claimed it was a "peaceful" test. However having acquired this capability they didn't pursue further testing, nor did they say they were going to make the bomb. In part the continuity can be explained by the very logic of acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. But it is also due to the temptation of successive Indian governments to seek a better bargain within the global nuclear order. This was accompanied by the growing hold of a certain type of nationalism on India society, especially on the Indian elite, through much of the 80s and certainly the 90s.

In this period you saw a marked rightward shift in Indian society and politics under the neo-liberal economic policies

and structural adjustment programmes dictated by the World Bank and the IMF which was gladly accepted by the Indian bourgeoisie as its own agenda. The elite in India began to see itself more and more through a northern prism. It wanted to join the club of major powers and saw nuclear weapons as a short cut.

The rupture of 1998 lies in two things. First a clear break at the level of policy – for 50 years before 1998, India rejected the idea that any nation, any state could acquire security through nuclear weapons. It made a powerful plea before the International Court of Justice as late as 1995 and again before the conference on disarmament in 1996 saying that India is opposed to nuclear weapons because they don't give security – ever. Nuclear deterrence was described as an abhorrent doctrine that is strategically irrational.

Between 74-98, the policy followed was that of nuclear ambiguity – along with active preparations. To move from that ambiguity to exercise of the nuclear option was a rupture. India announced that was developing a fully fledged weapons programme – that it was proceeding to acquire a minimal nuclear deterrent – a small nuclear arsenal with all the command and control systems and all the paraphernalia that goes with it.

The BJP was eager to conduct tests as soon as it acquired power. In the book we point out that in 1996 the BJP came to power for 13 days. It was in a hopeless minority in Parliament and no single party was willing to support it – it was quite clear that the government would collapse.

And yet the BJP's own leadership confirmed later that it had ordered nuclear tests even within that short period – in fact the tests were meant to coincide with the vote of confidence in the government in the lower house. This just shows the utter cynicism of that party. In fact these tests didn't take place because the Department of Atomic Energy wasn't ready with all the preparations.

The second time around that the BJP came to power and within a few days of Vajpayee forming the government he ordered the tests, again before he won a vote of confidence. Again it was not a foregone conclusion that he would win

because in 1998 there was a minority government which fell within a year or so. We know that the tests were conducted without any consultation with the foreign policy or defence establishments – there was no question of any strategic defence review. The army and the services chiefs were not even told about the tests until two days before they took place. The Home Minister and the Defence Minister were kept in the dark until May 11 – the day of the first round of tests.

The BJP have a peculiar obsession with nuclear weapons. The party and its predecessor, the Jan Sangh, have demanded the bomb ever since the early 50s. The Jan Sangh in its very first manifesto demanded that India crossed the nuclear threshold. Of course this had nothing to do with the security environment because China's nuclear tests didn't take place till 1964.

So you have both a continuity of preparation but also a rupture at the doctrinal and political level.

■ **After the tests, what was the response on the ground? Were people shocked that the BJP moved so quickly?**

PB: I think the initial image that that was broadcast all over the world of people dancing in the streets of New Dehli and Lahore was profoundly misleading – a CNN driven image which is sensationalist. That same week many more people protested against the test than the number that celebrated.

People shouldn't have been shocked but many were. After all the BJP promised that if they ever came to power they would go ahead and do it. I suppose people have still not got a handle on the nature of the BJP and if you live outside it is even more difficult to understand. Perhaps one way for an audience in the West to understand what is happening in India is to try to understand that what we are talking about with the BJP and the forces behind it, is that this party we have in power is worse than Jorge Haider's Freedom Party.

What you saw in the media represented a minority of the urban elite but for most people in India nuclear weapons is not an issue that touches them directly in their every day life. Not long after the tests there was a poll that showed that 45% had not even heard about them.

