
INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

News & analysis from the Fourth International - November 2007 - # 394

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A note to readers

November's issue of International Viewpoint is almost three times its normal size, with over 300,000 characters. As a result of the extra work involved, the print and pdf editions of this issue became available a few weeks late. We are now back on our regular schedule, and thank our readers for their patience.

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Pakistan's State of emergency

Pakistan Takes Yet Another Step into the Dark Night

Tariq Ali

For anyone marinated in the history of Pakistan yesterday's decision by the military to impose a state of emergency comes as no surprise. Martial law in this country has become an antibiotic: in order to obtain the same results one has to keep doubling the doses. This was a coup within a coup.

General Pervez Musharraf ruled the country with a civilian façade, but his power base was limited to the army. And it was the army Chief of Staff who declared the emergency, suspended the 1973 constitution, took all non-government TV channels off the air, jammed the mobile phone networks, surrounded the Supreme Court with paramilitary units, dismissed the Chief Justice, arrested the president of the bar association and inaugurated yet another shabby period in the country's history.

Why? They feared that a Supreme Court judgment due next week might make it impossible for Musharraf to contest the elections. The decision to suspend the constitution was taken a few weeks ago. According to good sources, contrary to what her official spokesman has been saying ("she was shocked"), Benazir Bhutto was informed and chose to leave the country before it happened. (Whether her "dramatic return" was also pre-arranged remains to be seen.) Intoxicated by the incense of power, she might now discover that it remains as elusive as ever. If she ultimately supports the latest turn it will be an act of political suicide. If she decides to dump the general (she accused him last night of breaking his promises), she will be betraying the confidence of the US state department, which pushed her this way.

The two institutions targeted by the emergency are the judiciary and the broadcasters, many of whose correspondents supply information that politicians never give. Geo TV continued to air outside the country. Hamid Mir, one of its sharpest journalists, said yesterday he believed the US embassy had green-lighted the coup because they

regarded the Chief Justice as a nuisance and "a Taliban sympathiser".

The regime has been confronted with a severe crisis of legitimacy that came to a head earlier this year when Musharraf's decision to suspend the Chief Justice, Iftikhar Hussain Chaudhry, provoked a six-month long mass movement that forced a government retreat. Some of Chaudhry's judgments had challenged the government on key issues such as "disappeared prisoners", harassment of women and rushed privatisations. It was feared that he might declare a uniformed president illegal. The struggle to demand a separation of powers between the state and the judiciary, which has always been weak, was of critical importance. Pakistan's judges have usually been acquiescent. Those who resisted military leaders were soon bullied out of it, so the decision of this chief justice to fight back was surprising, but extremely important and won him enormous respect. Global media coverage of Pakistan suggests a country of generals, corrupt politicians and bearded lunatics. The struggle to reinstate the Chief Justice presented a different snapshot of the country.

The Supreme Court's declaration that the new dispensation was "illegal and unconstitutional" was heroic, and, by contrast, the hurriedly sworn in new Chief Justice will be seen for what he is: a stooge of the men in uniform. If the constitution remains suspended for more than three months then Musharraf may be pushed aside by the army and a new strongman installed. Or it could be that the aim was limited to cleansing the Supreme Court and controlling the media. In which case a rigged January election becomes a certainty.

Whatever the case, Pakistan's long journey to the end of the night continues.

This article is republished from the website of the Labour Party Pakistan.

-Tariq Ali is a socialist writer and broadcaster who has been particularly active in anti-imperialist campaigns, from Vietnam to Iraq. Born and brought up in Pakistan, he now lives in London.

LPP Vows to Resist Draconian Emergency

Hails lawyers for taking up the fight - Lends full support to resisting judges

Farooq Tariq

Lahore: The Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) has strongly condemned the Musharraf regime for imposing Emergency thus depriving the people of Pakistan of their already-limited basic human and democratic rights.

The LPP Chairperson, Nisar Shah, and Secretary General Farooq Tariq, in a joint statement issued here Saturday vowed to resist the imposition of Emergency in collaboration with civil society bodies, trade unions and opposition parties. While lending full support to the resisting Supreme Court judges and Chief Justice of Pakistan Iftikhar Ch., the LPP leaders condemned Justice hameed Dogar for taking oath under new PCO saying: ‘Regardless of the immediate outcome of the judges fight against the generals, the resisting judges have deprived the Emergency of all its justification’.

They said that it was unprecedented in the history of Pakistan that judiciary had showed such a courage. ‘This resistance also owes to the mass movement led by lawyers fraternity last summer that humbled the Musharaff regime and chief justice was reinstated’, they added.

