
INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

News & analysis from the Fourth International – June 2008 # 401

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Organisation
Conference: More Free
Trade, More Hunger**



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and the Anti-War
Movement: "The U.S. is
sowing the seeds of a
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the anti-capitalist left: A
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Food and Agriculture Organisation Conference

More Free Trade, More Hunger

Esther Vivas

The high level summit of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (the FAO) held in Rome on Food Security ended on June 5th. The conclusions of the gathering do not indicate a change in the policy trends which have been in force these last years and which have led to the current situation. The declarations of good intentions made by various governments and the promises of millions of euros to end hunger in the world are not capable of ending the structural causes that have generated this crisis.



On the contrary, the proposals made by the general secretary of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon, to increase food production by 50% and to eliminate the export limits imposed by some of the countries affected, only reinforces the root causes of this crisis rather than addressing and guaranteeing the food security of the majority of the people in the global South.

The monopoly of certain multinational corporations in each one of the links in the chain of food production, from seeds to fertilizers to marketing and distribution of what we eat, is something that was not dealt with during this summit. However, despite the crisis, the principle seed companies, Monsanto, DuPont and Syngenta, have realized a growing increase in profits as have the principle chemical fertilizer corporations. The largest food processing companies such as Nestle and Unilever have also announced an increase in benefits, though less large than those who control the first rungs in the food system ladder. In the same way the large distributors of food

such as Wal-Mart, Tesco and Carrefour have confirmed that their profits continue to rise.

The results of the FAO summit reflect the consensus reached among the UN, the World Bank (WB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to maintain economic and trade policies of South-North dependency and to support the agribusiness transnationals. The recommendations promoted in favor of a greater opening of the markets of the South, to subsidize food imports as part of development aid, and betting on a new green revolution all point in this direction.

Excluded from the debate were those who work and care for the land, the hands with whom our food policies ought to be placed, the men and women family farmers. When representatives of farmer organizations tried to present their proposals at the official inauguration of the summit, they were removed by force. In high level meetings that preceded this one, a greater participation of social collectives was permitted, whereas now, before the gravity of the situation, the doors were kept closed, a fact that has been denounced by the international network of the Via Campesina.

A resolution of the crisis situation implies putting an end to the current agricultural model and food system which puts the interests of the large transnational corporations ahead of the food needs of millions of people. Is it necessary to deal with the structural causes; the neo-liberal policies that have been systematically applied in the last 30 years, promoted by the WB, the IMF and the World Trade Organization (WTO), with the U.S. and the European Union in front. Some policies have meant an economic liberalization on a global scale, the unrestrained opening of markets, and the privatization of lands dedicated to local supply and a conversion of that land to export monocultures, which have all led us to the grave situation of food insecurity at the present time. According to the WB it is calculated that 850 million people have been suffering hunger (prior to the "crisis") and that an additional 100 million will be added to this group due to the crisis.

The way out of this crisis requires the regulating and controlling of the market and of international trade; rebuilding national economies; returning control of food production to the family farmers and guaranteeing their access to land, seeds and water; getting agriculture out of the free trade agreements and the WTO; and putting an end to the speculation on hunger.

The market cannot solve this problem. To counter the declarations of the number 2 at the FAO, José María Sumpsi, who affirmed that this is an issue of supply and demand due to the rise in consumption in emerging countries such as India, China and Brazil, we must remember that never before has there been a more bountiful harvest in the world.

Today humanity produces three times what was produced in the 1960s, while the population has only doubled. There is no production crisis in agriculture, but the impossibility of accessing food by large populations

who cannot pay current prices. The solution cannot be more free trade because, as has been demonstrated, more free trade implies more hunger and less access to food. We do not want to throw more fuel on the fire.

[Article first published at Via Campesina](#)

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Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, and the Anti-War Movement

"The U.S. is sowing the seeds of a long term tragedy..."

Gilbert Achcar

This interview was conducted on May 20, 2008 by Cinzia Nachira for the critical review Mesele (Question), printed in Turkey. It is published in the June 2008 issue of the review.

Mesele: 2008 is the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Israel and of the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe. What do you see as the Israeli goal and has it changed over the years? What is the current Israeli strategy regarding both Gaza and the West Bank?



GA: These are many questions. Well, first of all the continuity between 1948 and today is of course that of the initial and basic Zionist project of seizing the whole of Palestine, British mandate Palestine. This was only

partially achieved in 1948, as the Israeli state was founded roughly on 80% of this territory. It was considered then as a first step only, as we know now from all the biographies, documents, and archives of the Zionist leaders and especially of Ben Gurion — the first stage in a drive to control the whole land.

Those conditions were fulfilled in 1967 when Israel invaded and occupied the rest of Palestine, to the west of the Jordan River. So since 1967, which is the second major turning point in the history of the conflict, the problem of Israel has been to implement the initial project that started in 1948 in the 1967 occupied territories through the building of colonial settlements, settler-colonialism. However, there was a major difference between 1948 and 1967 and that is the main problem for Israel today. The difference is that in 1948 80% of the population in the territories controlled by Israel fled the war. They were terrorized, directly or indirectly, and fled like any civilian population would do during a war. As everyone knows, they were prevented from coming back and became refugees, constituting a majority of the Palestinian people. In the territories that Israel occupied in 1967, however, the same process did not happen because the population had learned the lessons of 1948 and understood that if they fled their homes they would not be allowed to come back.

Therefore most of them stayed this time. They had also learned from 1948 that they would not be massacred if they stayed: this is what they had feared back in 1948. Israel kept a Palestinian Arab minority within its territory after 1948 and since those who stayed then remained alive, the majority followed their example in 1967. Ever since Israel has been trying to solve this problem, which is the biggest problem it is facing: the population of the West Bank and Gaza. This population is itself composed of a large proportion of refugees from the 1948 territories in addition to the autochthonous people of the West Bank and Gaza. They are opposing and rejecting Israeli control over their territories.

What Israel is striving to secure, since it cannot simply expel the Palestinian population, is control over the territory of the West Bank by means of a network of settlements, strategic and military posts, roads and walls, etc. in order to keep the Palestinians in separated enclaves under Israeli control in the same way that Gaza as a whole is a kind of enclave under full Israeli military control from outside, something like a huge concentration camp.

This is what many call the demographic dead end of Israel. Now Israel cannot be both Jewish and democratic at the same time.

This is indeed Israel's problem. The whole issue relates to this oxymoron, that a state pretends to be both democratic and ethnically defined as Jewish. This is a contradiction in terms because if you define a state by its ethnic or religious character, you are already contradicting modern democratic values. Of course, in order to make credible this fallacy, this so-called

democratic Jewish state, you need to ensure an overwhelming Jewish majority among citizens of the state.

This is what Zionists had in 1948. They accepted a minority of Arab Palestinians among them — 15-20% in 1948 — as an alibi allowing them to say: Ours is a democratic state; it is Jewish by virtue of the fact that over 80% of our population is Jewish. However, after they took over the West Bank and Gaza with the bulk of the Palestinian Arab population remaining there, it was not possible for them to annex these territories as they did with those conquered in 1948. Israel annexed only Jerusalem in 1967, and later the Golan in 1981. But it did not annex the rest of the West Bank and Gaza. Why not? From the standpoint of Zionist ideology, the West Bank is much more important to Israel than the Golan.

The point is, however, that the Golan has only a small Arab population and today Israeli settlers in the Golan are actually almost as numerous as autochthonous Arabs — who, incidentally, belong overwhelmingly to the Druze sect that Israel always considered as integrable (Druze serve in the Israeli Army, contrarily to other "Arab Israelis"). As for Jerusalem, it was annexed straightaway in 1967 because of its very great symbolic value. But they could not annex the rest of the occupied land, because if they did, they would either have a vast population within Israeli territory deprived of rights or, were they to grant them citizen rights, the Jewish character of the state would have been jeopardized. In other words, had they annexed the West Bank and Gaza, the Israeli state would have either ceased being Jewish or ceased being democratic in the sense of equal rights, one person one vote, etc.

This is indeed the great dilemma of Zionism, which they tried to solve with the Allon Plan, designed in 1967, immediately after the war. The plan consisted of building settlements and military bases, in order to secure strategic control over the territories, without annexing the areas where the Palestinian population is concentrated — villages, towns, etc. — but with a view to returning them back to the control of some collaborationist Arab authority. At the beginning the plan was to give those areas back to the Jordanian monarchy. In the 1990s, Israel decided to make a deal with the PLO, because the PLO's dominant faction became willing to make a deal with them under their conditions and this yielded the Oslo agreement. For Israel, the Oslo agreement was but a step in the same direction of the Allon Plan. Arafat thought that the PLO could get some kind of independent state. But he quickly understood that he had become a victim of his own illusions. And this whole process, the so-called peace process, collapsed as we see now. It is in shambles, and whatever Washington tries to do leads to a dead end. I am not talking here about relations with Hamas, but of the so-called Palestinian authority of Mahmoud Abbas. There seems to be no possibility of reaching an agreement even though Abbas is the most servile towards Washington of all the leaders that the Palestinians ever had. Nevertheless the Israelis are not

granting him any meaningful concessions. It is a complete dead end and a major failure for the United States, for the Bush administration, one of its many failures in the Middle East. The Bush team will leave the scene at the end of this year with the worst foreign policy balance sheet in history of any US administration, especially in relation to the Middle East.

Edward Said once said about the PLO elite that "No other liberation group in history has sold itself to its enemies like this." Do you think that this judgment is valid?

This is a judgment which needs to be confronted with a detailed survey of all liberation movements. I am not sure that there were no comparable cases of capitulation in the long history of anti-colonial struggles. But to be sure, although not necessarily the most, it is one of the most submissive leaderships in the history of national struggles. They accepted so many concessions, so many retreats over their own basic demands and yet they have not gotten anything substantial in return.

Are there any specific characteristics of the PLO leadership that led to these retreats?

Well, the characteristics were there from the beginning. They constitute the major difference between the PLO and most anti-colonial and national liberation movements in history. A major specificity of the PLO is that, from the start, it has been closely linked to reactionary states, many of them closely linked to imperialism. So you had this very peculiar situation of a national movement fighting a Zionist state heavily backed by US imperialism, with this same national movement depending for its funding on states like the Saudi kingdom very closely linked to the same US imperialism. When the Palestinian guerillas took control of the PLO after the 1967 war, they were flooded with petrodollars, huge amounts. What is certain indeed is that the PLO became the richest national liberation movement in the history of anti-colonial struggles. Its budget could be compared to that of some third world countries. It developed a huge bureaucracy, a very corrupt one. With time, the best elements, the most dedicated militants were killed, especially in Jordan in 1970, during Black September. So there was some kind of selection whereby those who remained in control were the most corrupt leaders of the Palestinians. There is a direct line between this evolution and Oslo and the Palestinian Authority of today with Mahmoud Abbas, Mohammed Dahlan, and all these corrupt leaders who bet everything on Washington. They hope that the US will deliver something to them. And their problem is that, despite the fact that they are totally subservient to Washington, they are not getting anything.

What about the Palestinian left? What explains its weakness?

Well, the Palestinian left has never really managed to build itself as an actual alternative to the rightwing PLO leadership. It has never really challenged the institutions of the PLO, the structure of these institutions. It accepted the rules of the game set by the Fatah leadership, the

rightwing PLO leadership. Although time and again they had disputes with the Fatah leadership and there were instances when the PLO was almost split, they would invariably reconcile in the name of national unity. This is how they lost credibility as an alternative leadership to the PLO and that is how Hamas came into the picture. In the first months after December 1987, when the first Intifada started, the Palestinian left was clearly dominant within the leadership of the Intifada along with radical members of Fatah in the occupied territories — where there could be no equivalent of the corrupt bureaucracy in exile.

Nevertheless, from the summer of 1988, they managed to capitulate to the rightwing leadership abroad, which controlled the Palestinian National Council meeting of October 1988 that proclaimed the so-called independent state, and prepared for direct negotiations with Washington. Those were the years, 1987-1988, when Hamas was founded and entered the fray. Very quickly, Hamas with its radical Islamic fundamentalist outlook became in the eyes of the Palestinian people the sole real alternative to the Fatah leadership, to the PLO. Hamas built itself as such, while the left failed miserably to project itself as an alternative. Thus Hamas became much stronger than the left, although at the start that was not the case; the fundamentalists were not stronger than the left — even in Gaza.

There is a debate on the left as to whether we should be urging a "two-state" or a "one-state" solution for Israel-Palestine. What is your view of these alternatives?

To be frank, I consider this debate to be largely a waste of time. I mean this is a debate on utopias in both cases and yet, some are conducting it as if the stakes were at hand. Each side accuses the other of being utopian, and they are both right, because both "solutions" are utopian. Of course, an "independent Palestinian state" that would be limited to the West Bank and Gaza is totally utopian. But I would also say that a single state with ten million Palestinians and six million Jews is much more of a utopia, since it requires the destruction of the Zionist state if one wants to look at the issue seriously. Otherwise it cannot work.

That is why I think that these are utopias and too much energy is focused on this debate, such that it becomes a waste of time. In my view there are two levels to be considered when facing the Palestinian issue. On the one hand are the immediate and urgent interests or needs of the Palestinian people. What are the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank fighting for? They are fighting to get rid of the occupation, of course — not for the right of voting in Israel. They want sovereignty over their territories. Their fight should obviously be supported. Even if you are a one-state solution proponent, can you say: I oppose the Palestinian fight against the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza because it doesn't correspond to my maximalist view of the correct solution? That would be completely absurd from a political standpoint.

Hence, if we put it in concrete terms, one has to support the actual struggle of the Palestinians for their immediate relief from the occupation. Now, on the other hand, if you are considering a long term solution to the question, I mean if one wants to elaborate a long term program with a utopian dimension, then why limit it to Palestine, whether with one or two states? Why leave Jordan out of the equation, for instance? There are more Palestinians in Jordan than in the West Bank and they are actually a majority in Jordan itself, east of the Jordan River. So why should Jordan be left out? Between 1949 and 1967 the West Bank and Jordan were one state in which the overwhelming majority was Palestinian. It was controlled by the monarchy and, of course, it was a despotic state.

The Palestinian leadership, when the Palestinian guerillas were a state within the state in Jordan, never fought for the overthrow of the Jordanian monarchy. Only the left, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was calling for the overthrow of the monarchy. Fatah countered the left in this regard and that was one of the factors that allowed the monarchy to crush the Palestinian movement in Jordan in 1970. The Palestinian armed forces were then completely wiped out in Jordan in 1971. Of course, the Palestinian people, mostly 1948 refugees, remained in the country, but the movement was crushed and had to go underground. This was always the rightwing perspective: We don't touch Arab regimes, we just fight against Israel.

This is the "principal contradiction" and we should cool down "secondary contradictions." Well, this is tragically absurd: the so-called "secondary contradiction" — the Jordanian monarchy, that is — killed more Palestinians than Israel up to 1971. It proved to be another side of the same coin with Israel. The population of the West Bank cannot constitute alone any kind of independent state — at best a "Bantustan." But if we think of the Jordanian territories as the natural complement to the West Bank then the picture changes. But for that, you need to get in Jordan a democratic government. Beyond that I would say that no long term, final, lasting and just solution can be conceived other than at a regional level and under socialist conditions — through a socialist federation of the Middle East and beyond. Of course, this is a utopia, but this is an inspiring utopia. As I say all the time, if you want to be utopian, go for an inspiring utopia, not a mean one. Go for the big one. The big one is transcending borders, transcending nationalisms, socialism. This is an interesting utopia, whereas a one-state, "one person one vote" solution limited to Palestinians and Israelis strikes me as an uninspiring utopia. I'm not convinced at all that the Palestinians would like to be citizens of the same state with the Israelis, even if they were the political majority under hugely unequal social conditions like what you have now in South Africa where whites still constitute by far the main section of the dominant class and are getting richer, many of them living in gated communities. And I am positively sure that the Israelis will never accept being a political minority. So this is a dead end.

Last week there were major clashes between the forces loyal to Hezbollah and the pro-western government in Lebanon. After Hezbollah repulsed the Israeli aggression against Lebanon in 2006 Hezbollah were the heroes of the day. And now things seem to have shifted once again towards greater divisions. What accounts for it?