In so far as there was support for the tests, apart from this minority, it was passive support. If you don't have a clear idea of what you think then you take a lead

from those you have some respect for. Given that all the parties apart from sections of Congress and the left said the tests were good then this is bound to have a major impact. But opposition has been growing. There were demonstrations in 35-40 cities in protest. Last year you had the development of a major mass movement called the National Alliance of Peoples Movement (NAPM): an alliance of all kinds of groups some of which have a truly mass base. These include the movement against the Narmada dam and the National Union of Fishworkers with around 8 million members.

In the parliamentary debates that followed the tests in 1998 more than 2/3 of those that spoke opposed the tests – criticised the BJP for imposing its own minority sectarian agenda on the nation. And the BJP had only 23% of the vote so it doesn't represent anything like a large consensus of a broad cross section of public opinion. Its base is confined largely to the North of the country and mainly to the upper and middle castes of Indian society, not to the plebeian masses where it has no particular appeal. It's a very elitist and hierarchically minded religious sectarian right-wing party which has never come anywhere near the Tories for example in terms of its voting base in relatively large chunk of the population.

There were elections for 4 state legislatures soon after the tests and the BJP made those elections into a referendum. It lost those elections very badly with unprecedentedly high margins – so if it was a referendum the verdict was clear.

■ **Can you give a flavour of how the anti-nuclear movement has developed?**

PB: The NAPM, together with many other organisations, organised a three month march from Pokran – the village near where the test site was – to a place of Buddhist pilgrimage more than 1,000 miles away in the east of India. Every day there were people marching – sometimes 20 sometimes 200 – for three months and that gives you an indication of the kind of movement. This autumn we will have a national convention at which 80-100 groups will be represented – a more organised opposition is beginning to stir.

There are two different types of groups involved in the Indian movement. Firstly there are those that have a specific focus against nuclear weapons and also against nuclear energy – many of the groups which

are against nuclear energy are grass roots organisations concerned with the victims of radiation exposure to uranium mining in central India. Like everywhere else all over the world when you are talking about uranium mining its always the indigenous people whether its Australia with the Aborigines, whether it's the United States of America and native Americans or whether it's the tribals in India, they are the ones that are affected. It is their areas where the mining takes place and where the reactor leakages happen.

Then you have a whole other series of groups focused on different issues: women's issues, civil liberties issues, development issues which also see the importance of taking up the nuclear issue.

What we are trying to do is move towards a national network of all types of different groups – and this is a significant development. We should be realistic and realise that at this stage we can't alter government policies on the nuclear question – instead we are attacking the legitimisation of those policies by the government. When we become bigger and stronger then we hope to be able to move on and challenge the basis of the policies themselves.

Since then we've seen much more opposition and I would say that a very large proportion of people in the liberal intelligensia are opposed to the tests. So Arhudita Roy, the Booker prize winner wrote a very good powerful peace on "The Bomb and I" but this is true of other writers.

Behind the BJP's nuclear nationalism and nuclear obsession is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which is an organisation going back to the 20s with a totally and overtly fascist makeup. Its leaders are self confessed admirers of Hitler and Mussolini and of authoritarianism as a political ideology. The RSS controls the BJP ideologically, organisationally and in terms of its political agenda. The RSS's slogan has been "unite the Hindus and militarise Hindu society" and what better way of militarisation than the bomb.

The bomb is the most adequate, the most developed, symbol of a particular kind of macho, aggressive, bellicose, Hindu communal anti Muslim nationalism. There is a broad constituency of opinion in India that opposes that kind of nationalism as well the significant current of opinion that opposes nuclear weapons so there is a potential for much larger scale mobilisations than we have seen so far. ★

Maternity leave in danger

THE International Labour Organization (ILO) is on the point of modifying a convention on the right to maternity leave on the pretext that the existing convention was ratified by a small number of countries.

IN 1952, the ILO adopted Convention number 103 on the protection of maternity. It fixed the following principles: the right to at least 12 weeks maternity leave, the right to medical benefit, absolute protection against dismissal during maternity leave. In June 2000 this Convention is to be revised. Certain revisions suggested by the employers represent a questioning of its spirit.