They also hailed the Karachi lawyers for taking lead in announcing to launch their struggle to fight back Emergency.

The LPP leaders appealed to activists, trade unions and civil body organisations to join hands with resisting judges and lawyers to rid the country of military regime. They said: ‘Though the regime is likely to use Taliban-occupation of certain districts in Frontier province as a pretext to impose Emergency yet it is most likely that Emergency is imposed to pre-empt a court ruling against Musharaff’s re-election. Emergency means that all basic democratic rights will be suspended while courts would have their powers curtailed’.

‘Pakistan has been in grip of political crisis and regime was facing growing mass resentment. This Emergency is a desperate attempt to cling to power,’ they added.

-Farooq Tariq is the general secretary of Labour Party Pakistan.

Over 100 civil society activists arrested in Lahore

An urgent letter from our comrades

Syed Abdul Khaliq

Over 100 civil society activists have been arrested from a meeting of Joint Action Committee, at Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Lahore on Sunday 14.00 hrs.

Dear All,

The meeting was called to discuss the situation after the imposition of Emergency in the country by General Pervez Mushraf. Police broke the windows of the hall to enter into the meeting venue. Disrupt the peaceful indoor meeting and asked the participants to come out. All the participants were bundled into the police vans and driven to the Model Town Police Station. among the arrested men and women include I.A Rehman, Iqbal Hyder, Robina Saugol, Azra Shad, Khalid Mehmood, Mehboob Khan and Raja Salman. The names of many other friends could not be identified yet.

Me and Bushra Khaliq, secretary WWHL were late from the meeting. When we reached the HRCP office to attend the meeting at 12:30 by that time police cordoned off the whole building and blocked the road towards HRCP office. The police refused our entry in the meeting hall. We stayed outside the hall for half an hour to asses the situation. meanwhile we contacted some friends in present in the meeting on mobile and apprised them about the situation outside. More contingents of police were pouring in. it was all a threatening scenario. gun totting police men on red lighted vehicles and bikes can be seen all around the HRCP hall. The police ordered all the people waiting outside the hall to leave the place immediately.

Meanwhile We remained in contact with some participants on phone and they told us that police have entered in the hall, stopped the meeting and offered the women participants to leave the venue while all the men were told that they are arrested. The women participants refused to go so they were also arrested along with men. Later they were all taken to police station. Police has refused to tell

them the nature and period of their detention. We are trying to get more information

In view of the latest crackdown on political activists, Farooq Tariq, general secretary LPP is underground to avoid arrest and police is looking for him like grey hounds. last night a police raid was also conducted at his Lahore residence. It is pertinent to mention that LPP has denounced the Emergency and vowed to resist it.

Syed Abdul Khaliq
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Day Two of Underground Life

Military regime targets socialists

Farooq Tariq

Today is my second day in underground life.

On 3rd November 2007, when General Musharraf declared an emergency and suspended the constitution, I was in Toba Tek Singh, a city around four hours from Lahore. This was to attend a meeting for the preparations of the Labour Party Pakistan fourth national conference. The conference was scheduled to held 9/10/11th November in the city. Poster for the welcome of the delegates were printed and an invitation card to invite supporters for the open session of the conference was ready as well.

The meeting was nearly ending when I heard the news that emergency is been declared. I decided immediately to travel to Lahore. I was in contact with other party comrades on telephone and every one advised me not to go to my home. This was in the background of my three arrests in three months where I spent 23 days in jails and police stations. Labour Party Pakistan has become a target for the military regime because of active participation in the advocate movement. Several comrades had been arrested during the movement.

As I arrived in Lahore, I heard that police has raided my house and are looking for me. My partner Shahnaz Iqbal told them that I am not home and will not be at home because I know that I will be arrested. This was around 11.30pm when police came to my home. It was good decision not to go home.

I was immediately given few SIMs of mobile phone from different private telephone companies and was advised not to use my regular mobile number in any case. "I must use a new number to contact comrades every day to avoid been traced" was the advice. The telecommunication system is so advance that when I will on my regular mobile, they can know where I am and can be immediately arrested.

All the private television channels were off the air. It was only the official television that was broadcasting the official propaganda. Even BBC and CNN were off the line as well. We were in dark and did not know what is coming up. The government was using its dictatorial measures to silence any

oppositional voice being heard by people of Pakistan on the news media. It was an unprecedented act of censorship.