You are right to emphasize the fact that there has been a shift. Indeed. It's true that in 2006 Hezbollah achieved a major victory and was seen in the whole Arab region and Islamic world and beyond as a kind of heroic force resisting one of the closest allies of US imperialism, repelling Zionist aggression. So yes they achieved the status of heroes. And it is true that this image has been affected by the recent clashes. Why so? Because, first of all, the enemies of Hezbollah who, of course, are at the same time the enemies of Iran at the regional level — i.e. the Saudi Kingdom, Jordan, and Egypt — had only one argument with which to counter Hezbollah and try to stop Iranian influence. This was and remains the sectarian card: denouncing Iran as a Persian Shiite power, and Hezbollah as an Arab Shiite agent of Iran, implementing a Shiite plot against Arab Sunnis. This is how they strive to present things. In 2006 this failed miserably, because populations in the region — Turkey included, I am sure — are very much against Israel and US imperialism and sympathized therefore with Hezbollah. Thus, the overwhelming majority did not buy into the Shiite-Sunni argument.

Now what happened since then is that Hezbollah got entangled in Lebanese politics on a sectarian basis, with allies fully adhering to the sectarian framework. Like for example the Shiite Amal movement, which is a purely sectarian organization — nothing of an anti-imperialist organization, just a sectarian force. Amal in the 1980s was actually more anti-Palestinian than anything else. So Hezbollah got entangled in Lebanese sectarian politics, to the point of leading recently a military assault with its sectarian allies on Sunni-populated areas of Beirut and beyond. This affected very much its image in Lebanon — more in Lebanon than elsewhere because the Lebanese population is naturally more focused on the internal political situation in Lebanon than the people of, say, Egypt or Turkey. I believe that Hezbollah overreacted in the recent fighting.

They were right to reject the decisions of the Siniora government, for sure, but they could have defeated them easily — as they did with previous decisions they didn't like — without launching such a military offensive in Beirut and other parts of Lebanon, with allies like Amal. In so doing, they created a situation of very high sectarian resentment. Hence, although militarily they won very easily in the last round, I think they lost politically.

This is because there is now a very intense sectarian polarization in Lebanon: Sunnis versus Shiites. This is very dangerous. Now, as we can see from the discussions that are taking place in Qatar between Lebanese parties, the issue of Hezbollah's armament has been put on the table. Before the last events the

parliamentary majority headed by Hariri hardly dared to raise this issue, especially after Hezbollah made a powerful case in 2006 that its armament was needed to repel and deter Israeli aggression. Now suddenly after they used their weapons in internal fighting for the first time in many years, their armed force is denounced by their opponents as a sectarian militia force. In my view Hezbollah made a big mistake whose consequences are very serious, with Lebanon entering into what looks like a new cycle of violence. It might very well appear a few years from now that what happened recently was just the first round of a new Lebanon civil war, unless regional and international conditions prevent this pessimistic scenario. Of course, this is terribly bad for the anti-imperialist struggle in the region, coming after the horrible bloodbath between Sunnis and Shiites that is continuing in Iraq. If this were to extend to Lebanon and maybe tomorrow to Syria, it would be a disaster for the whole region. The only ones who would benefit from that are Israel and the United States, both of which would try to exploit this situation.

Are the Communist Party of Lebanon or other secular Left forces putting forward demands to completely change the system so that it is no longer based on sectarian identification and parties?

Well, the Communist Party is presently the only significant force on the left in Lebanon. The rest are very small groups. Among Lebanese parties of some significance the CP is one of the very few that is really secular, dedicated to a secular program. It is a truly multi-sectarian party, with Muslims, both Shiites and Sunnis, Christians, Druze, etc. The general secretary of the party is from a Sunni background, while the majority of party members are Shiites — a real multi-sectarian party indeed. It stands for the secularization of Lebanese politics. And as a left party it raises social and economic demands. The LCP has not joined directly any of the two main camps in Lebanon.

During the recent clashes it decided not to take part in the fight. Of course the communists stand against the government and the imperialist project in Lebanon, as well as against Israel's aggressions: they joined the fight against Israeli forces in 2006. But they cannot share the goals of the opposition in domestic politics, which they denounce as bourgeois sectarian goals. They criticize both sides, putting more emphasis on the pro-Western forces led by Hariri. They stood consistently on an independent position in the last three years. This is a major improvement in their political line, because the Communist Party in the 1970s and the 1980s and the whole previous period was very much involved in alliances under bourgeois hegemony: with Arafat for some time, with the Druze's feudal leader, Jumblatt, most of the time, as well as with the Syrian regime. They went into deep crisis and fragmentation beginning in the 1990s, as a result of which the present party, much weakened it is true, radically improved its politics. Since 2005 they have really followed an independent line, starting from the March 2005 mobilizations in favor and

against Syria in Lebanon after the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri.

On the 8th of March 2005 Hezbollah and its allies organized a huge demonstration in tribute to Syria and its president Bashar al-Assad. The pro-Western forces called for a counter-demonstration on the 14th of March 2005 against Syria, which is why the present majority in Lebanon is called "14th March" and the opposition is called by some "8th March." The Communist Party refused to join any of these two demonstrations and called for a third one. It was, of course, much smaller than the two gigantic demonstrations on 8th and 14th March, which gathered hundreds of thousand people at each of them. The demonstration organized by the LCP drew only a few thousand people. But, with their red flags, they represented visually a third way in Lebanon, rejecting the two other sectarian camps. For that reason basically I think their political attitude has very much improved, although I still have many reservations — especially on their supportive attitude toward the Lebanese army and its chief poised to be elected president with the support of all forces.

It seems that the only way to go beyond sectarian divides can be through left political and trade union organizations that pose a non-sectarian alternative and resist the neoliberal policies that have been implemented in the country. Does Hezbollah have an inclination to organize resistance against those neoliberal policies?

This is a total illusion. They have nothing fundamentally against neoliberalism and, even less so, capitalism. You know that their supreme model is the Iranian regime — certainly not a bulwark against neoliberalism. Of course, like any Islamic fundamentalists, they consider that the state and/or the religious institutions should help the poor. This is charity. Most religions advocate and organize charity. It presupposes social inequalities with the rich giving the poor their breadcrumbs. The left on the other hand is egalitarian, not "charitable." In any event, Hezbollah is not really interested in the social and economic policies of the state. During all the years when Rafik Hariri dominated the government and Syrian troops dominated Lebanon, the cruelest neoliberal policies were implemented, yet Hezbollah never seriously opposed them. This is not part of their program or their priorities.

The last round of events started on the day of a general strike called by some unions. But these are rotten unions that were actually controlled by the Syrians before they left Lebanon. The previous time they called for a strike, it was a total failure because the opposition, i.e. basically Hezbollah, did not seriously support it despite paying lip service to the strike as an opposition gesture. This time, Hezbollah used the opportunity of the strike to mobilize against the political decisions by the government directed against them — not to oppose its social and economic policies. That's why, although the clashes started on the day of the general strike, the social and economic demands of the strike fell into oblivion. Hezbollah is not fighting against neoliberalism, although it can cater to the

needs of its plebeian constituency at times. The only significant force that opposes neoliberalism in Lebanon is the left, mainly the LCP.

Turning to Iraq now, what is the meaning of the recent conflict between the forces loyal to the Maliki government and the Mahdi Army of Muqtada al-Sadr?

Well, they result from a convergence of two interests. The most immediate reason behind the last clashes is that the clout of the Mahdi army and the Sadrist movement in Iraq has been rising very much among Shiites in the last period, especially since 2006. They became the most popular force among Iraqi Shiites. Since we are getting close to the next elections which are provincial elections scheduled for this autumn, the other two major Shiite groups — the Maliki group (i.e. the Dawa Party) and the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC) — which are collaborating with the US occupation, feared very much the outcome of the forthcoming elections. As you know, the Sadrists had initially formed with these groups the United Iraqi Alliance and joined together with them in the previous electoral rounds. They then broke with the alliance, accusing the others of being collaborators with the occupation. Dawa and SIIC understood that if nothing changed they were going to be beaten by the Sadrists.

This was their first and main incentive in launching the attack on Basra followed by the attack on Sadr City in Baghdad. They tried to marginalize or weaken the Sadrists. On the other hand, of course, the US occupation basically considers the Sadrists as enemies and would be hugely glad if they were weakened. US occupation forces clashed with the Sadrists more than once. In the recent clashes, US commanders tried to play a hypocritical game, claiming at the beginning that they were not involved and that the Sadrists have been no problem for US forces ever since they froze their military activities. However, it is very clear that the US was very much involved in the fighting against the Sadrists. As I said, two agendas converged: that of the US occupation and that of the Dawa-SIIC alliance anxious to weaken their main competitor among Iraqi Shiites, i.e. the Sadrists.

What are the results of the US "surge"? Certainly there has been a relative decline in the sectarian violence in Iraq. Does this mean that the US occupation is going better?

The "surge" achieved some results, to be sure. From Washington's point of view, it is successful. They claim so because as a whole the level of sectarian violence clearly subsided — a good thing indeed. But it is worth asking why did that happen? Well, because, on the one hand, more US troops were deployed in Baghdad and the Sadrists retreated and decided not to fight when the "surge" began. But the key element in the so-called surge is a change in the strategy of the occupation. The US started doing what all colonial powers did in these parts of the world, what the British did in Iraq after the First World War when they took control of the country: They played the tribal card. So the US sought to buy — literally

to buy or bribe — Sunni tribes in the Sunni areas. They bribed tribes and gave them weapons assisting them in forming the so-called Awakening Councils, which are tribal forces subsidized by Washington.

They pay members of these tribal militias salaries starting at US \$300 per month. This is a high amount compared to average wages in Iraq, but not much compared to the cost of the occupation. You can make the calculation. If you give, say, up to 250,000 people an average of \$400 a month, you get \$100 million: This is peanuts compared to the \$12 billion a month that the US spends for the occupation of Iraq! And I haven't checked yet, but it might very well be the case that the tribes are being bribed with Iraqi governmental funds. Whatever the case, Washington can afford this comfortably. Is this a long term solution for the US, however? In the long term this will be another major factor in preventing Iraq from reaching any kind of stability, since it is just reinforcing the division of the country into tribes and sects. Paradoxically, Shiite forces in the government are attacking the Shiite forces of Muqtada al-Sadr under the pretext of dismantling all militias. And the Sadrists reply: "You want us to disarm, while now the Sunnis have their own militias." So this is a completely messy situation. The United States, in trying to extricate itself from the quagmire and the disaster that it created in Iraq, is just setting the scene for a much greater disaster. Iraq is a tragic story and one can hardly conceive of any stable outcome in the foreseeable future for this country as long as the US is presiding over its destiny.

Do you think that a possible victory of Obama or Clinton will change US policies regarding the Middle East and especially Iraq? Is a withdrawal from Iraq possible?

I think that the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq is something that will not happen unless it is forced upon Washington. The US will not withdraw from Iraq willingly, simply because this is not Vietnam. In Vietnam they decided to withdraw in 1973 when in the balance they saw that the cost of the war — politically, economically, from all points of view — had become much higher than the benefits for the US in controlling South Vietnam. But in Iraq, the benefits of keeping the country under control are huge.

This is the big difference between Iraq and Vietnam. Iraq is an extremely important oil country in the middle of what is by far the most important oil region of the world. Therefore what is at stake is very much more important than Vietnam. That is why US imperialism cannot contemplate a withdrawal similar to that from Vietnam. What they will try to do is to find solutions whereby they can keep control of the country while trying to stabilize it. Because, after all, if you control a country very rich in oil but cannot exploit its oil, then what's the use? They need therefore to stabilize the country.

I think that the next administration, whoever they are, will on the one hand continue the present strategies of the Bush administration of "Iraqization" through the Sunni

tribes and all that — like you had "Vietnamization" in Vietnam. Secondly, they will try to cut a deal with Iran as well as Syria. They certainly will try to make a deal with Syria and will try to separate it from Iran. But they need also to cut a deal with Iran in order to stabilize the area for want of better, i.e. "regime change." This was one of the key recommendations of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group co-chaired by Baker and Hamilton that was formed before the "surge" to assess the situation in Iraq: Negotiate with Tehran and Damascus.

Another important issue, which is also related to Turkish policy, is the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq. What is the US strategy regarding the Kurds?

This is a major dilemma for the US. Everybody should remember Washington's betrayal of the Kurds after the first war against Iraq in 1991, when they rebelled against Saddam Hussein and the US just let him crush their rebellion. In the same way the US allowed Saddam Hussein to crush the rebellion in the South of Iraq. In both cases tens of thousands of people were killed. After that, in the Kurdish North the US established a kind of protectorate, a US-British protectorate in Iraqi Kurdistan. That was, on the one hand, because Turkey got alarmed about the flow of Kurdish refugees from Iraq into Turkish territory and wanted to push them back into Iraqi Kurdistan. The Europeans also got afraid that ultimately Iraqi Kurds would arrive as asylum seekers in Europe. Western powers also wanted to show that they were great humanitarians by protecting this population that had even suffered chemical attacks from Saddam Hussein.

Thus, Iraqi Kurdistan's leaders became Washington's closest allies in Iraq. When the occupation of the whole of Iraq started in 2003 this alliance proved to be very useful for Washington. The Talabani-Barzani Kurdish Alliance in Iraq is the most important and most reliable ally of the US. Basically there are no reliable allies of the US in Iraq but the Kurds. Someone like Iyad Allawi may be a trusted ally but he does not command a significant force as the Kurds do. The Shiite major forces are not reliable allies for Washington because everybody knows that they are also closely linked to Tehran, especially SIIC. They are at best ambiguous forces collaborating with the occupation but not utterly reliable. So the only reliable ally of the US is indeed the Kurdish leadership. The problem for Washington, however, is that the Kurds also have their own ambitions.

They want to establish a de facto independent state, not an officially independent state because they know that this will require a war with Turkey and they cannot afford that. They want all the attributes of an independent state without the name. They want also to enlarge the region they control to include places like Kirkuk. They want a greater Iraqi Kurdistan. This of course clashes with the aspirations of other Iraqis. And so the US is facing a real dilemma: Washington needs these Kurdish allies but at the same time it cannot lose Iraq's Arabs for the sake of its Kurds. The problem has been postponed year after year. The issue of Kirkuk should have been solved long ago according to initial plans. A referendum was

supposed to be organized and it has been postponed over and over again. This is a real time bomb for Iraq.

Do you think a separation of Iraq into Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite regions or states is possible?

This so-called solution actually means war. Any attempt to divide the country will lead to war under present conditions. This will create a situation in the region even worse for the US. This is why Washington is not at all interested in fostering partition although there are some people in the US and in the US Congress in favor of a partition, for something like a loose federation. But even a federation is very difficult to implement. It might become possible only if you had something like equally rich oil reserves or gas reserves in all three key regions of Iraq. The Kurds are trying to secure their own. In the Sunni Arab region, there is a major gas field which is now being intensively explored as a political priority because there is a need to satisfy the Sunnis.

If each region could be endowed with important hydrocarbon resources, there might be some kind of a federation in Iraq at the end of the day, with the US remaining there as the arbiter between the three regions, Kurdish, Arab Sunni, and Arab Shiite. This might be an optimal solution for Washington, but it would be very difficult to work out — I mean to reach a real agreement, a consensus among all major factions. It is not by arming everyone like the US is doing now; it is not by enhancing tribal and sectarian divisions that this could be reached. The US is sowing the seeds of a long term tragedy in Iraq. It is already a huge tragedy. Iraq has been living a permanent tragedy since Saddam Hussein and his cronies came to power in 1968, up to the US-imposed genocidal embargo. The tragedy that Iraqis are experiencing since the beginning of the occupation in 2003 is seen by some as worse still. And I can hardly see a way out of it in the foreseeable future.

Do you believe that the anti-war movement is declining as a social force? If so, what are the causes of that decline?

Well, the movement declined very much relatively to the mobilizations held just before the invasion of Iraq. There are basic and episodic reasons of that. One episodic reason which concerns mostly the US but affects also the rest of the world is US elections and the belief of many that these could lead to a radical change in US policy towards Iraq. As usual the effect of elections is to demobilize the anti-war movement. Another episodic reason is what we were talking about, i.e. the relative success of the surge. This also has a demobilizing effect on the anti-war movement because it reduces the sense of urgency for the fight against the occupation.

To these one must add a more basic reason, which is that the nature of the forces that are facing US imperialism inspires much less sympathy than in the past. I mean in Vietnam the US was facing the Vietnamese communists who acted in very clever ways addressing the US population and the whole world. They managed to win the sympathy of world public opinion. Nowadays the

forces that are facing the US are mainly Islamic fundamentalists, best epitomized by Al-Qaeda. They certainly cannot arouse any sympathy in public opinion, especially in the West where the bulk of the anti-war movement is and should be, because the anti-war movement is meaningful above all in warrior countries. So the nature of the forces that US imperialism is facing nowadays does not help the building of a strong, powerful anti-war movement.