Thus, according to the Convention, maternity leave "applies to women employed in industrial work as well as women employed in the non-industrial and agricultural sectors, including women working at home". The draft revision would allow a member state "to exclude completely or partially from the field of application... limited categories of workers or enterprises".

Exclusion

Some states could thus exclude certain categories of wage-earner from the enjoyment of maternity leave! The same applies to the duration of maternity leave. The Convention stipulates: "the duration of this leave will be 12 weeks at least ... the duration of the leave obligatorily taken after childbirth... will in no case be lower than 6 weeks".

In the proposed revision this is no longer stipulated: "maternity leave must include a period of obligatory leave, whose duration and distribution must be determined by each member". Another reason for concern: the recommendation which accompanies the draft revision of the convention stipulates; "As much as possible, measures should be taken to ensure that the woman can freely exert her choice with regard to the time she intends to take the non-obligatory part of her maternity leave, before or after childbirth".

In countries with high unemployment rates, the freedom of the wage-earner is a

pure fiction. The revision also opens the way to the dismissal of workers during their maternity leave. Whereas the Convention stipulated that it "is illegal for employers to give notice of dismissal during the said absence [maternity leave or complementary leave]", the draft revision proposes "it is forbidden for the employer to lay off a woman during her pregnancy ... except for reasons unlinked to pregnancy, childbirth and its continuations or breast feeding". In short, dismissal would be possible, it would be enough to search for another reason.

Maternity leave is applied in a very disparate way: certain countries, like Germany, grant 14 weeks at 100% of salary, France 16 weeks at 84%. Other countries like Portugal grant 12 weeks. The women of Switzerland or the countries of the South are deprived of rights. But the suggested revision of the Convention, far

from helping to improve the current situation, opens the way to a levelling down.

In this case, as with the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), only mobilization can prevent social regression. In France, the National Collective for Women's Rights and the French Coordination for the World March have taken up this question. In an appeal they call for the maintenance of the spirit of ILO Convention 103 and demand "a minimum of 16 weeks maternity level; the maintenance of maternity leave for all categories of wage-earner, without exception, including homeworkers and independent workers; the maintenance of the absolute impossibility of dismissal; the maintenance of existing legislation where it is more favourable than the ILO Convention". ★

For further details fax 33/0 1 43 56 36 48 or e-mail <colcadac@club-internet.fr>



Women on the march against poverty and violence!

ON March 8 last, numerous initiatives launched the World March of women against poverty and violence.

Some 4,200 groups are participating in the March, representing 153 countries of which 90 have set up national coordinations, a measure of the success already enjoyed by this initiative, first floated as an idea at the Peking conference.

In May alone there was a national march in Burkina Faso, a week of activities and meetings on the status of women in Niger, and national demonstrations in Haiti and Peru. The big meeting will be on October 17 in New York, where the marchers have set the objective of gaining at least 10,000 signatures in support of their demands. In Europe, meetings have already taken place in Paris, Bordeaux and Geneva. In May a meeting was held in Copenhagen to prepare the march to Brussels which will take place on October 14. A European platform has already been adopted. ★

THIS will be the last number of International Viewpoint before our summer break. We will return in September-October with a special double issue devoted to an analysis of the legacy of Leon Trotsky 60 years after his assassination which no reader of IV should miss! Thanks again to all of our readers for your continued support for this magazine. ★



“THE Legacy of Ernest Mandel” is available at last in English! The volume is a strikingly handsome and sturdy hardcover published by Verso Press. Covering not only Mandel’s pioneering explorations of the economics of late capitalism but also his work on bureaucracy, the transition to socialism and Auschwitz, it is a record of the 1996 founding seminar of the Ernest Mandel Study Centre, edited by Gilbert Achcar and with contributions by Robin Blackburn, Michael Löwy, Michel Husson, Charles Post, Catherine Samary and Norman Geras among others. It also includes several of Mandel’s articles never before available in English.

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