After midnight, General Musharraf came up on the official television to tell the reasons why he has imposed the emergency and that usual demagogy of national interest and Pakistan First. He was trying to tell that he has removed the chief justice of Supreme Court of Pakistan because his decisions have promoted terrorism and suicidal attacks in Pakistan. This was all none since. He had imposed the emergency rules to prolong his power period and was to avoid the Supreme Court decision that might be against him. It was a dictatorial act by a dictator who had tried to convince the world that he is not a dictator. That, he is in a transition period from dictatorship to democracy.

I was awake till 3am trying to listen some international news from the radio.

Next day was Sunday and I went out to buy the newspapers. The area I was staying was where I never had been earlier and no one knew who I am and so on. But the newspapers were not there yet even at 8am. I went back home and in the meantime, I put on my regular mobile telephone forgetting that I am in underground. There was immediately call from a friend and I replied to him. This was a mistake.

I was told by my friend to change the venue immediately that is what I did. This was my second place in hiding during the last 12 hours. Here I read all the papers. Then I went to a park three kilometres away from my place of stay and spoke to some party comrades from my new telephone numbers and discussed the political situation. I called my family as well to check the moral. It was high as ever. My daughter and son asked me not to come home and that they are ok.

A meeting by Joint Action Committee for Peoples Rights was called at the office of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan to discuss and chart out the strategy to oppose the dictatorial measure. The chairperson of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan Asma Jahangir was already detained at her house. And her office called me to tell the comrades to come for the meeting. I told them I will not be there and if police see me they will immediately arrest me.

Khalid Malik, director Labour Education Foundation and Azra Shad chairperson Women Workers Help Line were among those who arrived in time for this meeting. So were around 70 others. Comrade Maqsood Mojahid, Khaliq Shah and Bushra Khaliq were little late for the meeting. As they arrived, they saw police everywhere around the HRCP office. They stopped and contacted inside via phones to tell them be ready for the arrests. This was may be the only time when being late has paid off. This laziness of three comrades saved them being arrested.

Police went inside and broke the doors. They asked women to leave and men to stay for arrests. The women refused. The women included Hina Jilani, Rubina Sahgal, Neelum Hussain, Syeda Deep and Azra Shad. They were all bundled to the nearest police station. This incident showed the intensity of the police brutality and the military regime to silence any opposition voice. It was first time since the establishment of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan office in 1986, that police entered the building. It was considered to be a safe place and that police will not dare to enter.

I heard within few minutes from Bushra, secretary Women Workers Help Line of the arrests. She told me to be more careful.

In the evening, I made another mistake to on my regular telephone. Bad habits die hard. So there was a call, I spoke to a journalist from a private tv channel against the arrests. I immediately realized the mistake and left that place to stay another one for the evening. As I arrived at the new place, a

received a call around 11.30 pm that police has entered my home and checked me everywhere. My partner told me next morning that police came with some intelligence officers in plain cloths. They ordered her to open the door otherwise they will break in. When police entered my home, it was only my daughter (13) son (7) and my partner Shahnaz at home. The police opened every room, cupboards, bathroom, and went to the rooftop. They were desperate to arrest me.

I was upset after hearing the news but did not call home for security reasons. It was hard but I had to be patient, I was told by my friends.

Today is Monday. We had decided to bring the weekly paper Workers Struggle in time and today was the last day of the paper production. It was decided that we would not work at the usual office of the paper; police might even come there. So decided to bring the equipments, computer, and printer and so on to a new place for working together. I also told the comrades I would come and write the main article for the paper.

We were five together to work on the paper. I wrote the article and was on new telephone line to hear about the wholesale arrests of the advocates all over the country. Over seven hundreds have been arrested. Police entered the Lahore High Court building for the first time in the history and arrested the advocates after they were severely beaten up. It was writing a new history of police atrocities under a military dictatorship.

Khalid Malik and Azra Shad along other were charged and sent to the same jail, Kot Lakhpat, where I had spent around ten days in June this year. Lucky they are, the weather is ok and not hot. We discussed some more measures for tomorrow.

We decided to fight back the military regime and to organize the movement. It was agreed that I will not come up open but will be active in organizing the movement until my arrest on job. It was agreed that we will not accept the dictatorial measures and will organize the demonstrations and will ask comrades be ready for more arrests.

Here I am sitting in a net café at 6pm to write this and sent it from there. I had to travel over 20 kilometers to reach my place for this evening.

Escaped by Seconds

The fourth day of underground life

Farooq Tariq

On the third day of my underground period, I escaped an arrest by seconds. It was all because of inexperience to live in a society that is full of high tech techniques to find a person.