I think that this is the chief problem confronting the anti-war movement. The main task of the anti-war, anti-imperialist movement should be to explain to public opinion that the more wars like these you have, the more fanaticism and fundamentalism you will get. And to explain that these wars will only reinforce the dialectics of barbarism that I call "the clash of barbarisms," in which the major barbarism is that of Washington and the minor one is that of fanatical bands of Islamic fundamentalists. This is a disaster for all the populations of the world. Therefore it is absolutely urgent to stop the wars and the ongoing imperialist aggression. This is the kind of message that the anti-war movement should convey and not one that says: "We support anyone who fights US imperialism notwithstanding what they are and what else they do." This is not the way to win popular support for the anti-war cause.

There is a certain dilemma for the anti-war, anti-imperialist left, because in many countries of the region resistance to imperialist aggression is headed by political Islam. How can the left show solidarity with such resistance without abandoning its struggle for secularization, women's liberation and workers' rights?

I don't think that you can have a general rule here. It depends on which situation you are talking about. For instance in Iraq you have groups that are fighting the US occupation but the same groups are simultaneously involved in sectarian violence. And these groups have killed many more civilians on sectarian grounds than coalition troops. In such circumstances, to say "We support the Iraqi resistance" is completely wrong and misleading. You cannot say that you support such forces. One should say "We support the fight against occupation" or better, for didactic purposes: "The fight against the occupation is legitimate, by all means (truly) necessary." That's fine. You support the acts selectively, not the actors when you cannot take responsibility for all their acts. In Iraq, you cannot support any specific force because all forces that are fighting the occupation are at the same time sectarian forces. So two wars are being waged at the same time: a just war and a very reactionary one. Now take the case of Lebanon or Palestine, that is the case of Hezbollah and Hamas.

There you have Islamic fundamentalist forces opposing Israeli aggression. One can say: "We support the people's struggle against imperialist aggression regardless of the nature of the leadership; we support the struggle despite our reservations about its leadership." Moreover, I am very much against any uncritical support

of any leadership whatsoever, even the most progressive leaderships — all the more so when they are not progressive, but adhere to reactionary ideologies. When the struggle is unambiguously legitimate, but led by non-progressive forces, one should state very clearly: "We support the struggle but we do not share the perspective of its leadership."

▀ *Gilbert Achcar grew up in Lebanon and teaches political science at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. His best-selling book 'The Clash of Barbarisms' came out in a second expanded edition in 2006, alongside a book of his dialogues with Noam Chomsky on the Middle East, 'Perilous Power'. He is co-author of 'The 33-Day War: Israel's War on Hezbollah in Lebanon and Its Consequences'.*

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Imperialism

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Anti-war movement

European conference of the anti-capitalist left

A conference full of hope

François Sabado

On the 31st May and 1st June a Paris conference called by the LCR on "May 68- May 2008" brought together the European anticapitalist left.

They all came and were all there from the north and the south of Europe. There were about a hundred representatives of about thirty organisations from sixteen countries present. Among them were the principal organisations of the revolutionary left in Europe which represent thousands of activists and sympathisers. Also

present was an observer from the ISO ((International Socialist Organization) in the United States. Among them were the main organisations of the revolutionary left in Europe representing thousands of activists and sympathisers.

This international conference of the radical, anti-capitalist and revolutionary European left was undoubtedly a big success. For the first time since May 68 nearly all the anti-capitalist left was brought together in St-Denis (in the Seine St Denis department to the north of Paris). It was remarkable that this first meeting took place. The fact that it decided to continue and meet for a second conference in 2009 shows that something new is happening for Europe's radical left.

This success is first of all connected with both the support for and the curiosity about the LCR's initiative, building a new anti-capitalist party. But there is something else. A change in the historic period has been unsettling the workers' movement and organisations for several years, a process which is perhaps coming to maturity in a number of countries. The combination, in the framework of capitalist globalisation, of the current financial, banking and food crises of capitalism, of the redoubling of attacks against social and democratic rights, and the social-liberal evolution of the traditional left opens a space for the radical left.

These questions were dealt with in a first discussion introduced by François Sabado, a member of the LCR leadership. He indicated a series of points of convergence on the nature of the capitalist offensive, on the evolution of the social-democratic and communist parties and on the dynamic of the class struggle. This debate also confirmed the points of agreement about the principal anti-capitalist measures in the face of neo-liberal capitalism and the need for a clear independence from social democracy.

All the organisations present reaffirmed the necessity of rejecting the politics of parliamentary or governmental coalitions with the social liberalism of social democracy or the centre left. These main reference points for rebuilding a new workers' movement and an anti-capitalist alternative don't exhaust all the indispensable debates for rebuilding a socialist project, debates which we must have on the different experiences in Europe, questions such as the formulation of an European anti-capitalist programme, the war, an ecosocialist response to the ecological crisis and of course about the content and forms of socialism in the 21st century.

So we have to work and debate. The next conference in 2009 will be focused on the struggle against the war, NATO and military politics in Europe .

There was something else positive about this conference. It is not only a question of discussing but also of acting. There were three discussions after the main discussion. The first, which was introduced by LCR leadership member Yvan Lemaitre, about the war, in which considering the warmongering policies of the ruling classes and the role of Nato, the conference participants

decided to organise a large international demonstration in Strasbourg and Kehl next spring on the 60th anniversary of Nato.

For the first time a conference of this type looked at the question of global warming. It was introduced by Laurent Menghini. This second debate showed that all the anti capitalist organisations are developing an ecological dimension.

There was a third debate, introduced by Emmanuel Siegelman, on the importance of the struggle against racism and xenophobia. Following the example of the Lega Nord in Italy, which is waging a real campaign against foreigners, the attacks against immigrants are a central element of the attack of reactionary governments against social and democratic rights. Anticapitalists must make this a central axis of their activity in Europe .

After a short summary of the proceedings by Galia Trépère for the LCR, all the participants have decided to have a joint intervention at the next social forum in Malmo in Sweden, and especially to consider common activities at the time of the next European elections in 2009. What is at stake at a time when the far right, the socialist and communist parties all have European structures is to begin to build a European anti capitalist pole of attraction. This is one of the most difficult questions for each organisation has a different history, there are specific relationships of forces in each country. Some organisations have already responded positively. Others are going to discuss it, and some, without taking part in a European campaign, are open to common initiatives.

In short – the new anti-capitalist party is getting things moving in Europe !

The organisations represented were:

Austria : SOAL

Belgium: LCR-SAP

Britain : Respect, Socialist Resistance, Socialist Party, Socialist Workers Party

Denmark : Red Green Alliance

France : LCR

Germany : Anticapitalist Left, BASG, Interventionist Left, ISL, Marx21, RSB,

Greece : Alternative Ecologists, AKOA, ARAN, ARAS, DEA, KOE, Kokkino, NAR (New Left Current), OKDE-Spartakos, SEK, Syriza, Synaspismos

Italy : Sinistra Critica

Netherlands : SAP

Norway : Socialist Unity

Poland : Polish Labour Party

Portugal : Left Bloc

Spanish state : Espacio Alternativo

Sweden : Socialist Party

Switzerland : Gauche anticapitaliste, Mouvement pour le socialisme, Solidarités,

Turkey : ODP

United States : ISO

► *François Sabado is a member of the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International and of the National Leadership of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR, French section of the Fourth International).*

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Introduction to the European Conference

The international situation facing the European left

François Sabado

We must carry out seriously, together or separately, reflexions and debates which bring up to date the perspective of socialism, of a socialism for the 21st century.

The LCR has taken the initiative of this European conference, for two reasons:

► The first is to underline the relevance of the lessons of "May '68" for the class struggles of today.

► But the second is to renew or establish the dialogue between most of the representative anti-capitalist and revolutionary organizations in Europe, to have an exchange on the analysis of the situation and also to see what it is possible to do and to discuss together in a more serious way... Well, of course, this is only one small meeting, a small beginning, but I believe that it should be taken seriously. In any case we take it seriously.

Because this is the first time, for a long time, that so many revolutionary and anti-capitalists organizations are meeting together to discuss... Everyone and every organization has their own history, their tradition, their policies but all of us, with our own criteria, analyze the situation in terms of a new epoch or historical period – the

period of capitalist globalisation, the collapse of Stalinism and of the former USSR, and of new evolutions of the workers' movement. All of us feel the need to discuss or re-discuss a series of key questions on the political, strategic and programmatic levels, and to do so on an international level. This report is only an introduction to the discussion. The ideas that we submit to the discussion come, of course, from the French experience, and are therefore partial, but we have to start somewhere. But we are convinced that in order to go forward we need a discussion which goes beyond national frameworks. We need each other.

The main tendencies of the international situation...

*Because this conference is taking place at a particular moment, a moment of a crisis of capitalism, a global crisis.

We are no longer in a situation where the ideologists of capitalism presented their system to us as the end of History.

* What dominates, in the present conjuncture, is the crisis: a financial crisis, a banking crisis, a credit crisis, a crisis of over-accumulation of capital. The banks have lost billions of dollars or Euros, which they are making the workers and the peoples pay for. Admittedly, the capitalist world has experienced for several years high rates of growth. It has reconquered new spaces with the restoration of capitalism in the former Soviet Union, the countries of Eastern Europe and China. Globalisation is experiencing a new configuration, new relationships of forces, with the growth of China and India, but the contradictions are there: the US economy is going into recession. And that threatens Europe.

*The socio-economic effects of this capitalist crisis sharply affect the life and the work of millions of people. The tendencies towards the overexploitation of the labour force – precarious work, pushing down of wages, the lengthening of working hours, are the principal demonstrations of this, and women are among the first victims of precarious work and of this overexploitation. The attacks against the rights of immigrants, the attack on undocumented migrants, the xenophobic and racist campaigns against foreigners have become one of the central dimensions of these attacks against democratic and social rights. The food crises and the hunger riots demonstrate the destructive consequences of this capitalist system. About a dozen countries have experienced these explosions of hunger.

*The ecological crisis, with climate change directly related to greenhouse gases, pollution of all kinds, which causes catastrophes that are called natural but which are in fact the result of the unrestrained search for capitalist profit.

*The oil wars, today in Iraq, tomorrow against Iran or other countries. Aggressions against the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples. The militarization of the principal imperialist powers testifies to the way in which the ruling

classes are preparing to deal with this crisis, but with two major contradictions:

- ▶ the resistance of the peoples...and American imperialism is now experiencing a new Vietnam in Iraq...
- ▶ and the asymmetry between American military power and its weakening position in the world economy.

*You may say that we are catastrophists, once again... but no, it is necessary to take the measure of the crisis, and of its global character... Even though there is no situation without an exit for capitalism, this system is in an impasse. The solutions of the system to its crisis are increasingly expensive for humanity, in terms of work, living conditions, but also quite simply of life...

The offensive of the Right and how it is evolving

*This crisis leads to a situation where inter-capitalist contradictions, but also social contradictions between the classes, are being sharpened. Since the beginning of the 1980s, the ruling classes, through governments of the Right and of the Left, have deployed an arsenal of counter-reforms, which have called into question a series of social gains, concerning social security, public services, the standard of living and working conditions. The European Union, moreover, has constituted one of the principal vectors of this reorganization against the rights of the workers and the people. Today, the requirements of international competition, for a worldwide market of the labour force which draws downwards the standard of living of the workers, are leading the ruling classes to deploy new social attacks. The latest elections in Europe, in France, in Greece, in Italy, in the United Kingdom demonstrate that the ruling classes are equipping themselves with leading groups, parties and governments which are ready for battle, a "muscular Right", a Right that draws support from populist parties like the Northern League in Italy, a Right that is getting ready for confrontations to call into question the social gains of the workers and their organizations.

The social-liberal evolution of social democracy

*But faced with the offensive from the Right, social democracy adapted to the liberal-capitalist counter-reform. It went from reformism to reformism without reforms and now to reformism with liberal capitalist counter-reforms. Each delegation will be able to give their own examples of the application of neo-liberal measures by social-democratic governments. That corresponds to an increasing integration of the political and trade-union apparatuses of social democracy into the higher echelons of the state and the capitalist economy. The symbol of this integration is the nomination of one of the principal leaders of French social democracy to head the IMF. And on the political level, this evolution is being expressed in a process of transformation of the PS into an "American-style democratic party", as the transformation of the Italian left has just illustrated, from the ex-PCI to the "Democratic Party". The result of this policy, and there

once again the Italian experience is a lesson for us, is this: the traditional Left, supported by Communist Refounding and the centre-left, went into the government to manage the affairs of the bourgeoisie, and the outcome is that it is the Right of Berlusconi, Fini, and Bossi that is back in power. We should note, with differences according to the countries, the support of the Communist parties for this social-liberal evolution, pointing out however the particular cases of the Greek and Portuguese CPs, which are neo-Stalinist and at the present stage anti-Socialist... Now of course, the Right and the Left are not the same thing, especially for millions of voters of the popular classes, but it is necessary to record a historical change in social democracy: a major integration into globalized capitalism. This evolution is also taking place on the trade-union level, where the trade-union leaderships of the ETUC are having to take on co-responsibility for neo-liberal policies, in particular within the framework of the EU. The evolution, over the last few years, of the Spanish Workers' Commissions, the Italian CGIL, and now the French CGT, in the framework of the implementation of neo-liberal policies, is extremely significant.

Some indications of the social and political relationships of forces

*In such a situation, it should be recognized that there has been a degradation of the social and political relationships of forces, to the detriment of working people. The ruling classes have taken decisive steps forward in terms of capitalist reorganization. Workers' and popular struggles are on the defensive. There is unequal development of the class struggle, depending on the countries. But the ruling classes have not been able to inflict major defeats on the proletariat. In spite of his declarations about the "British model", and his will to copy Mrs. Thatcher and Tony Blair, Sarkozy is encountering enormous difficulties in applying his policies. There is social resistance. Lately we saw the strength of the Greek general strike. Strikes like that of the rail workers in Germany show that there is in certain sectors a real combativeness. The force of the anti-war and global justice movements in a series of country testifies to the potential that exists. In France the year 2005 saw three major crises: the success of the "no" in the European referendum, the explosion in the suburbs, and the massive demonstrations against precarious work and the CPE... but that did not prevent the victory of Sarkozy. There is in this situation a major responsibility of the leaderships of the traditional Left, which played into the hands of the Right. We thus have a situation where in spite of social resistance, and elements of political crisis, the bourgeoisies are pursuing their offensive.

Proposals for questions to be submitted for discussion

*In this situation of historical change, of a globalized capitalism and a social-liberal evolution of the Left, we think that we need a new discussion on the main lines of an anti-capitalist policy and the prospects for building and

rebuilding, not only anti-capitalist forces, but also a new workers' movement, new social movements, for discussing policies for the trade unions and for different associations, and links between social movements and currents and political organizations, in the context of the emergence of an anti-capitalist alternative.

a) To take into account the changes in capitalism, the massive development on the international level of the proletariat - of wage-earners - , the effects of the reorganizations carried out by capital on the situation of the working class: the combination of new technologies in the framework of capitalist relations of production, the social differentiations within the proletariat, the phenomena of precarious work, the consequences of flexible work, the processes of individualization of work. How to formulate a policy which takes into account these new configurations, this "new working class".

b) To work, reflect, analyze new questions like that of the ecological crisis and climate change, in order to define an ecosocialist policy which puts forward demands on the terrain of the environment, while at the same time attacking the hard core of the functioning of the capitalist economy, which puts the search for the maximum profit before the respect of human beings and nature.

c) That also implies bringing up to date an anti-capitalist transitional programme which links immediate demands, democratic demands, demands in defence of women's rights, and demands for radical, revolutionary transformations of society, through the objective of achieving a new distribution of wealth by taxing capitalist profits. Such an objective implies in its turn attacking the power of the employers and making incursions into capitalist property in order to advance along the road of public and social property. We are not naive, and these objectives will require exceptional social mobilization, confrontations, clashes, ruptures with the capitalist system... In this confrontation, the aspiration towards and the need for democracy are decisive. A wide-ranging debate based on experiences of struggle, of workers' control and self-organization is decisive from this point of view.

d) Finally, on the strategic level, it is also necessary to verify the main outlines of a policy which can be enriched by a series of very important experiences of the last period, whether it is in Europe, in Italy or Germany, or even in connection with the situation in another country, on another continent - Brazil. We think on this point that it is necessary to discuss the modalities of policies which combine unity of action of all the left forces against the employers with a policy of intransigent independence with respect to parliamentary or governmental coalitions with the centre-left or social democracy. There again the Italian example reminds us of the hard lesson, that when sectors of the Left take part in a government that manages the capitalist economy and capitalist institutions, which today means social-liberal governments, they are led to support policies that are incompatible with the defence of the interests of the working class and the most elementary social demands,

they are led to demobilize the workers, to disorientate them. It is for us a question that is capital for rebuilding the workers' movement. We have to do it in a completely independent way.

e) The forms of organizations are specific in each country, concerning organizations, currents, fronts, new parties, the organizations of the revolutionary Left, the breaks with the traditional parties. All that represents a space to the left of social democracy and the parties of the traditional Left. Everyone has their own experience and must learn from the experiences of others. We know very well that in a series of countries, history and unhappy experiments have led to the division of the anti-capitalist forces. In other countries, on the basis of mass political experiences or electoral experiences, there have been convergences and a coming together of forces. We have to continue along this road. It will be long, but while having a unitary policy with respect to the whole of the Left and the social movements, we think that there can be new opportunities to discuss, to advance along the road of an anti-capitalist alternative That is the meaning of this conference.