I called my partner on 6th November morning from a new SIM to send me clothes at the place where I was staying. My family has gifted me a new car recently to travel in little more comfort. I had been driving a Suzuki car 800cc for long time. I am one of the five brothers and we have three sisters. All the other decided to acknowledge my political activities by gifting me a new Toyota Corolla. The car has a tracker as well. We have a car driver who brings our two children to school and drop Shahnaz to her office. He came to bring my clothes.

I had to go to a new place in Lahore to work with some other comrades. I did not realize that car had the tracker and asked the driver to drop me at a certain place from where I could take a public transport.

As Allah Ditta was driving, he told me that he has been stopped two times yesterday by police who asked the whereabouts of mine. I got angry with him that why he did not tell me earlier. So I asked him to drive fast and drop me at the first available safe place. In the mean time, a police jeep was in front of us. He slowed down so we could come next to him. We also slowed down putting the traffic in problem at a busy road. While this went on for few seconds, The police jeep tried to come next to us. I asked Allah Ditta drive fast and turn the next road. He did that. The police jeep could not follow us.

I asked him that I must be dropped now. He stopped the car around a kilometer of the place we had this encounter. As he stopped the car, a police van stopped just next to us. Because we had already stopped the car, I jumped out of the car and while the police were still stopping their van. I rushed myself into a running three wheeler and asked the driver to drive fast. He was surprised but acted accordingly. There was a lot of rush and there was a lot of three wheelers around the place. So the police could not follow me.

The driver told me later that the police van followed him for another three kilometers and then let him go while could not find me.

In the afternoon, two plain clothes police officers came to the place I was staying for the night and enquired about me. I was not there. They had to leave in disbelief.

Five of us were together to work on the movement. We issued the press releases from there about our participations in the movement and that I will not offer arrest but will organize the movement in underground. We faxed the press releases to all the news media after checking the telephone number that would appear on the fax. It was LPP number but we were not at LPP office.

We bought some more SIMs on anonymous names. I had to arrange a new place to stay. My friends are fantastic. They are all waiting when I call them to stay the night. I am not staying at LPP comrade's houses as they are already under surveillance. I had a good night and good sleep after I arrived the place of my friend travelling over one hour in a public bus.

Yesterday, the picture of one of the LPP comrade Rabia Shahzadi was on the front page of some papers in Lahore. She is an advocate and was pictured while throwing stones on the police.

She told me later on the telephone that, at one time, she was the only one fighting with police. She saved herself afterwards in a library when police entered to arrest over 700 advocates from the premises of the Lahore High Court. She was full time for a short while then later went to practice as an advocate.

She went yesterday to different police stations to help the advocates who were in custody despite, being printed on front page.

Yesterday, In Islamabad, the advocate's movement was also led by Nisar Shah Advocate who is chairperson of LPP. He was in forefront of the demonstration of advocates in Islamabad alongside with LPP comrades. He is not arrested yet. Although, on 5th November, he just escaped an arrest from a demonstration in Rawalpindi.

At Karachi, LPP comrade Shakeel was dragged by police during a demonstration in front of Karachi Press Club on 5th November. This led some press photographers to intervene to save Shakeel. A fight started and that led to the arrest of several press photographers and political activists. It was mainly LPP comrades who had started the sloganeering in front of police while others were inside the press club building.

Police has raided the house of the secretary of LPP Punjab Afzal Soraya three times during the last two days but he is safe.

The plain clothes police came to the LPP office in Lahore and checked if I am there. They went to Good Books shop and remained there for some time on the pretext of buying books. They tried to ask about the whereabouts of the different comrades pretending that they are LPP supporters and want to join the party. The comrade in charge of the Good Books is an experienced comrade: he immediately realized who they are. He cleverly convinced them to buy Tariq Ali's book "Clash of fundamentalism" while offering all the comradely hospitality of tea and good political talk. Comrades told me the story after they left the office proudly telling that that they came to look for you but instead took a book that may change their minds.

Today is the morning of the fourth day and I am again writing this from a public net café and will open the mail for few minutes to send this story and leave the place.

Thanks for some comrades telling me more about the information technology and how to avoid the arrest.

I will try to write every two days all the main happenings of the underground life to share with the comrades in Pakistan and internationally.

Musharraf's Days Are Up

Embassy pickets a most effective way of opposition

Farooq Tariq

General Musharraf would have not thought of the political scenario that has emerged after five days of the martial law he imposed on 3rd November. His hopes for a normality of the situation have been dashed even after he has used the most vicious repression against the advocates and political activists. More unpleasant surprises will come in future for the military regime who was used to a rather stable political control until now.

After advocates, now students are emerging on the political opposition to the military regime. Demonstrations took place on 7th November 2007 in most of the public and private universities mainly in the main cities of Pakistan. "Student

power rises from slumber" was the headline of News International on 8th November.

All the courts across Pakistan are on stand still and Pakistan Bar Council has announced an indefinite strike till the new Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) is withdrawn. There have been daily demonstrations by the advocates across Pakistan. This is an extra ordinary militancy shown by the middle classes during this period.

Most of the newspapers in Pakistan are full of stories of the arrests, demonstrations and strikes of different actors of the society. But it is the fifth day; no private television channel has been allowed to telecast their broadcasting in Pakistan. You can only watch songs, dances, sports and religious readings on different channels but no news bulletin is allowed apart from the official Pakistan Television.

The most surprising opposition to the military regime has come from Benazir Bhutto. She was in negotiation with Musharraf regime for a power-sharing formula. But the advocate movements intervened in this unholy alliance forcing Benazir Bhutto to come up openly against the military regime. Almost half of the arrested advocates belong to Pakistan Peoples Party.

It left very little room for Benazir maneuvering, playing games with the regime. She asked the Pakistani masses to rise up against the martial law of General Musharraf. "Restore the constitution or we will have long march from Lahore to Islamabad on 13th November" she warned the regime. This resulted in the arrests of Pakistan Peoples Party activists across the country. They were spared by the regime in the first phase of repression started from 3rd November.

The media organizations of the bosses and employers are also joining the mass movement after unprecedented repression against the electronic and print media by the regime.

It was a black Monday on 5th November for the stock exchanges in Pakistan. The stock exchange crash resulted a net loss of four billion dollars in one day, unprecedented in the history of last 17 years of the exchange.

His close imperialist friends from US, UK and European Union have been forced to condemn this imposition of emergency, at least in word, for the first time since 9/11. Any gross violation of human rights in Pakistan since 9/11 was always an internal matter for the US imperialism. Even Australian imperialism is also condemning the sorry state of

affairs of Pakistan and terming Musharraf “a dictator” for the first time, a fact Pakistani people knew for eight years.

But it seems General Musharraf is trying to show his angry eyes even to his bosses, the same way the religious fundamentalists are going out of the control of the military regime in Pakistan. “You can never control a monster for long time” it seems from the action of General Musharraf. The Netherlands has suspended the aid to Pakistan and the US is reviewing its relationship with the military regime, according to reports printed here.

The movement is still growing in all sphere of life. This is despite an unprecedented level of repression during the first five days of the emergency; the real name is martial law. The police entered the office of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan arrested over 80 social and political activists who were discussing their strategy to oppose the military action.

This was unheard in past, that police will enter in this most prestigious independent building in Lahore. Police went in the buildings of Lahore High Court and arrested over 700 advocates from the chambers of the judges, libraries, bar rooms and canteen. This was not done even under the most brutal martial law of General Zia Ul Haque in the eighties.

According to the home ministry in Punjab province, 1734 political activists, journalists and advocates have been arrested during the first four days of the martial law. Similar figures are stated by the administrations of the other three provinces. This is the most brutal repression of the opponents of the Musharraf regime during the last eight years. The arrested advocates and political activists have been charged with Anti Terrorist Act and they have been sent to far off places from their home towns. No one can meet them.

Similarly repressive treatment has been the case of those judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts of Pakistan who have courageously refused to take oath under the new Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO). They are put under house arrest and their children are not allowed to go to school. Doctors have been refused entry to their houses where they were called for emergency treatments.

Police are raiding the houses of the advocates and political opponents of the military regime on a regular basis. Pakistan has become a police and military state in the real sense of the term. Police is seen everywhere in the main cities. There has been

an increase of thefts and robberies during the last four days because police is only deployed to curb the opposition of the regime.

General Musharraf is now having more opposition than ever among the general public in Pakistan.

Musharraf is losing his internal and external support at a fast speed. He has almost lost the support of his most recent friend, Benazir Bhutto. The religious parties have been forced to de-link their long lasting relationship with the regime. The old alliances and formations are in crisis. This is a real crisis of the Pakistan state. The regime is becoming more isolated day by day. Now, it is only two political parties supporting the regime, it is Muslim League Q and Muhajir Qaumi Movement, both are partners of the military government. But both are hated more and more by ordinary citizens of Pakistan.

The path of repression to control the opposition is losing its weight day by day. The state can not repress all the growing voices against the regime. The implementation of a neoliberal agenda on a faster speed has been marked by daily price hikes and growing unemployment. It is brutal rule of the free market resulting the monopolizing the economy. The growth of capitalist economy has not touched to the bottom line and the bottom line is over 70 percent of the 160 million population.