Elements of conclusion

Those are some questions which we submit to the discussion, but to conclude we would like to express a wish: today, this is a first meeting, these are first discussions. We must carry out seriously, together or separately, reflexions and debates which bring up to date the perspective of socialism, of a socialism for the 21st century. That will take time, but it is decisive. At the same time, we will discuss it this afternoon, we think that we all have responsibilities to try and act together in a united way on essential questions, in social and political resistance, in the fight against war, on the terrain of solidarity with immigrants, on the question of climate change. We propose to see whether we can do things together on these questions - there can be others. But we are convinced that it is necessary to try and advance along the road of unity anti-capitalist forces in Europe. Are we capable of it? That is the question.

✶ *François Sabado is a member of the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International and of the National Leadership of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR, French section of the Fourth International).*

France

May 68 and the Paris conference of the European anti-capitalist left

Josep María Antentas, Raul Camargo

From May 31 –June 1, 2008 an important political initiative called by France's Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) to mark the 40th anniversary of May 1968 took place in Paris: an international meeting and a conference of political formations of the European anti-capitalist left.



Throughout May initiatives from the anti-capitalist left to mark the anniversary have taken place across Europe. The common objective has been to reclaim the inheritance of May 68 from the attacks of the reactionary right and attempts at banalisation of the events of that year, and to register the memory of May in the struggles of the present. The campaign "May 1968 – May 2008. We continue the combat" launched by Espacio Alternativo with events in different cities of the Spanish State was framed by this dynamic. Of all the initiatives called on a European scale, the LCR's meeting stands out in its importance.

More than 2,000 people went to the Mutualité to hear a broad panel of people representing different militant generations, that of 1968 and that forged in recent combats, and from different countries: Alain Krivine and Daniel Bensaïd, both founders of the LCR and outstanding leaders in May 68, Boguslaw Zietek of the Polish Party of Labour (PPT), Myriam Martin, a member of the LCR leadership, Flavia D' Angeli of Sinistra Critica (Italy), Francisco Louça, delegated from the Portuguese Bloco de Esquerda, a young participant in the student struggles of recent weeks in France and Olivier Besancenot, spokesperson of the LCR and its candidate in the last two presidential elections.

The objective of the meeting, as Alain Krivine indicated, was not "to have a meeting of old combatants" but of "present and future combatants", for "exchanging generational experiences of international struggles" and discussing the possibility of another May 68 "in new conditions, in a new historical period and with new correlations of force".

Daniel Bensaïd denounced the discourse of the right, through the likes of Sarkozy, about "eliminating" May 68 (with little success apparently since more than ¾ of the French population indicate in the surveys that they have a positive opinion of the events), and also that which tries "to sweeten" the events, reducing it only to its cultural

dimension, in the style of Daniel Cohn-Bendit. For the latter, May 68 has triumphed in the cultural area and he now wants simply to forget it, as he says in the title of his book, "Forget 68". "To reread 68 as a movement of cultural modernization has a very clear function: to depoliticize it" indicated Bensaïd.

1968 was a great social revolt where, although perhaps "not all was possible, something else was of course possible. It was possible to overthrow De Gaulle and the regime of the Fifth Republic, by the force of the general strike". Today the lessons of 68 it can be useful for the present struggle. 1968 left "a memory and a culture of struggle" that explains the difficulties encountered in France in the application of neoliberal counter-reforms, from 1995 to the present. "After the difficult period of the 1980s, when many withdrew, we have gained the right to recommence", said Bensaïd.

Boguslaw Zietek of the Polish Party of Labour (PPT) spoke about the situation in Poland and the emergence of some excellent recent union struggles, such as the strike at Tesco supermarkets and of the necessity to coordinate union struggles on the European scale.

Myriam Martin, from the LCR leadership, denounced the neoliberal and authoritarian policy of Sarkozy indicating the necessity "to fight against the repressive state that is developing in this country", and to support the struggles underway, like those of undocumented immigrants, who were strongly represented in the room. "The combat is far from over".

Flavia D' Angeli spoke about Berlusconi's policy and the failure of the Italian left in the last general elections. "When the left in the government does not respond to any of the popular expectations, it is the right who win" and "when the anti-capitalist left [a reference to Rifondazione] governs the capitalist system, is not the left that wins, but the system. It is necessary, therefore, to advance towards the "construction of a new anti-capitalist left, the left of the 21st century".



Flavia d'Angeli from Sinistra Critica in Italy

Francisco Louça, delegated by the Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal, began his intervention denouncing the "intensity of the hatred of the right against the 68", frightened before the ghost of its repetition. Louça also spoke about the policy of the Bloco in Portugal and the importance for

the European left of the LCR's proposal for the construction of a New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France.

After Louça, a young participant in the French student struggles explained their dynamic and the necessity "to organize to fight against the government".

Finally, Olivier Besancenot, spokesperson of the LCR, indicated that May 68 had been a central event in the history of the current represented by the LCR, which had not only been in synch with the rising struggles and the aspirations for change of the younger generation, but has remained faithful to this commitment. "Many abandoned the struggle. We didn't".

"We do not put 68 on a pedestal", but rather see how its legacy serves us in today's combat. Besancenot explained the NPA project of constructing a new activist-based political instrument, open to the popular sectors, and on the basis of strategic independence with respect to the Socialist Party and to the institutions. Anti-capitalism and internationalism will be two fundamental constituent elements of the new project. "Internationalism is not only an inheritance. It is our trademark. Our daily practice" indicated Besancenot.

For that reason, "to advance in the construction of a European anti-capitalist party" is one of the objectives that the new French anti-capitalist party is going to pursue from its constitution.

Go to end of page for meeting videos

The meeting of the European anti-capitalist left

A hundred representatives of thirty organizations from sixteen European countries, among them Espacio Alternativo, participated in the international conference held in the theatre of Belle Étoile in Saint Denis, from May 31-June 1. The objective was to relaunch the dialogue between the forces of the European anti-capitalist left, to discuss jointly and to see what perspective of collaboration could be drawn up.

The meeting began with a general debate on the political situation in Europe and the strategic perspective of the anti-capitalist left, from an introductory report by François Sabado of the LCR. The report noted the situation of capitalist crisis that dominates the present world-wide conjuncture, the increase of social contradictions and the ecological crisis, the ascent in many European countries of a reactionary combative right, and the crisis of the traditional left, marked by the social-liberal mutation of social democracy and the subordination of a good part of the formation located to its left (like IU in the Spanish state or Rifondazione in Italy).

He raised the necessity of the construction of an anti-capitalist left, independent of social democracy and the institutional logic and rooted in the social resistance, and to advance in the reconstruction of a socialist perspective for the 21st century.

The debate showed the existence of important points of agreement among the forces present on the general

characteristics of the international political situation and the conviction that is necessary to advance towards a greater collaboration of the anti-capitalist left on the continental scale.

Along with the general debate, three specific discussions took place on: the permanent global war and the military policy of the EU; climate change and the strategies of the anti-capitalist left; and the policy of immigration in the UE in a context marked by the ascent of racism and xenophobia. The debates in these areas showed the existence of relatively common approaches on the part of those present, all involved in the campaigns and mobilization around these subjects.

In the conference some concrete agreements were made and the forces present decided to continue looking for forms of joint collaboration in the next big European mobilizations, like the next European Social Forum in Malmö (in September of this year) or the mobilizations that will take place in Strasbourg and Kiel in spring 2009, around the sixtieth anniversary of NATO. A new meeting was agreed for 2009 to continue the dynamic initiated in Saint Denis.

The success of the conference and the large numbers attending show, beyond the interest in the French political situation and the LCR's project for the creation of a new anti-capitalist party is attracting, the understanding on the part of a broad number of organizations of the European anti-capitalist left of the necessity to advance towards a greater international collaboration.

The advance of European integration necessitates intensified collaboration between the formations of the European anti-capitalist left. Nevertheless, until now advances in this area have been quite modest. National particularities, the strategic plurality of existing traditions in the anti-capitalist field, differences of organization model, and so on have meant that the crystallization of a European space of the anti-capitalist left has not yet been possible, beyond some very limited advances.

The Conference at Saint Denis could serve towards a relaunch of coordination of European radical formations. Objectives should be concrete and realistic, without trying to go too far too quickly or leaping stages, little by little affirming an anti-capitalist pole to the left of the left which has become subordinate to social-liberalism. The meeting helped put us to all on the right path, although the way is going to be long.

[Watch the speech of Alain Krivine here](#)

[Watch the speech of Daniel Bensaid here](#)

[Watch the speech of Flavia d'Angeli here](#)

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France

The meaning of May 1968

Jean-Francois Cabral, Charles Paz

“What’s important is that the action took place, when everybody believed it to be unthinkable. If it took place this time, it can happen again...”

Jean-Paul Sartre (1968)



Since 1968, each anniversary has been the occasion for a new challenge, generally by reducing the May events to various anecdotal aspects, when they are not accused of being at the origin of all our society’s ills. In this field, French President Nicolas Sarkozy has been the most radical: “... it is about whether the heritage of May 68 should be perpetuated or should be liquidated once and for all. I want to turn the page on 1968” he proclaimed at the final meeting of his presidential electoral campaign. In one sense, we understand him. In May-June 1968, the mobilisation of an initially very limited fraction of youth was capable of unleashing the biggest general strike in France’s history. And it certainly did not amuse the denizens of the presidential palace when thousands of high school students went onto the streets this year with placards reading “1968... 2008: the dream continues”.

The dominant class like the government are not fond of situations in which a powerful mobilisation defeats their plans and challenges their power, even in a limited way. Forty years later, this experience is first of all a confirmation: a massive movement of the people can go beyond the traditional apparatuses of the left and the workers’ movement, and shake the established order. It is also a lesson: in itself, this cannot offer an outcome capable of changing the situation in a durable fashion. For that a political tool is need, of a type which is rarely built amidst the fires of such events.

The simultaneous nature of the youth movements across the world in the late 1960s corresponded to a generalised challenge to the political order established after the Second World War: the division of the world into zones of

influence within the framework of peaceful coexistence. These youth and particularly student movements affected different countries in a very variable manner. There were certainly good reasons to rebel! Even the somewhat privileged youth of a country like France could recognise it. The miracle of television, now present in most households, made it possible to follow the programmed death of hundreds of thousands of people in Biafra (in Nigeria), victims of a merciless war waged by the British and French oil monopolies. It was also possible to follow the US bombing of Vietnam day by day.

A small fraction of the student youth became politicised radicalised in the years which preceded 68 in this context, that of imperialism and the Vietnam War in particular. Vietnam was a source of indignation, but it was also a source of hope for those who aspired to a better world. In February 1968 there was the Tet offensive, a veritable insurrection organised by the FLN throughout South Vietnam. For a few hours, Saigon seemed to be in the hands of the insurgents and the prestige of the US took a terrible blow. At the same time there were other examples of peoples in the Third World who seemed prepared to confront imperialism. Starting with Cuba where in late 1967 Fidel Castro organised the Tricontinental, a conference to affirm the solidarity of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America against imperialism. Che Guevara launched vibrant appeals to create 2, 3, 4, 10 Vietnams if necessary. At the same time the “Cultural Revolution” reached its height in China and seemed to give an example of a revolution which had become permanent where the students seemed to have come to the fore, little red books in hand, supposedly to “serve the people”.

In the East there was the Prague spring, the beginning of a political liberalisation and mobilisation in a state under the Soviet grip, which gave hope to the possibility of a democratic socialism. The struggles of the oppressed peoples of the third world found an echo at the very heart of the United States. Since 1965, the black movement had radicalised. “Black Power” gained influence, affirming the necessity of a violent struggle, proclaiming the solidarity of black people with the Vietnamese people against the same enemy. Political violence resurged almost everywhere: in Japan with the Zengakuren, a highly politicised student union; in Germany where an extra-parliamentary opposition developed through the SDS, the Socialist Students Federation led by Rudi Dutschke.

In this radicalisation, the notion of internationalist solidarity, the sensation of being involved in a common combat with all who fought imperialism was a striking feature. But it had limits: the temptation for short cuts, the belief that revolution, or radical change, was possible independently of profound political changes in the working class, particularly in the imperialist metropolises.

The French situation

In France, as in most developed capitalist countries, the number of students grew. The capitalists could no longer

choose their qualified labour, the management they needed, from their own privileged milieus and the middle classes. They had to broaden recruitment. Children from humbler backgrounds began to arrive at university. They refused to play the role of capitalism's watchdog and their radicalisation linked up with that of the youth who rejected the moral order of Gaullist society. Undoubtedly because the Communist tradition was more alive than elsewhere, numerous small far left groups appeared. The first breaks with the Parti communiste français (PCF), the dominant organisation on the left, took place during the Algerian war. Having refused to take the part of the Algerian people, the PCF was in low repute among politicised students. In 1966 the Union des étudiants communistes, the PCF's student organisation, fell apart, with the departure of the Maoists who went mainly to the UJC(ML) and the PCMLF, and the Trotskyists who formed the JCR (Alain Krivine), both groups rejecting the PCF's support for the presidential candidacy of a centre left candidate, François Mitterrand.

The politicisation of the movement broadened around solidarity with the Vietnamese revolution. After that of Liege in 1966, the demonstration in Berlin in February 1968 was an opportunity to compare the experiences of different countries, and to note that nearly everywhere youth were linking up with a certain revolutionary tradition, with revolutionary communist ideas that had been thought completely forgotten, indeed bypassed. Yet before 1968, these groups were only a handful, with a very relative influence on their milieu. The May events would propel them to the forefront.

The post war boom was a period of uninterrupted growth of the capitalist economy, all the more appreciated in that it followed the crisis of 1929 and the disaster of the world war, as well as a difficult period of reconstruction, where there had been several years of belt tightening and rolling up of sleeves. In France the parking lots were full as were the shopping trolleys. The workers had a right to cheap public housing "with every comfort": certainly some depressing miles of concrete, but it was progress for the time. Some shantytowns remained, but they were for the immigrants of Nanterre or la Courneuve. Of course, the consumer society excluded some: one in two French people had no car, and 50% of housing lacked hot water, showers or internal toilets, and sometimes all of them. But things could only get better, it was thought.

Gaullism had allowed capitalism to accelerate the restructuring of the productive apparatus. The number of employees had increased rapidly, and the number of industrial workers in medium and large unites reached a record level in the 1960s. Industrial production grew by 50% in ten years. But at what price? To achieve all this, workers had to accept the fragmentation of tasks, shift work and stepped up rhythms, all the charms of Taylorism, with an average of 46 hours work per week and an armada of little bosses to sweat out the profits. Work was more tiring, more dangerous also: there were 2.5 million work accidents per year for 16.5 million employees. Unemployment was certainly marginal:

200,000-300,000 people. But in one year, the figure had nearly doubled, prompting some concern.

As for growth, it remained nonetheless badly shared out. It is possible to live in a rich country and see its standard of living increase, but have the justified impression of being cheated when profits increase faster than wages. Meanwhile, the unions did little. In 1967-1968 however, the social climate changed a little. There were some genuine strikes, notably in enterprises employing young workers on assembly lines. In February 1967, workers at Rhodia in Besançon extended their strike to the whole group and occupied their factories. There had not been any occupations in a long time. Some months later, conflict surged at the factory in Lyon, accompanied by confrontations with the police. Another example was the strike at la Saviem in Caen in January 1968. When this factory of 4,000 people was occupied there was an immediate intervention from the CRS riot police. The next day workers marched in the city and briefly confronted the police. The day after that, workers and students were shoulder to shoulder during a day of rioting that left nearly 200 wounded. So there were some "tough" conflicts, but before May, the impression which dominated was that not much had happened since the big miners' strike in 1963.