Several activists of Awami Jamhoori Tehreek, the left alliance of seven political parties and groups are under arrest including Nisar Shah, the chairperson of Labour Party Pakistan. Abid Hassan Minto, the convener of AJT and president of National Workers Party has asked all the left forces to join the movement and fight the military regime. The Left is not any more an insignificant force in Pakistan. The student uprising against the regime is mainly the work of the left wing forces and radical social activists.

The regime can not last long. The movement is on and is growing. The advocates unprecedented courage has influenced many and they are taking the road of active opposition.

The opposition to military regime will be strengthening by the active solidarity of our friends and comrades outside Pakistan. The pickets of the Pakistani embassies all over the world will be one the most effective way of opposition. We are not alone, we know, but we need to know more of it.

Not arrested yet but facing dangerous situation

Day Seven of Underground Life

Farooq Tariq

The day seventh passed without my arrest despite several attempt by the police. During the last three days, we were able to hold a meeting of the leading members of Labour Party Pakistan, gave interviews to private television channels and to a private team working for CNN. We were able to fax a daily news to most of the news papers in Pakistan.

Comrade Rabia Shahzadi, a lawyer in the LPP was on front pages of many papers after she threw stones on police who were tear gassing the Lahore High Court premises on Monday 5th November. A show of retaliation among the young advocates inspired many.

Unfortunately, Labour Party Pakistan chairperson Nisar Shah, also a lawyer, was arrested in Islamabad on 7th November along with some party activists after he led a demonstration of lawyers despite all the police threats.

Nisar Shah is an advocate in the High Court. He has had practices for 10 years in Karachi. After the devastating earthquake in October 2005, he moved for two years to Kashmir. He originally comes from Kashmir and his village was also hard hit by the earthquake: some of his close relatives were among the dead.

He was asked by Labour Relief Campaign to move back to Kashmir to look after the work of relief and reconstruction. He helped successfully build 100 homes within three months of the earthquake, the first to be completed with the help of Action Aid International and Shirkat Ghah, a radical women's NGO in Pakistan. He is in the process of building the first Kashmir Labour Center at Paniola where a good piece of land is donated by locals for the construction of the first ever to be constructed labour center in Kashmir.

He was recently asked by LPP to be in Rawalpindi and Islamabad to help build the social and political movement. He had started working as an advocate in Islamabad to be more close to the advocates in movement. Here he is arrested after few days of public rebellion.

During the last three days of my underground life from 7-10 November to 10th today till this morning, I was able to stay three nights at

friend's house with utmost security measures. I was not on line from the house and did not made a single telephone contact from any number and sim from the house. I was walking to a marker around a kilometer to make telephone contacts and to open the mail for few minutes.

I would on my Blackberry and download all the emails at this place within minutes and then off the air.

Immediately after the first encounter on the police on 6th November, When I was just saved, I changed my name on the telephone line. I would call only very close comrades and friends from different sims within these days. This has helped to secure me for the time being. On 8th November, while I was walking back to my place while I had covered my head with cap and to some extent my face with growing beard, suddenly one police van stopped next to me and it was red traffic signal.

The police officer looked at my face with a full glimpse for few seconds. I thought he is trying to recognize my face that he might have seen some where. I was afraid that he will now come out. I had planned to run in case he comes out. In the mean time my face was just blank and I did not give him any impression of being afraid or saying him hello that I know him. I tread him with a full confidence of not knowing him at all. The drama was over in 20 seconds and I walked normally as I nothing has happened. As he moved away, I changed the rout immediately and started running in the next street to move away to another street.

The area I was staying was full police petrol all the time for many reasons. But It was only two times That I will come out of my place and walk to different net cafes for the email checking and writings. Although, my friend house had all the modern multi media facilities, but we had agreed that I will not be on line from the house.

We had also chalked out an escape plan in case of police at the house. He has told me several ways to leave the house from back doors. But I suggested that if police comes from the back sides as well, I will court arrest without resistance. We also discussed that while escaping from the back doors, I will try to do the room as no one was living here. I must tell you that I carry no bag, no cloths, wherever I go, I borrow cloths for the night from my friends and in the meantime, I get my cloth washed to wear it again next morning.

My friend knew that in many normal cases, when ever police come to house and do not find the person, they want to arrest, they take the house

boss, the house made or any house adult apart from the women. My friend still took the risk and did not for a single moment tried to make me aware that he is doing something extra ordinary in my case.

The good news within three days was the changing attitude of Benazir Bhutto about the present with the present military regime. She has tried in exile to deal for a power sharing formula with military regime. But while in Pakistan, there was suicidal attack on her rally leaving over 200 dead. There was a massive negative campaign by the chief minister of Punjab against Benazir Bhutto during the time. Then Musharraf announced the emergency on 3rd November without her consent apparently. Most of the arrested advocates were from her party. It was all too much. While the first three days, arrests were made of any PPP activists but it all changed with Benazir coming openly against the military regime on emergency.

Her changing attitude was welcome by us in press releases and I announced in the media that LPP will participate with the long March planned for 13th November by PPP from Lahore to Islamabad. Although we had a severe criticism of her polices during the last months, because of soft corner about the regime, but we did go for the so-called conspiracies theories about Benazir and Musharraf being friends but hypocritically opposing each other to restore the respect of Benazir as a popular leader and the one who fight for democracy in any case.

Benazir oppositional statements against the regime have meant arrests of hundreds of PPP activists and their houses raided all over. It meant that Musharraf losing friends and the opposition is growing.

On 9th November, when we would have been holding our fourth national conference, seven of us traveled hours to meet each other for a meeting at safe place to chart out our future strategies. We faxed press releases, invited a team of television team working for several channels including CNN to interview us and film how we are working in underground. They had made a contact with a friend to make a film of the activist working in under ground. They filmed our deserted but functioning office in the center of Lahore and they came to us. We have to take extra ordinary safety measures to bring them safely to the place we were working. After the filming of our activities within a room and a chat with us and not of the area or the house, we decided to leave the place immediately

to avoid any unpleasant incident. But these two were our trusted friends for long time.

Earlier on day, I went to my home for 15 minutes after my partner Shahnaz told me that my son Abdullah is missing me very much. This was done after making sure that no one from the police in uniform or in plain cloths are around the place. I was here after seven days even I was in the same city Lahore. They were all happy and in absolute high spirit. No complaints and no hard talk. My son (7) asked me to stay home but When I explained what would happened, he still did not agree and told me that I will speak to you. But my daughter Mashal told me it will be ok and you can leave. In all seven days, I spoke once a day with my partner on telephone briefly. I changed my cloths and left happily.

I have changed my outlook after I was to a hairdressing person on 8th November after the chance meeting with a police officer. Although I had not many hairs anyhow but now it is totally different. It had not make much difference to my outlook but I had to do something, may be to satisfy myself alone.

There was some pleasant moments on 8th November afternoon when BBC and CNN were back to the air in Pakistan for the time being. I say Lucy Dousset of BBC broadcasting live programme from Islamabad. She only comes to a country with a grave situation and her arrival is an indication of the seriousness of the situation. I was happy to see LPP chairperson chanting slogans in Islamabad before his arrest. They tried to interview Asma Jahanghir at her place where is detained but only could speak for a few moment before they were whisked away by police. I got a message from Asma yesterday that I be in underground in any case and organize the movement.

Happy to see today's papers with LPP news items welcoming the long arch of PPP, condemning all the arrests, demanding an immediate release and solidarity with the striking media people. The LPP news printed in daily Waqat today is an appeal to all the trade unions, working class and peasantry to join the advocate movement. First of such appeal appearing the main news media after the emergency is imposed. We have to rely on the print media for promoting our ideas rather than on electronic media which is off the air.

I also contacted some of the main trade union leaders to be involved in the campaign. Maybe some positive response will come. Some of the trade union leaders in Karachi have already been

arrested. A trade unions, left parties and radical social movement in Karachi on 7th November has condemned the imposition of emergency and decided to participate in the movement.

On 9th November, our left alliance Awami Jamhoori Thereek meeting in Lahore could not agree on a day of action but agree to mobilize the masses. One of our leading comrades attended the meeting and put forward an idea of a day of united action across Pakistan. Two of the main leaders and members central committee of AJT, Yousaf Masti Khan (National Workers Party) and Nisar Shah (Laour Party Pakistan) are already in jail. Police is raiding the houses of many AJT leaders. Bilal Minto, son of Abid Hassan Minto the president of National Workers Party and convener of AJT has spent three days in jail before he was released alongside with other 70 social activists. He is teacher at elite university Lahore University of Management and Sciences (LUMS). The arrest of the three radical teachers alongside with him sparked a movement of students at the university.