France's then President, Charles De Gaulle, had come to power in 1958, borne by a right wing insurrection in a context of sharp crisis during the Algerian war. He appeared then as a sort of supreme saviour, a Bonaparte, who wished to build consensus around his person, while being the chosen man of the big capitalists. The National Assembly passed the general's laws, virtually without discussion. The opposition did not have much perspective. There was of course the "radical" Pierre Mendès-France, or François Mitterrand who was not yet a socialist. But the Socialists had little credit since their volte-face in 1956 in relation to the Algerian war. As for the PCF, the most significant left party at the time, it had remained isolated from the other parties since the beginning of the Cold War. The PCF had pleaded for some years for a "government of democratic union" but nobody was interested, least of all Mitterrand. In 1968, then, society appeared as above all blocked, without perspective of real change.

The beginnings of the movement

The movement began on March 22, after the arrest of Xavier Langlade, a student at Nanterre and a militant of the JCR, suspected of having participated in a demonstration which had attacked the head office of a US company ("American Express"). Confrontations with the far right were the pretext for the closure of the university on May 2. On May 3, a protest meeting was held at the Sorbonne, attracting around 500 militants. That wasn't a lot of people, but confrontations with the police followed. The beginning of the May movement had something fortuitous about it. For some weeks, elements of the press had identified political groupuscules as the source of disharmony. The solution seemed quite simple: it was enough to arrest the groupuscules to restore order. On May 3, Grimaud, the prefect of police, was satisfied

he had rounded up the groupuscules at the meeting. But thousands of students joined them, in fist fights with the police. They did not yield to the repression, and were determined. The CRS charged and attacked indiscriminately, and within a few hours the students had become veritable "enragés".

On May 3 there were nearly 600 arrests. On May 6, 16,000 demonstrators took to the street. By May 7, there were 45,000 chanting "We are a groupuscule!" There were several hundred wounded here and there. Demonstrations followed every day: 20,000 on May 8, 20,000 to 30,000 on May 10. On that day, there were dozens of barricades in the Latin Quarter. It was a turning point which immediately placed the Gaullist regime on the spot. The decision to erect the first barricades was not formally taken by any organisation. The militants of the JCR had however played a significant role in the taking of this initiative, unlike other revolutionary organisations who decided that the barricades built and defended by thousands of students were a "petty bourgeois adventure".

Of course, even a very determined student movement cannot by itself undertake a test of force with the Gaullist government with the hope of winning, without the support of the working class. But in a context of erosion of the Gaullist regime, of radicalisation of the working class, and of democratic legitimacy of the student movement, what could have been a simple demonstration of "violence outside of history" became an essential initiative. This was also a decisive factor for the audience of the JCR in the weeks and months that followed. The police violence was terribly shocking and mobilised a public opinion which had the impression of having directly lived through the "événements", thanks to the radio notably. It was said that the police had turned on isolated and sometimes wounded demonstrators, throwing tear gas grenades into the apartments where some had sought refuge, indeed into ambulances. All that is true. What is shocking above all is the lack of synch between all this violence and the known demands of the students: the rejection of archaic rules which forbade mixing of the sexes in university accommodation or for some the laws concerning holding a political meeting at the Sorbonne. For the first time in history, student youth appeared as a social force which played a central role at the political level.

The movement spread outside the capital: demonstrations against the repression in Paris, repression, demonstration against the new repression, further repression... the cycle of demonstrations took off at full speed. Universities like Strasbourg declared themselves "autonomous". A "student power" established itself and stated that it had broken ranks with the bourgeois state, taking as its model the "critical universities" of the German students.

The strike begins

On May 11, the prime minister Pompidou gave way on all points: the Latin Quarter would be evacuated by the police on Monday May 13 in the morning and the

Sorbonne opened without conditions. The students who had been sentenced would be freed by the appeal court: the judges, independent of the government as we all know, thus had to work overtime on Sunday afternoon to deliver a judgement which had already been announced by the government. The government wanted to calm things down. As Pompidou would put it later, he wanted "deal with the problem of the youth separately". But it was too late.

The trade union organisations were obliged to react and organised on May 13 a one day strike and demonstrations throughout the country to protest against the police violence. The success was considerable: hundreds of thousands of people in Paris, 450 demonstrations throughout France. Something had changed in the consciousness of the workers. The youth had succeeded in drawing some tens of thousands of their comrades behind them, they had fought, they had resisted, and they had even forced the government to back down, delivering a sharp blow to De Gaulle's personal prestige. For some years, the workers' organisations, with the PCF at the head, had argued that it wasn't possible to do anything because of this regime.

De Gaulle had had the pretention of "bringing all French people together" around his person; he was henceforth in the process of creating unanimity against him, thus throwing a bridge between the students and the workers. From May 13 slogans hostile to De Gaulle appeared: "De Gaulle to the archives!", "10 years is enough!" On May 14 at the Sud-Aviation factory near Nantes, young workers influenced by the far left went on strike, occupied the factory, and seized the managers and the director of the factory. The next day, the movement reached Renault-Cléon. And this despite the union leaderships. On May 16 it was the turn of Renault-Billancourt. At this time 200,000 workers were on strike, around fifty factories already occupied, above all outside Paris.

The growth of the strike across the country was extremely rapid. 200,000 strikers on May 17, 2 million on May 18, between 6 and 9 million on May 22 (there were 15 million employees at this time). It was three times more than in 1936. More than 4 million were on strike for three weeks, more than 2 million for a month. It was certainly a key movement in the history of the class struggle. First because a general strike with occupation of enterprises, is much more than a day of action which lasts longer. Daily oppression disappears, human relations come to the fore, and speech is liberated. You talk everywhere about everything with everybody, in the occupied factory, of course but also in the neighbourhood, in the street.

Then because this strike affected all layers of the working class. It was first engineering, the big industrial workplaces which went on strike, then the tertiary sector. All categories were affected, blue and white collar workers, managers, but also footballers, actors, the press, the justice system... the movement affected all employees in a society where for the first time they represented 80% of the active population. Yet it was in the industrial concentrations that it would be at its most

powerful and it was there that the major events were played out. Occupation was a general phenomenon, but with very diverse realities. Sometimes it was only a few delegates, sometimes it was much larger. An embryo of social life began to be organised in and around the enterprises: mass meetings of workers, a day left open for the rest of the population, popular dances also, and solidarity organised here and there with traders or farmers to guarantee food supplies. For the main trade union federation, the CP-controlled CGT, occupation was also the way to keep control over the strikers, sometimes there were even pickets against the "leftists and students". The union leaderships wished to control everything and were obsessed with avoiding possible exchanges and meetings, even between the workplaces of a given group. Thus the inter-union delegation at Renault-Flins had to negotiate for several days to enter Renault-Billancourt and meet their comrades!

The strike committees, when they existed, were made up of trades unionists and rarely the non-unionised. They were most often inter-union, meetings of delegates, of militants linked to the apparatuses and responsible solely to these apparatuses. A study in the North and the Pas-de-Calais indicates that they existed in 70% of cases, but that they were elected in only 14% of situations and recallable by strikers' meetings in only 2% of cases. Despite this, from May 17, CGT leader Séguy confirmed on the radio the refusal to coordinate the existing strike committees. Commissions were sometimes set up, notably in enterprises where technicians, or indeed managers, played a significant role. There were in some places action committees, grouping the most combative workers, the working class left, employees who were attracted to the student model, which often had an anti-union dynamic. The general meetings were places of information rather than discussion. There were no or very few examples of workers' control. They appeared only in specific sectors: the press, hospitals, with the best known example being the Atomic Energy Sector at Saclay.

At Nantes, because the paralysis of the country rapidly posed serious material problems, trade unionists created a central strike committee so as to ensure the functioning of certain indispensable services: distribution of fuel or fuel coupons, collection of rubbish or organisation of points of sale of basic necessities for the strikers and their families. In its breadth and length, the strike provoked a veritable political crisis. De Gaulle attempted to defuse it on May 24 by proposing a referendum putting his own person at stake: "Me or chaos!" That same day a student-worker demonstration in Paris of 100,000 people set fire to the stock exchange, and besieged and looted two police commissariats. Violent demonstrations took place in Lyon, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Strasbourg and Nantes.

It was impossible to break the student movement which conserved all its strength but also met its limits: the students had said they were in solidarity with the working class, but remained de facto outside what happened in the factories. The government thought it possible to end

the strike by encouraging the employers to negotiate at the corporatist level, with Pompidou playing a kind of arbiter role. The union leaderships accepted this offer, allowing De Gaulle to emerge from the impasse. To negotiate under the arbitration of his government at this time was necessarily to restore his legitimacy at the very time it was being most contested.

The negotiations at Grenelle on May 25 yielded nothing on the sliding scale of wages, the age of retirement, the return to 40 hours or the abrogation of the orders concerning Social Security. They gave guarantees to the union apparatuses with the creation of workplace trade union sections, and specified significant wage increases (35% for the minimum wage and 10% for other wages) and payment at 50% for strike days. The CGT tested the results with its secretary general Séguy, accompanied by the negotiator of the Matignon agreements of 1936, before the workers of Billancourt. They demonstrated their burning indignation. The opposition of the workers was expressed in their will to continue the strike, but the capitulations were not massively disavowed at the base. For the CGT there was no question of renegotiating Grenelle. It now undertook negotiations on this basis at the level of the branches and enterprises, breaking the unity of the general strike.

The political crisis

In the immediate however, the rejection of Grenelle by the workers only rendered the political crisis more acute. On May 27 there was a meeting at Charlety stadium with 50,000 people, called by the UNEF student union, with the support of the FEN teaching union and the (non-CP) union federation the CFDT, in the presence of Pierre Mendès-France. The student movement, incapable at this stage of proposing a real political alternative, turned to the left. Mendès had nothing to offer.

Mitterrand, conscious of the political vacuum, sought an institutional alternative: he announced his candidacy for the presidency of the Republic and proposed Mendès-France as prime minister. Mendès agreed to lead a government of the united left. Mitterrand opened the door to the participation of the PCF, for a reason that he would later explain: "I estimated that the Communist presence would reassure more than it would cause concern.... I knew that neither their role, nor their number in the leadership team would frighten reasonable people who, at that very time, saw in the CGT and Séguy the last ramparts of a public order that Gaullism had shown itself impotent to protect against the blows of the devotees of revolution." [1] The PCF said that "there is no left politics and social progress in France without the aid of the Communists", and spoke of a "popular government".

On May 29, the CGT organised a huge demonstration (500,000 people) in favour of this "popular government". On this demonstration, the JCR chanted "Popular government, yes, Mitterrand Mendès-France, no!" a slogan taken up by a number of demonstrators. But this slogan did not settle the basic questions: a government to do what, responsible to whom? Simply, it tried to indicate

a solution which was not resigned to impotence at the political level, while continuing to explain the traps of the institutional mechanisms in which Mitterrand and others wished to confine the movement. The absence of the regime was not only symbolic. These few days between May 27 and 30 were the culminating point in the political crisis. The strong Gaullist state was temporarily incoherent and paralysed. The confrontation with this state was posed without the movement being capable of developing an alternative politics.

For their part, the reformist leaderships attempted to propose a solution in the framework of the institutions. But they did it solely because the situation appeared totally blocked to them, without necessarily wishing that the process should go to the end.

De Gaulle disappeared on May 29, and a veritable atmosphere of everybody for themselves reigned among right wing politicians, to such a point that Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, a future president, said: "The government which, despite a deferral, has not succeeded in re-establishing the authority of the state, nor in putting France back to work must itself go". De Gaulle left to consult general Massu at Baden-Baden. On May 30 he retook the situation in hand. At 4.30 pm in a pugnacious and incisive speech, he announced that he would not withdraw, nor change prime minister and that he would dissolve the national assembly, leading to early elections.

Among his partisans, the joy was equal to the great fear that they had experienced. From 6 pm to 8 pm, at the call of various Gaullist organisations, joined by the far right Occident movement, the mercenaries, the former combatants of "l'Algérie française", some hundreds of thousands of people marched along the Champs-Élysées, giving the impression of a veritable tidal wave. There were similar demonstrations nearly everywhere. It was a real cold shower for all those who had believed he would resign. A certain drift began to spread among the strikers, and even a certain discouragement. It was then that negotiations at branch or enterprise level began to really spread, with the hope now of emerging from the crisis at least cost.

In announcing on May 30 that he would stay and that there would be new parliamentary elections, De Gaulle not only struck a blow at the morale of the strikers. He allowed the union apparatuses to retake the initiative after the setback of Grenelle, arguing that it was possible to resume work without having obtained satisfaction on everything, or even on very much, when in any case a left government would settle things after elections. It was necessary than to return "in order and in unity". Yet the resumption was not so simple. The state made an effort to resume work at the enterprises that depended on it, in coal, EDF (electricity), RATP/SNCF (rail). But there were still 6 million strikers on June 5, 3 million on June 10, more than a million on June 15. At Renault-Billancourt work only recommenced on June 17. From June 7-10, workers and students were shoulder to shoulder at Flins. There was one death, a youth who drowned while trying to escape the police. The next day, there were riots at

Sochaux around the Peugeot factories. Two workers were killed. The CGT closed its eyes, desperate to end it all

At the elections, De Gaulle won an absolute majority in parliament. His party, the UDR, realised its best score ever. The movement had been directed against the right; it was the right which benefited from its defeat and the return to order.

A revolutionary crisis?

The JCR at the time saw the events as above all a "dress rehearsal" a first stage in the revolution. The far left, even adding all the different groups together, was obviously not in a position to organise decisive sectors of the population, and Charléty showed the limits of the movement, the absence of political perspective. We were far from a situation of dual power: that is why the JCR preferred to speak of a "revolutionary situation". The question should nonetheless be considered, taking up the major characteristics outlined by Lenin in relation to a revolutionary situation: when those above can no longer govern as before, and those below can no longer bear their government as before.

The administrative sector was affected by the strike, even if it was shorter than in industry. Media, communications, transport, energy production were affected. We now know there was uncertainty among some sectors of the police, and the government had even called up the police reserves. But the armed forces remained largely outside the crisis. The political leaders seemed to have been bypassed, even De Gaulle, who was ready for massive repression, unlike his prime minister.

Yet what is remarkable was the force and lucidity of the state apparatus in relation to the weakness of most of the politicians, the capacity to appreciate the real relationship of forces. Pompidou, prime minister and banker, preferred to make the choice of absorption rather than confrontation, resting on the division between youth and workers. The heads of the repressive apparatus, following this analysis, made considerable efforts to avoid any fatalities during the confrontation. For them, clearly, it was a student revolt, not a workers' revolution, and the police response adapted to this level. The three dead were killed in front of the factories.

As for the military leaders, Massu at their head, they simply advised De Gaulle to return to Paris, because for them this was not the time for a military intervention. For 4 to 6 weeks, the movement was such that the state apparatus could not govern as before, but it could still intervene. One can speak of political crisis to the extent that there was an absence of government for several days. But there was no absence of power.

And those below? It was the biggest general strike in French history. The initiative came to a large extent from combative young workers, with in a certain number of places a liaison in the street between young students and workers. For a month, the whole country lived to the rhythm of the strike. In this festive ambiance, millions of

strikers expressed much more than economic demands: their rejection of De Gaulle and of society. Finally the problems of the exploited and oppressed were discussed and, while the “actually existing socialism” of Eastern Europe was increasingly discredited, utopianism acquired a new legitimacy, accompanied by a radical critique of all the workings of capitalism.

But this movement lacked a real capacity to carry through this project in terms of power. May-June 1968 was not a revolutionary situation: even if the government vacillated, those above kept power; and those below, even if they were highly mobilised, were far from replacing them by something else. This movement did not have any democratic form of representation, still less of centralisation, among the students or the working class. If the discussions were permanent in the faculties and some open places, they were not reflected in decisions, a process of designation of democratic representatives of the movement. In the factories, there were rarely genuine general meetings, and virtually no self-organisation, structuring of strike committees, or experiences of workers' control, even partial. In the absence of democratic representation of the strike movement, the question of its centralisation was not even posed.

The working class vanguard which still existed was splintered, divided, atomised. It was then unable to orient the millions of strikers on political perspectives. The weakness of the revolutionary far left and its extreme dispersal in multiple small and often very sectarian groups did not transcend this situation. There was then a distance between the strength of the movement and its content. Such a situation could have changed but for that a political force was necessary, dramatically absent in 1968. The rejection of the betrayal of this strike expressed in the continuation of the movement was not reflected by significant breaks with the reformist apparatuses. A phenomenon which should be placed in the limits of an objective situation where, after a long period of growth, nothing vital was at stake for the population.

What remains of 1968? This major event of the class struggle profoundly changed French society, while having significant effects beyond France's frontiers: it is one of the key dates of the recomposition of the European workers' movement at the end of the 20th century. There are profound reasons for this.

Against those who see 1968 as the last workers' strike of the 19th century, we understand that it was the first general strike of a society where 80% to 90% of the population are wage-earners. It showed that in an advanced capitalist country, a movement of such breadth, which affects all the layers of the population, which challenges the authority of the state and transcends bourgeois legality, is possible. It shows the forms of struggle of the working class spreading to other sectors of society.

May 1968 was the catalyst for the emergence of a new political and social generation. The profound modification

of the relationship of forces between the classes produced direct effects until the mid-1970s. A process of politicisation in the working class allowed the appearance of currents which crystallised to the left of reformism. The relationship of forces inside the workers' movement began to change, the hegemony of the PCF began to founder. A revolutionary current appeared to the left of the PCF and acquired legitimacy, even in the workplaces. Without however being capable of changing the givens of the situation: electoral illusions in the common programme of the Union of the Left dominated the 1970s; then there was the disillusionment of the Mitterrand years and the rise of the far right in the 1980s and 1990s.

Today, the situation is again different. Years of management of capitalism have considerably reduced the credit which social democracy, and still more the PCF, disposed of. On the basis of a global decline in the consciousness and combativeness of the proletariat, a new generation began to renew links with struggle, breaking with the traditional apparatuses of the left and the workers' movement. The far left has begun to represent an alternative, certainly still modest, but this is an inestimable gain in the perspective of the coming and still more decisive struggles.

For at a time when the majority of the population believes that future generations will be worse off than the preceding ones, where the social and ecological disasters of an unbridled capitalism plunge millions of workers into poverty, then revolt is not only possible, but much more justified than was the case forty years ago.

► *Jean-Francois Cabral is a member of the leadership of the LCR.*

► *Charles Paz is a leading member of the LCR*

NOTES

[1] 1. François Mitterrand, “Ma part de vérité: De la rupture à l'unité”, Payard, Paris 1986

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Food and Oil Pices Skyrocket

The World Economy and the Credit Crisis

Andy Kilmister

The current credit crisis is throwing into question the whole of the neoliberal, free market, order that when the post-war boom went into crisis in the mid-1970s, it was eventually resolved in the mid-1980s by a new economic order, neoliberalism. The current crisis has put that order in question, as its main pillars – low inflation, low commodity prices and stability in the international financial markets – are breaking up.



The significance of the current turmoil in global financial markets can be seen sharply in the following quote from 'The rescue of Bear Sterns marks liberalisation's limit' by the chief economic commentator of the Financial Times, Martin Wolf. Wolf, who is no radical, writes "Remember Friday March 14 2008: it was the day the dream of global free-market capitalism died.

For three decades we have moved towards market-driven financial systems. By its decision to rescue Bear Sterns, the Federal Reserve, the institution responsible for monetary policy in the US, chief protagonist of free-market capitalism, declared this era over. It showed in deeds its agreement with the remark by Joseph Ackermann, chief executive of Deutsche Bank, that 'I no longer believe in the market's self-healing power'. Deregulation has reached its limits.....even the recent past is a foreign country." (Financial Times 26/04/08)

The current crisis has been compared to 1929. This is not really helpful. More useful is to see it as the unravelling of the institutional arrangements which have governed global capitalism since the mid-1980s, and emerged as a response to the breakdown of the long post-war boom a decade earlier.

2. The Crisis of the 1970s and 1980s

Stable capitalist accumulation depends on two conditions. First, it requires the extraction of sufficient profits in the process of production. Second, it requires the realisation of those profits through sales in the market. This gives rise to a key contradiction – these two conditions are in conflict with one another.

The successful extraction of profits depends on keeping wages down while the realisation of those profits depends on sufficient demand being available, which in turn limits the ability of capital to lower wages. This conflict is a central reason for the periodic crises of capitalist growth.

Two of the main Marxist theories of crisis result from adopting a view which focuses on just one side of this conflict; under-consumptionism (for example the Monthly Review school in the USA) concentrates on the lack of demand which prevents realisation of profits, while the profit-squeeze theory of writers like Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe focuses on rising labour costs, which prevent the generation of profits in production. An adequate theory of crisis has to encompass both perspectives and to take account of the way in which capital can achieve a temporary resolution of the contradiction, which however inevitably stores up new problems for future accumulation.

The temporary resolution underlying the boom of the 1950s and 1960s depended on three main factors. First, state expenditure as a key source of additional demand. Second, the stable international economic environment provided by the 'Bretton Woods' system of fixed exchange rates which allowed for rapid growth of world trade. Third, the development of new consumer goods technologies and markets, notably in areas like the motor industry and consumer electronics (so-called 'white' goods).

This boom broke down in the mid 1970s leading to a decade of economic turbulence and two major international recessions, in 1974-75 and 1979-82. However, from the mid-1980s onwards a new framework for accumulation began to take shape.

3. The Temporary Resolution of this Crisis

The mid 1980s resolution of this conflict, modern neoliberalism, had three main components. The first was a massive explosion of debt – both household and (to a lesser extent) corporate debt. Debt has played a key role in mitigating the contradiction between the generation and realisation of profits, allowing for expanded demand even though wages have been kept down and a frontal assault on trade unions and organised labour has kept the working class on the defensive. However, there is an obvious contradiction here in that debt has to be repaid eventually and so the conflict between low wages and increased demand is likely to reassert itself with renewed ferocity at that point. Consequently, debt has only been able to play the role which it has because of the other two components listed below.

The second component was a renewed stability in the international financial system, following on from the wild exchange rate swings of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s which resulted from the end of the Bretton Woods arrangements.

This stability has allowed for strong growth in international trade and more importantly underpinned

dramatic financial deregulation and increased international investment.

The key factor leading to this stability has been the informal but durable relationship between the USA and China (and to a lesser extent other Asian countries) whereby the US deficit has been funded by surplus countries, which in turn has underpinned their export drive. Linked with this, and important for both the US and UK, has been a rise in the returns earned by these countries on their investments abroad, which has helped them run large balance of payments deficits without their foreign liabilities mushrooming.

The third factor has been two decades of exceptionally low commodity prices. This has been a key factor in allowing central banks in the industrialised world, especially in the UK and USA, to let debt increase and to lower interest rates to boost demand, without worrying too much about inflation.

This framework did not take root globally at a single point in time, but arose in a more spontaneous way. Notably, the second most important capitalist economy, Japan, followed a trajectory of its own, as a result of the specific characteristics of Japanese capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s, and has stagnated throughout most of the last two decades. Western Europe remained unstable for longer than the USA. However, from the mid-1990s onwards Europe participated in the general framework outlined above and this provided an important basis for two key successes for the European capitalist class during this period – the absorption of Central and Eastern Europe into the capitalist world economy and the institution of a common currency, the Euro. Particular regions continued to experience crises, notably Latin America, South East Asia and Russia, but these were successfully localised by capital and did not bring overall global expansion to an end, although the instability of 1997-98 briefly opened up such a possibility.

Each of the three factors outlined above is integrally linked with the other two in a mutually reinforcing system. The growth of debt requires low inflation and international financial deregulation, which in turn requires exchange rate stability. The export boom in China and elsewhere has depended on debt fuelled demand in the US and other countries. Low commodity prices have resulted from the process of 'globalisation' and imperialist expansion which has required deregulated debt finance and stable exchange rates.

4. The Current Crisis

The depth of the current crisis for capital arises because all three of the factors listed above have been thrown into question. The build-up of debt is extremely serious in itself, partly because of the size of the debt, partly because the 'securitisation' of it has spread it around the system so widely.

However, despite the over-valuation of the housing market in the US and other countries, problems in that market would not threaten the system globally were it not

for the role of debt in the current pattern of capitalist accumulation more generally.

What is dangerous for capital is the conjunction of major problems in credit markets with renewed exchange rate uncertainty, especially the fall in the value of the dollar (and also a steep decline for both the US and UK in returns on foreign investments) and with what appears to be the end of the era of low commodity prices – shown most clearly by increasing prices for oil and other fuels and for food.

The difficulties are shown up most clearly in the key policy weapon which capital has depended on over the last three decades, control over interest rates. The US has cut interest rates sharply to deal with the build-up of bad debt, but such cuts run the risk both of speeding up the decline of the dollar and of raising inflation (which in turn will go up in the US if the dollar falls IMF economist Kenneth Rogoff has quoted the poet Robert Frost: 'Some say the world will end in fire. Some say in ice'. For Rogoff, fire here is financial ruin, ice is inflation.

5. Can Capital Resolve the Crisis?

Discussion of possible outcomes of the crisis runs the risk of being very speculative. However, it is important for socialists to consider some of the arguments which indicate possible resolutions of the crisis which might be attempted.

Any attempt at such a resolution will involve distribution of the costs of the crisis. Capital will try to shift as many of these costs as possible onto labour and its success in doing so will depend on working class resistance nationally and internationally.

Some of the key issues that have been raised are the following:

- Demand from China and elsewhere may substitute for US demand: One possible resolution of the crisis might be a slowdown in the US and similar countries and a shift towards internal growth in China and other surplus economies, based on domestic consumption and investment rather than exports. This would clearly be possible in principle in a globally planned economy. It is much harder to achieve in the unplanned, spontaneous world of contemporary capitalism.

- The crisis may be just a crisis of liquidity not of solvency: A number of observers argue that the credit crisis results mainly from liquidity problems and panics in the financial markets and that the amount of 'genuinely' bad debt is still quite limited. In addition corporate profits in the non-financial sector remain high. This latter point is probably the most optimistic element for capital in the current situation. However, this argument neglects the extent to which non-financial profits have been dependent on a degree of debt-based consumption which now looks unsustainable.

- Commodity price rises may mainly be caused by speculation: There is probably a strong element of speculation in recent oil and raw materials price rises

(with speculators fleeing from the dollar). But the seriousness of the ecological crisis and the relatively long-term nature of recent price rises seem to indicate that speculation is only playing a minor role here.

- A fall in the dollar and sterling will raise US and British exports: It has been argued that exchange rate changes will restore balance to the world economy and that already US exports are rising as the dollar falls. Again, there is some truth to this. But reliance on this mechanism is very risky for capital because of (a) the substantial losses it would involve for countries like China which have purchased US dollar assets in recent years (b) the inflationary impact of such falls on the British and American economies (c) the possibility of renewed exchange rate turbulence of the kind seen in the 1970s and 1980s and (d) the fact that even balanced growth resulting from such exchange rate changes is likely to be at a much lower level than what we have seen in recent years.

- A better structure of regulation can solve the problem: One strand of thought in recent discussions sees an improvement in the regulatory structures of capitalism as key to solving the crisis. Martin Wolf in the article quoted above is an example of this. However, this is controversial; other analysts have strongly opposed responding to the crisis through increased regulation.

All of the above means that any attempt to resolve this crisis, at least in the short-run is fraught with dangers for capital – and consequently, the crisis opens up significant opportunities for socialists.

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Italy

Eleven points to face the crisis of the Italian Left

Sinistra Critica (Critical Left)

The entire left is speaking about the defeat, often in disarray, opportunistically or with "newist" or liquidationist hypotheses. For our part, we want to attempt to provide a reflection on the matter at hand, indicating the ideas we see as more fundamental

than containers or formulas, to undertake rebuilding a new left, starting from scratch and on truly original bases.



1. The loss of parliamentary representation is the culmination of the failure of the Italian left, after the end of the old Italian Communist Party (PCI). Swept away was the illusion of being able to live on electoral annuities, without actual roots, without a project, with an old party model no longer able to maintain its position in the social body. We can't rule out the left regaining a part of their lost votes, in other electoral contests. But this would not cancel the defeat, the product of a heritage of votes without roots and without support in subaltern labour and in the society. A new left will rebuild itself first of all by sweeping away the old leadership groups, responsible for the defeat, but above all by starting to understand why, despite how obvious the problem to solve is, not only is nothing done to solve it, but it becomes more and more serious with every turn in Italian political life.

2. Rather than reconstruction, we think that nowadays one must speak of building an anticapitalist, class left on new bases. It has been impossible to put down roots because – in the context of globalisation and the disintegration of the 20th century workers' movement – the emphasis on the institutional prospects alone and the bureaucratic legacy have made all these efforts vain. Taking root in a society involves long-term, tedious and invisible work that does not necessarily pay off in the short term in electoral terms. For political layers, driven by personal demands for perks and power, the easiest route has remained holding on to positions of power in institutions and the processes needed to attain these, completely different from those needed to take root. This is also why we are not interested in re-jigging worn-out leadership groups, deaf to reality. Nor in identity-based forms or opportunistic manoeuvres to gain a few seats in Parliament. We are interested in a "new beginning", starting out from another history, freed of the lingering effects of 20th Century bureaucracy to have an impact on the present and regain the imagination and motivations needed to build another left.

3. A new class left will be anticapitalist or cannot be. Women, men and the planet can no longer bear up under the weight of the absolute rule of private interests, the drive towards re-armament and wars, the regressive hallucinations that this state of affairs is producing. In

simple terms, this means opposing capitalism. In less simple terms, it means governing with capitalism's representatives or guardians is preventing the rebirth of a left that actually wants to transform the world. It is not merely a revolutionary perspective to suggest an adequate distance from governments. Even an authentic commitment to reforms must recognise that governing within the current relation of forces is no longer possible.

4. We propose to start anew from a eulogy to the opposition. Not because we have a minority vocation, but simply because the only way to react to this social system is evoking and organising political and social opposition through movements, struggles and diffuse self-organisation. The 20th century workers' movement won important victories in opposition. Nowadays it is possible to organise a diffuse resistance in the opposition and succeed in pulling off victories and winning rights to provide substance to an alternative hypothesis. For this reason it is not possible to govern with the PD on a national or local level, in the sense that it is not possible to govern with those who in the best case defend the existing state of affairs, have an administrative and authoritarian political outlook and thereby open the road for rightwing forces. The case of Rome speaks clearly of this.

5. The victory of Berlusconi and the Northern League completed the progressive rightwards shift in Italy and the twenty-year long deterioration in already-deteriorated social forces. Berlusconi's "People of Freedom" party (PDL) will attempt to build a "serious and responsible" government right but also try to gain social roots, with its reference social block that has not abandoned its populist and reactionary nature, as Fini's behaviour has shown. At the same time it attempts to be useful for the Confindustria (Italian industrialists' confederation) that wants to launch a full-fledged attack on labour's achievements. It aims to start with the national contract. It will seek PD support against the contract, as the latter takes a similar stand. For this reason the attempt to stabilise the "bipartisanation" of Italian politics will go forward.

The response to this situation does not involve political alchemy, instead identifying a reference social block, elements to involve in a unitary framework of struggles and common alternative hypothesis. In this sense the refoundation of class-struggle unions – starting from a clear, strong opposition within the CGIL and a progressive unity in action of rank-and-file trade unionism – represents a decisive wedge. It is the main horizon for any new anticapitalist left project: unity among struggles and movements is indispensable today to resist the rightwing forces and make progress towards building a class-struggle left.

6. The new left cannot have a single identity. There are legacies of the past that are no longer sufficient to give meaning to political representation and that must encounter each other dialectically. We would posit an anticapitalist, ecologist, communist and feminist left, not to assemble a range of subjectivities haphazardly, but to

find together a unitary frame of reference and a common work project. However, this multiple identity cannot simply be proclaimed. It must be practised: a feminist left is one that accepts women as protagonists and thus also their struggles.

An ecologist left means not accepting any compromises in terms of safeguarding the environment. A communist left means continuing to fight to break from the existing social system and building a real movement to abolish the existing state of affairs. It also means an internationalist left capable of building an international project based on theoretical and practical work in common. For this reason we look attentively at the European anticapitalist left experience.

7. Absolute democracy will be the decisive means of building a new beginning. We can no longer accept, or build, any left based on charismatic leaders, infallible leaderships, immobile bureaucracies, scandalous careerism, or institutional drifts. We want a left based on participation and democratic rules. Regular congresses and transparent statutes are not sufficient. It will require precise measures: rigorous rotation of responsibilities on all levels, pay levels patterned on average Italian salaries, gender parity, respect for sexual orientations and self-financed political activity. Instead of leaders and immobile leaderships, activist collectives will be needed on all levels: regional, topical and national.

8. The left will build itself in the living world of contradictions and social conflict, not in the halls of power or worse, in salons. It is a "hand to hand" work that must be built upon, made of mutual aid, social usefulness, and responsiveness to needs, organisation of struggles and victories. This means putting social roots that are not generic or abstract. These roots must grow from new realities and in particular the new proletariat, the new makeup of the contemporary working class, starting from migrants. It means discussions about forms of social self-organisation and the type of political insediamento subaltern classes can develop. It can't be achieved through bureaucratic, crystallised apparatus, but depends on the contribution of activists who refuse to give up. This is the task awaiting us. Radicality, above all class radicality, is the keyword to make left politics credible and participatory today.

9. Rebuilding the left also requires in-depth discussions. These must be rigorous and not ritualistic, about the society we want and major horizons. We posit a democratic, socialist society, self-governed, centred on needs and not private interests. It would be founded on social property of the major means of production, ecological, sexualised and liberating. This is not an abstract model from above but a movement that transforms reality that gains legitimacy and strength in the living heart of struggles and change. It means rethinking and building a political organisation that can work and struggle for this objective without seeing itself as the single holder of a presumed truth, without aping past experiences, without replicating power roles or relations. It means an organisation able to read reality and take part

in transforming it. But we don't want to proclaim ourselves this subject, we want to actually build it. This is why we are a political movement. This does not mean giving up on organising ourselves or developing a collective project – building the Critical Left also means that.

10. A new left will be built in the here and now, in the urgency of a situation dominated by Berlusconi's regime and the Democratic Party's pragmatic adaptation. The priority is organising a social opposition, not merely in words but modelled on real needs. The issues for this opposition remain, in our view: the struggle against precarity, continuing to demand the abrogation of Law 30, the Treu package and the welfare package, the struggle for a 1300 € minimum salary and a 1000 € social salary, defence of the national contract. They include struggle against war and military missions, whether in Afghanistan or Lebanon, against military bases, starting with Vicenza, and military spending. They also include struggles for environmental defence in the regions against useless or harmful large-scale projects and privatisation; the defence of women's self-determination, of Law 194 for a moratorium on conscientious objections (to abortion and contraception); full freedom of sexual orientation through recognition of civil unions, the struggle against racism, security hysteria and the new anti-Roma xenophobia. This struggle must also aim for the abrogation of the Bossi-Fini and Turco-Napolitano laws, class unity between migrant and Italian workers, new citizenship rights, permanent resident status, closing the CPTs, and freedom of movement. This will also be the main testing ground for opposition to the rightwing forces, the terrain on which all political forces must measure themselves, and on which movements must quickly provide themselves adequate instruments for reflection and mobilisation.

11. Building the anticapitalist left requires a new political generation's commitment. This new generation bears no responsibility for the ruins. A new political generation does not necessarily mean the youth cult that figured in the last elections but must represent the most genuine expression of new social movements and struggles continuing to develop across Italy, from the "rebel citizens" in Vicenza and Val di Susa to workers resisting in bitter class struggles, neofeminists who want to live in freedom and not be bossed around, LGBTQ activists who refuse the second-class life the Vatican imposes on them, migrants fighting for new rights. A new political generation, which has grown up without models to copy but which does not resign itself to thinking that this is the best of all possible worlds and is prepared to fight so another world, another society can still be possible.

Critical Left National Coordination, 10 May 2008

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► *The Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) was set up in January 2007 by the minority of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) which refused the participation of the party in the Prodi government. It includes the comrades*

of Bandiera Rossa, Italian section of the Fourth International.

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Ireland

Rewritten European Union Constitution Buried?

Voters Drive Stake Through the Heart of the Lisbon Treaty

John Meehan

Voters in the Republic of Ireland drove a stake through the heart of the Lisbon Treaty, a rewrite of the European Union Constitution, in a Referendum which took place on June 12 – The result was announced on Friday June 13 2008.

No campaigners made this a memorably unlucky date for EU boss Jose Manuel Barroso and his gang of privateers and wannabe military adventurers – a ruling class élite still smarting from its 2005 European Union Constitution referendum defeats in Holland and France.

The No side won with 862,415 votes (53.4%) against 752,451 (46.6%) for the Yes of the 1,621,037 people who voted (turnout was 53.1%).

Formally the treaty is de facto dead, expired, late and extinct – just like the Monty Python parrot. However, dracula-style revival measures are possible.

The treaty cannot achieve life unless each EU state ratifies it. The Nice Treaty survived because Irish voters were asked for their verdict not once, but twice.

Can the Irish ruling class risk that operation a second time?

New York was "so good" they had to name it twice. In 2001 Ireland experienced "Nice 1" and voted No. In 2002 voters said Yes to "Nice 2".

Holding a second referendum this time around will not be so easy.

Ask yourself : was the EU constitution killed by the French and Dutch referendums of 2005?

The answer is Yes.

Was the process killed? - the answer is No.

The Lisbon Treaty is a child of the EU Constitution, but is different in some respects. (Bertie Ahern correctly said the treaty contains ninety per cent of the [dead] constitution).

Here's a vital difference : Only citizens of the Irish state could vote on the treaty - parliaments ratify in every one of the other 26 member states. Barroso and company were determined there would be no repeat of the French and Dutch referendum rejections.

A week before voters marked their ballot papers, an opinion poll published in the June 6 2008 Irish Times predicted, for the first time in the campaign, a clear victory for the No Side.

This poll estimated a No vote share of 35 per cent – the Yes trailed behind on 30 per cent, and undecided voters made up the remaining 35 per cent.

Discounting the “Don't know” category, this implied a result of No 54 per cent against a Yes of 46 per cent – a deadly accurate prediction.

For this reason No campaigners should pay detailed attention to the findings of this and similar polls, as the information will be needed to guide us forward in the months ahead.

The Yes side strained every nerve for a reversal of the poll prediction in the final days – but, it is now clear, its goose was already cooked.

The final result is a remarkable event, since the odds were stacked so high in favour of the Yes Side.

160 members of Dáil Éireann (the Dublin Parliament) supported a Yes Vote – only six TD's [1] supported the No Side. Just one Dáil Party (Sinn Féin) called for a No Vote on June 12.

The governing Fianna Fáil/Green Party/Progressive Democrat coalition Government elected in May 2007 was joined on the Yes Side by the biggest opposition parties – the right wing Fine Gael and the Labour Party (a social democratic organisation which has embraced Tony Blair style neo-liberalism).

Sniffing danger, all of these machines – which normally run their own shows, taking pot-shots off each other - started to combine forces during the last week of May.

The “Alliance for Europe” – fronted by former Labour Party leader Ruairí Quinn TD – alone has a budget of €750,000.

For the first time ever the employers' organization IBEC (Irish Business and Employers' Confederation) directly campaigned in a referendum with its own posters and publicity material.

By contrast the main left-wing campaign, the Campaign Against the EU Constitution (Vote No to the Lisbon Treaty) – a coalition of 14 different organisations and independent activists (www.sayno.ie) – had a budget of less than €10,000.

Towards the end of the campaign, after months of hesitation, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Executive recommended a Yes, but for the first time in many years revealed deep internal divisions. The motion was carried by fourteen votes to five, with eight abstentions. A few months earlier a Yes proposal would have sailed through with little discussion.

UNITE , the state's second biggest union, and the Electricians' Union voted No – the Campaign Against the European Union Constitution office was located in the UNITE headquarters. The large Unions with big private sector membership, SIPTU and MANDATE, abstained.

The neo-liberal drive of the European Union in the last few years has alarmed many workers' organisations. Recent European Court of Justice rulings in the Laval and Viking cases – which allow employers to hire people at minimal rates of pay, destroying existing collective agreements negotiated a state level, are consistent with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty.

Shaky Fianna Fáil

The coalition Government is shaky (Fianna Fáil) and vulnerable (Green Party).

Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern stepped down early from office in April this year, allowing the then deputy leader of Fianna Fáil, Brian Cowen, to take over the top Government job.

Ahern, for the last two years, has been trying to explain away the receipt of large sums of money to a Tribunal investigating Payments to Politicians, directed by Judge Alan Mahon.

Negative headlines were replaced by a month of media praise for the departing leader. Words of worship rained like cats and dogs - again and again the Irish public was reminded that since Ahern was elected Taoiseach in June 1997 :

1. The Fianna Fáil leader played a major role in the “peace process” (which terminated the “troubles” in Northern Ireland, ushering in a “power-sharing” Government between Unionists and Nationalists, headed by the rabble-rousing far-right preacher Ian Paisley [2] – Ahern was feted around the globe. He was invited to make a long speech to a special joint session of the USA Senate and Congress, which was broadcast live back in Ireland, followed by acres of fawning newspaper coverage.

President Bush was paying a small price – the Fianna Fáil led Government allows the USA military to use Shannon Airport for transporting troops weapons and torture victims back and forth between Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo and other locations on the American continent.

2. Bertie's period of office coincided with a historically unprecedented economic boom in the 26 County Republic of Ireland (the years of the Celtic Tiger)

Government poll ratings improved, new leader Brian Cowen basked in the reflected glow – and a temporary opinion poll boost was delivered to the Yes side of Lisbon Treaty debate.

But current reality collided with spin - the Lisbon Treaty crash-landed, and Brian Cowen's short honeymoon is over.

Ahern is back in the Mahon Tribunal - a tortuous comic affair, as one clever piece of deception after another gets unravelled by legal investigators on the trail of intentionally complex financial wheeling and dealing.

One week before the referendum, for example, the former Taoiseach was in the witness-box, unable to answer Tribunal Counsel Des O'Neill's statement that "of the 86 lodgements to Mr Ahern's accounts during 1993 and 1995...there was no evidence to show the source of "99.99%" of the money" (Irish Times, June 6 2008). A total of at least £62-79,000 Sterling has so far been uncovered for these two years alone. The former Minister for Finance claims he had no bank account between 1987 and 1993, and saved cash in a safe.

Vulnerable Green Party

At a special Green Party conference delegates voted for the Treaty – but by less than a two-thirds majority, meaning the party was unable to publicly campaign for either side in this campaign.

Panic set in at top levels. Minister Éamonn Ryan warned of "chaos" if the Treaty is rejected. One of the party's six TD's, Ciarán Cuffe, bitterly complained that the debate has been taken over by "Spuccers and Trotskyites" (!).

Ciarán Cuffe and his colleagues are very intimate with the left-wing case against the Lisbon Treaty – before the Greens entered Government with Fianna Fáil in May 2007, the party was associated with the CAEUC.

In one public debate on Development Issues and the Lisbon Treaty a former CAEUC member, Green Party Yes campaigner Senator Deirdre de Búrca, declared that if her party was not in Government it would be campaigning for a No vote on the Lisbon Treaty.

To ensure there was no doubt, this writer double-checked, asking the Senator for confirmation of her statement – Deirdre repeated herself - my ears were working fine that evening.

This exchange occurred on Wednesday May 7, during a discussion about the Treaty's provisions on development issues – see these links for a [CAEUC Statement](#) distributed to all who attended, and a full report of the meeting written by [Liz Curry](#) .

De Búrca also argued for a Yes Vote because we must tackle climate change – a No campaigner pointed out that the Treaty contains precisely six words on this subject.

Some weeks later Green Party leader and Government Minister John Gormley stated that even if he was in opposition, he would be recommending a Yes Vote on the Lisbon Treaty.

A fool might bet that the Green Party will sit on the government benches after the next General Election (scheduled for June 2012 at the latest) – a wiser punter would wager that Gormley's party will be lucky to survive electoral contests in the next couple of years.

A leading spokesperson on the No side was former Dublin Green Member of the European Parliament Patricia McKenna. She will be again seeking the party's nomination in forthcoming polls – the big question will be : should the Greens remain in coalition with Fianna Fáil? Odds are that Gormley's party will stay in government .

In that case, the fate of the Progressive Democrats (PD's) looms large for the Green Party : the PD's are a well-financed right/neo-liberal party which returned only two TD's in the May 2007 General Election, a disastrous drop from eight. Its leader Michael McDowell lost his seat and promptly resigned from public life.

Its single minister, Mary Harney, directs a root and branch privatisation of the Department of Health, and has generated a mounting campaign of public demonstrations against her policies.

It is only a matter of time before most Progressive Democrat components are assimilated into Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael – maybe fragments will drift into the Labour Party or the Greens.

CAEUC activists worked with Health campaigners during the referendum campaign, successfully persuading key activists from this sector to vote against the Lisbon Treaty.

Why Did the Lisbon Treaty Lose Ground?

In January 2008 the Irish result seemed a shoo-in [3] – A Red C Opinion Poll estimated a Yes / No split of 43 to 25 per cent discounting a high "Don't Know" score of 32% - meaning a likely 64/36 result on the referendum day. At the start of April the gap narrowed to a Yes/No share of 35 to 31 per cent – making the likely result too close to call – it was within the margin of error.

The numbers then moved back towards the Yes Side – coinciding with the decision of Bertie Ahern to vacate the job of Taoiseach.

Worrying trends for the Lisbon Treaty showed up in a May 25 Sunday Business Post Opinion Poll : the Red C Company headlined its report "Yes camp struggles to gain a clear lead" – the No Side was gaining ground, undecided voters were breaking in a ratio of 5:3 against the treaty.

Then a decisive swing against the Lisbon Treaty swept away the Yes side - why?

Using hindsight, reading reliable reports from CAEUC activists on our e- mail list, and public sources such as

the website www.sayno.ie, tell-tale signs of a momentous victory jump out at the reader.

An unusual feature of this campaign was that at several public meetings, even those called by the Yes Side, most of the audience tended to favour a No Vote.

Some examples :

The Labour Party called a public meeting in Dublin's Liberty Hall on April 14 – six platform speakers, including party TD's and an MEP, spoke for the treaty. Reliable reports indicated that at least 70 per cent of the audience (numbering about 80 people) favoured a No Vote.

In Limerick City on May 15 a CAEUC inaugural meeting directly clashed with a public debate organised by the Oireachtas (Houses of Parliament) European Affairs Committee. Naturally, the Oireachtas meeting was much better-financed, and therefore was more heavily advertised. The CAEUC meeting attracted an attendance twice the size of the Oireachtas Committee Event (65 people versus 30). The parliamentarians, once they had finished praising the Lisbon Treaty from the platform, discovered that every single person in their audience was voting No. So, it was established that 95 people in Limerick City intended voting against the treaty, feeling strongly enough about it to attend two clashing public meetings.

The Limerick East constituency result

No	21191	54.0%
Yes	18085	46.0%
Turnout		51.4%

On June 4 the Community and Workers' Action Group (CWAG) organised a debate in the Dublin South-Central constituency between the Yes and No sides. The independent socialist councillor Joan Collins (CWAG) and Brendan Young of the CAEUC spoke for voting No. Their opponents on the Yes Side were representatives of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, Charlie Ardagh (Fianna Fáil) and Ruairi McGinley (Fine Gael). When the debate ended the 70 people attending were asked to raise their hands for a Yes or a No – all seventy people in the audience voted No.

The Dublin South-Central constituency result

No	25624	61.0%
Yes	16410	46.0%
Turnout		51.6%

The Irish Government had to run two referendums on the Nice Treaty – at the first time of asking the proposal was defeated in 2001 (Nice 1).

After that the state set up a "National Forum for Europe", with relatively democratic rules allowing for equal time shared between Yes and No speakers. Research demonstrated that many people had voted No in the Nice 1 referendum because they objected to a lack of

information about the issues. A "democratic deficit" was addressed, without doubt helping the state to gain a Yes victory in the 2002 "Nice 2" referendum.

Turnout for Nice 2 was 49.5%, significantly higher than Nice 1, 34.8% .

But this time around the turnout for the Lisbon Treaty Referendum was even higher, 53.1%.

This means that a revote on the Lisbon Treaty, like the Nice 2 operation, is not a good option for the Yes side.

Writing in the Guardian (June 14) the Irish Times columnist Fintan O'Toole (a left-liberal supporter of Lisbon) correctly observed that "In the first Nice referendum, the turnout was so low that the government could just about get away with asking people to vote again. The turnout for Lisbon was much higher, so repeating the exercise would simply feed the perception that voters are being bullied."

In 2008, in general, a significant majority of people attending forum meetings indicated they were voting no.

The "democratic deficit" factor worked in favour of the No side.

The Lisbon Treaty is a tough read, and is very hard to understand – not surprising when one its main supporters said :

"The aim of the Constitutional Treaty was to be more readable; the aim of this treaty is to be unreadable [...] The Constitution aimed to be clear, whereas this treaty had to be unclear. It is a success." Karel De Gucht, Belgian Foreign Minister, Flanders Info, 23 June 2007

Here too are the words of the document's main author, ex-President of France Valéry Giscard d'Estaing :

"Public opinion will be led to adopt, without knowing it, the proposals that we dare not present to them directly ... All the earlier proposals will be in the new text, but will be hidden and disguised in some way." Le Monde 14 June 2007 and Sunday Telegraph 1 July 2007

I showed these and other similar quotes to one voter who immediately asked (very reasonably) if De Gucht was on the No side.

Both these quotes, and a few other gems from similar high-ranking politicians, are contained in a 32 page CAEUC pamphlet calling for a No Vote on the treaty – we distributed 10,000 copies during the campaign. They are also published on the website.

Time and again activists read out these quotes, and then concentrated on unravelling key provisions of the text – for example those which provide for further privatisations of public services. The Lisbon Treaty is written in the style of George Orwell's 1984 "Newspeak" : "Public Services" are renamed "Services of General Economic Interest".

When Yes supporters claimed to be defending the State's traditional policy of military neutrality, CAEUC activists directed people to provisions which require an increase in military spending – and contrasted this active wording

with the absence of any measures to, for example, increase public funding for health services.

A growing mood of puzzlement threatened the Yes side of the Lisbon Debate.

Fianna Fáil has a big popular base and takes pride in staying in touch with its “grass roots”. The new Taoiseach Brian Cowen is no fool – he admitted he had not read the 440 page labyrinth, with its confusing set of protocols, amendments to amendments, obscure and deliberately baffling language, and so on.

The June 6 Irish Times report of its opinion poll said “Not knowing what the treaty is about was cited as the main reason for voting No in the referendum, with 30 per cent giving it as the reason for their decision.”

No campaigners sympathised with the state leader's dilemma, knowing their point had hit home big time.

Yes organisations like Fianna Fáil used slogans like “Yes to Europe”, “Good for Ireland” and so on – without discussing the Treaty's actual text. They presented it as an administrative tidy-up job, reducing the number of commissioners, giving the European Parliament extra powers, making the expanded machine work more efficiently to accommodate 27 states.

In the final days of the campaign Cowen and his allies accused the No side of failing to discuss the treaty's contents, spreading false information, and warned that Ireland would suffer from a No decision. This was an unconvincing change of tune from a campaign which for months has sung hymns of praise to the Irish Celtic Tiger, a “success” linked to membership of the EU.

Media supporters of the Yes side – especially those with a left-wing past, or who currently support the Labour Party – inflated the profile of far-right wing opponents of the Treaty, and minimised the opposition campaign mounted from the left.

A notorious example of this was an Irish Times “story” that French fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen might come to Ireland to campaign for a No vote. Pro Lisbon Treaty journalists from this newspaper could not find anyone in Ireland willing to invite the French fascist – several No campaigners indicated they would in fact protest against any such visit.

True to form, on the day after the count, most mainline media organisations gave significant pictorial coverage to far-right No campaigners associated with “Youth Defence”, which is militantly anti- abortion.

The imbalance prior to the vote has been carried over into the post mortem. On talk shows and press pages the losing side debates with itself on what went wrong, what are “we” going to do next, how could the people have done the wrong thing and what is “Europe” going to do in retaliation?

The discourse assumes that a way must be found to fit the result into “the other 26” countries' determination to go ahead with Lisbon and to overlook the simple result of

the vote (in Ireland, France and the Netherlands): that the Lisbon Treaty is legally and morally dead.

The overwhelming dominance of the defeated side — in the national debate and in the corridors of EU power (where the EU elite is overlooking the result and putting enormous pressure on the Irish elite to get a ‘solution’) – means there is only one thing that can prevent the Irish majority being left out on a limb. That is the remobilisation of the French ‘No’ movement, rekindled by the Irish vote, to demand a final end to Lisbon or, at least, a French referendum on it. The Irish, French and Dutch stands need to be internationalised.

Debate within the CAEUC and beyond should focus on alternative visions to the doomed Lisbon Treaty / European Union Constitution Project. One approach is set out here, “[The Europe We Stand For](#)”.

This contrasts with the main line advocated by Sinn Féin, which is looking for a “better deal” to be negotiated. Wily politicians such as Brian Cowen will be happy to offer some minor concessions – such as keeping an Irish Commissioner, maybe tinkering with a few vetos – but keeping the neo- liberal substance of any new Treaty/Constitution intact.

People in Sinn Féin who doubt this should take on board the fate of the Green Party – once they entered Government with Fianna Fáil former radical policies went out the window. Sinn Féin's welcome opposition to the Lisbon Treaty, along lines that were generally progressive, collides with any perspective of being “ready for government” – the party's headline policy in the May 2007 General Election.

The ‘No’ right may set out to provide the political alternative and stand in the coming European Elections in June 2009.

A thing very badly needed is better coordination of the ‘No’ side on the left.

The victory, in the light of the far from ideal, but real, left unity during the referendum campaign, has returned regroument to the agenda of the left.

Key players here are the Socialist Party (its best-known representative Joe Higgins did tremendous work, co-operating very well with the CAEUC as well as promoting his own party); the People Before Profit coalition, whose main component is the Socialist Workers' Party; the Community and Workers' Action Group, whose main spokesperson is the Independent Socialist City Councillor Joan Collins; the trade union UNITE; and various other activists.

Local Government Elections take place at the same time, and all sectors of the “real left” need to run a united campaign in both contests – you can't have one without the other.

Organisations trade unions and activists which, at a minimum :

* Oppose the neo-liberal assault on public services

* Are in favour of equality measures such as ending the notorious 1983 constitutional ban on abortion

* Which unconditionally refuse any governmental coalition deals with bourgeois parties such as Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael

have another opportunity to get their act together, with the emphasis on 'together'.

▶ *John Meehan, a founding member of the CAEUC, is a supporter of the Fourth International in Ireland.*

NOTES

[1] TD = Teachta Dála, Member of the Dáil (parliament)

[2] Like Ahern, Ian Paisley has recently been forced to step down early from his First Minister's job in Northern Ireland – in part caused by a financial scandal over the designation of the Giant's Causeway as a World Heritage Site. Readers will struggle to find details of this in the principal media outlets based in the 26 County Republic of Ireland – however, there is plenty of material available on the website www.nuzhound.com – which carries an excellent daily selection of news relevant to the six-county state of Northern Ireland.)

[3] According to the Wikipedia entry "Shoo in" was originally a racetrack term, applied to a horse expected to easily win a race. The Oxford English Dictionary mentions "shoo in" was originally a horse that was expected to win a race because the race was fixed: "the designated horse would win even if it were so lackadaisical in its performance that it simply wandered somehow up to the finish line and had to be "shoed in" to victory". Former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, scrambling with words to explain monstrous amounts of sterling in bank accounts he had "forgotten" about, now says he won the money by betting successfully in England on horse races.....

Other recent articles:

Ireland

[The New Stormont regime in the North of Ireland](#) - July 2007
[Sectarian headcount in Irish election sees Paisley triumphant](#) - March 2007
[Breakthrough for Sinn Fein](#) - October 2004
[Goodbye to Good Friday](#) - December 2002
[A crucial vote](#) - March 2002

France

Building a new anti-capitalist party

A progress report to the LCR's national leadership

Ingrid Hayes

Following on the meeting of the National Leadership (DN) of the LCR over the weekend of May 17-18, some elements on the progress of the process of building the new anti-capitalist party (NPA)

On what information are these elements based?

▶ on information coming directly from towns and departments, synthesized each week in an inventory of the situation sent out in the national circular of the LCR;

▶ on a questionnaire that was filled out by the members of the DN concerning the NPA committees in their department.

1. How many committees are there?

This information is still partial but gives us a fairly reliable estimate of the number of committees: at the present time we can calculate that there exist a minimum of 250 committees already established and active, and at least a hundred in the process of being set up. Moreover, in a series of cities and departments, activity around the NPA has started but is not yet sufficiently advanced for us to consider that a committee is being set up. In all, activity is under way in more than 80 departments [out of 95 in Metropolitan France].

2. What form do they take?

1. In general they are set up on a geographical basis.

The great majority of the committees already existing or in the process of being set up are established on a geographical basis. There also exist also several dozen youth committees, often organised around universities or high schools. On the other hand, committees based on industries or workplaces are still very few, which undoubtedly reflects the difficulty of this work. The majority of the industrial committees are centred on the health sector, some are organised by rail workers or teachers and one functions in the Paris region with workers from 12 enterprises of the graphic industries.

2. The size of the committees.

It varies, between committees which function through well-attended general meetings based on a town or a department and others which are very small (less than 10 people)

3. Who is involved?

a. On the number of people involved.

It is still difficult to estimate. It is certain that several thousand people who are not members of the LCR are involved, and that they are the majority in the process. Furthermore, in certain cases (more than 15 per cent) there was no branch of the Ligue before the NPA committee was set up. So although the existence of a branch of the LCR is an important criterion, it is not always a necessary precondition.

b. The composition of the membership

At the present stage, it is not yet possible to give elements of information in terms of social composition and age. We will have to follow this up.

The new members for the NPA are often trade unionists, members of local or national associations, former members of political parties, but for the majority it is their

first experience of being involved in an organized structure. In any case we can see great political heterogeneity, since the process is bringing together ex-members of various parties of the left and far-left, former supporters of Jose Bove's presidential campaign, radical ecologists, libertarians.

c. The ratio of women to men

According to a calculation carried out on a sample of approximately 160 committees, the numerical relationship between women and men is not up to our objective: there are approximately 35 per cent women.

Having said that, this ratio is comparable with that which exists within the LCR. It is nevertheless an important question to work on, because it concerns an essential aspect of the kind of society that we want to build, it is a condition for women to be able to play a full part and for the concerns and the demands of women to be taken up and defended by the future organization.

4. The diversity of rhythms

Seventeen per cent of the committees were established before March and more than 70 per cent in March-April, without taking into account the committees that are in the course of being established.

That confirms the desynchronization that we have noticed since the beginning of the process, but it is actually quite limited, since work basically started after the municipal elections. We should nevertheless note that a series of areas and departments are very much in advance of the rest: the Haut-Rhin department around Mulhouse, Aquitaine (in particular Gironde and the Pyrenees-Atlantiques), Brittany, Franche-Comte, the city of Paris, Midi-Pyrenees (in particular Tarn and the Toulouse area of Toulouse), the Nord/Pas-de-Calais region, Upper Normandy (Le Havre and the Rouen conurbation) and the Bouches-du-Rhone [the area around Marseilles].

Although some towns and departments are reporting difficulties in launching the process, this only represents a small minority, to which we have to give help. In the vast majority of cases, it is enthusiasm which prevails, and even a certain astonishment on seeing the extent of the interest and dynamics provoked by the project.

In conclusion

The first phase of the process is an indisputable success: the interest and the dynamics are there, the political delimitations defined by the appeal launched at the LCR congress already seem to be collectively accepted, in particular as regards independence with respect to the Socialist Party. The discussions cover every possible subject, on the need to organise as a party, on democracy and internal functioning, on the link with mobilizations, on trade-union intervention, on how to address a broad audience, on strategic and programmatic questions; and the activity of the committees themselves has really started.

It remains to amplify this phase in places where things are less advanced, but especially to pass on to the

second phase, of the stabilization of the committees in terms of participation and commitment. In general there exists a solid core made up of members of the Ligue and of non-members, the latter taking their share of responsibilities for the political and organisational aspects of the process (this is a decisive element, in particular for the second phase), but we sometimes see, beyond this core, that there is some turnover. We have to make sure that the party that is being built becomes a place that everyone feels is theirs, which means that we have to have more thorough collective discussions on the party, its functioning, its programme, but also that we have to strengthen its activity, anchored in local and national mobilizations.

► *Ingrid Hayes is a member of the National Leadership of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International), with particular responsibility for work in the global justice movement.*

France

The New Anti-capitalist Party is on the march!

Appeal of the national coordination of action committees for a New Anti-capitalist Party

We are thousands of workers, men and women, from the cities and the countryside, with or without employment, with or without papers, young people, pensioners, precarious workers, activists from political organisations, trade-unions, associations, new and old, who are in the process of making this project a reality.

The "new anti-capitalist party" proposed by the LCR in France had its first national meeting on the 28th and 29th June in St Denis near Paris. About 1000 people were present including 800 delegates from local committees.



After a first session of contributions from local committees, the gathering split up into workshops on different themes such as ecology, feminism,

internationalism, work in local neighbourhoods, in work places, with the sans papiers...

The meeting ended with the creation of a national coordinating committee to prepare a further national meeting in the autumn and the adoption of a statement.

We will carry further reports on this meeting and the process of creating the new party but we publish here the statement adopted.

Today there are more than 300 committees and the dynamic is getting stronger. This is a result of people becoming conscious: we can no longer put up with a globalized capitalist system which is leading the world to disaster! We now find ourselves in an economic and financial crisis, an energy crisis, a food crisis, whose consequences no one can predict. More than ever, this system is making the search for profit the centre of its decisions, treating the lives of millions of human beings with contempt. Fundamental ecological equilibriums are threatened. Because it is the source of the problem, capitalism, like all productivist systems, is unable to provide a solution to it. In a world of greater and greater inequalities, hunger riots are spreading, as a consequence of the policies of the great imperialist powers, the institutions that serve them (the IMF, the WTO...) and of shameful speculation on essential commodities. The war "without limits" decreed by Bush and his allies, including France, is spreading its horrors throughout the world.

Here in France, Sarkozy and the MEDEF [French employers' organization] are multiplying attacks which express the arrogance of the powerful. Seldom have right-wing policies been so openly aggressive towards the vast majority of the population. Seldom have the owners of wealth, the shareholders, and the employers shown themselves to be so avid for profits, with contempt for the elementary wellbeing of the people. Yes, everywhere people are exasperated by the attacks on the gains working people have made, on solidarity, on public services, by the difficulty of "making ends meet", by the worsening of housing and living conditions, by racism and discriminations, by law and order policies... We must not throw away the potential of this exasperation by letting ourselves be taken in by "social dialogue" with the government, by division, by one-day strikes in disorder, one sector after another. Here and now, we can react! Action "all together", determined and unitary, the generalization of the struggles and the strikes that exist, that is what is needed to defeat the government and its counter-reforms!

To push things in this direction, it is necessary to regroup our forces in a party which does not give up anything, which does not abandon anyone. It is not possible to unite in the same party those who want to finish with capitalism and those who put up with it. It is not possible to have in the same government those who defend the rights of the workers and those who defend the power of shareholders, those who want to break with liberal policies and those who put them into practice, those who

want to build a Europe of the workers and the most dedicated artisans of a Europe of free competition and profit. That is why we want a party completely independent of the Socialist Party, a party which defends to the end the interests of all the exploited.

We call on you to build, all together, a Left which does not give up, a fighting, anti-capitalist, internationalist, anti-racist, ecologist, feminist Left, a Left that is revolted by all forms of discrimination. To change the world, we need a party which fights to the end against the system, for the revolutionary transformation of society. The Left that we want must be organized on an international, and in particular European, scale. It must be present in elections, without ever forgetting that it is the social, cultural and ecological mobilizations that will impose change.

Bearing in mind past experiences, we will work out together, by taking the time to discuss, a new democratic socialist perspective for the 21st century. We do not have a model, especially not the regimes of the last century that claimed to be "communist", but we have objectives. To put an end to the dictatorship that capital imposes on the economy and the entire society, to build the broadest democracy that humanity has ever known, where the "invisible hand of the market" will be replaced by collective decisions. There are more and more of us who want to meet this challenge. Individuals, groups of activists, revolutionary political currents, libertarians, communists, socialists, ecologists, anti-liberals, let us keep on uniting! ... In their village, their neighbourhood, their workplace, their place of study, each and every one can and must bring, at their own speed, their contribution to the building of this pluralist and democratic instrument. Success is within our grasp.

Let us go forward!

St Denis, Sunday June 29, 2008.

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