According to one press report, over 5000 have been arrested so far in the movement. There are not enough places in the jails to accommodate all the political prisoners. Temporary camps have been set up in different jails. Many private houses have been declared as sub jails to put the prisoners. The prisoners are not been allowed visits by their relatives. No private food allowed for these prisoners. While I had been a recent guest at different jails during the last three months, I could imagine very well the plight of these arrested ones. Our hearts are with them. Sacrifices for democracy and socialism will not go in vain. We will get rid of the military dictatorship soon; I am convinced by the recent developments. How? We do not know but we will do it through our mass movement and sacrifices.



Musharraf's Days Are Up

Embassy pickets a most effective way of opposition

[Farooq Tariq](#)

General Musharraf would have not thought of the political scenario that has emerged after five days of the martial law he imposed on 3rd November. His hopes for a normality of the situation have been dashed even after he has used the most vicious repression against the advocates and political activists. More unpleasant surprises will come in future for the military regime who was used to a rather stable political control until now.

After advocates, now students are emerging on the political opposition to the military regime. Demonstrations took place on 7th November 2007 in most of the public and private universities mainly in the main cities of Pakistan . “Student power rises from slumber” was the headline of News International on 8th November.

All the courts across Pakistan are on stand still and Pakistan Bar Council has announced an indefinite strike till the new Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) is withdrawn. There have been daily demonstrations by the advocates across Pakistan . This is an extra ordinary militancy shown by the middle classes during this period.

Most of the newspapers in Pakistan are full of stories of the arrests, demonstrations and strikes of different actors of the society. But it is the fifth day; no private television channel has been allowed to telecast their broadcasting in Pakistan. You can only watch songs, dances, sports and religious readings on different channels but no news bulletin is allowed apart from the official Pakistan Television.

The most surprising opposition to the military regime has come from Benazir Bhutto. She was in

negotiation with Musharraf regime for a power-sharing formula. But the advocate movements intervened in this unholy alliance forcing Benazir Bhutto to come up openly against the military regime. Almost half of the arrested advocates belong to Pakistan Peoples Party.

It left very little room for Benazir maneuvering, playing games with the regime. She asked the Pakistani masses to rise up against the martial law of General Musharraf. "Restore the constitution or we will have long march from Lahore to Islamabad on 13th November" she warned the regime. This resulted in the arrests of Pakistan Peoples Party activists across the country. They were spared by the regime in the first phase of repression started from 3rd November.

The media organizations of the bosses and employers are also joining the mass movement after unprecedented repression against the electronic and print media by the regime.

It was a black Monday on 5th November for the stock exchanges in Pakistan. The stock exchange crash resulted a net loss of four billion dollars in one day, unprecedented in the history of last 17 years of the exchange.

His close imperialist friends from US, UK and European Union have been forced to condemn this imposition of emergency, at least in word, for the first time since 9/11. Any gross violation of human rights in Pakistan since 9/11 was always an internal matter for the US imperialism. Even Australian imperialism is also condemning the sorry state of affairs of Pakistan and terming Musharraf "a dictator" for the first time, a fact Pakistani people knew for eight years.

But it seems General Musharraf is trying to show his angry eyes even to his bosses, the same way the religious fundamentalists are going out of the control of the military regime in Pakistan. "You can never control a monster for long time" it seems from the action of General Musharraf. The Netherlands has suspended the aid to Pakistan and the US is reviewing its relationship with the military regime, according to reports printed here.

The movement is still growing in all sphere of life. This is despite an unprecedented level of repression during the first five days of the

emergency; the real name is martial law. The police entered the office of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan arrested over 80 social and political activists who were discussion their strategy to oppose the military action.

This was unheard in past, that police will enter in this most prestigious independent building in Lahore. Police went in the buildings of Lahore High Court and arrested over 700 advocates from the chambers of the judges, libraries, bar rooms and canteen. This was not done even under the most brutal martial law of General Zia Ul Haque in the eighties.

According to the home ministry in Punjab province, 1734 political activists, journalists and advocates have been arrested during the first four days of the martial law. Similar figures are stated by the administrations of the other three provinces. This is the most brutal repression of the opponents of the Musharraf regime during the last eight years. The arrested advocates and political activists have been charged with Anti Terrorist Act and they have been sent to far off places from their home towns. No one can meet them.

Similarly repressive treatment has been the case of those judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts of Pakistan who have courageously refused to take oath under the new Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO). They are put under house arrest and their children are not allowed to go to school. Doctors have been refused entry to their houses where they were called for emergency treatments.

Police are raiding the houses of the advocates and political opponents of the military regime on a regular basis. Pakistan has become a police and military state in the real sense of the term. Police is seen everywhere in the main cities. There has been an increase of thefts and robberies during the last four days because police is only deployed to curb the opposition of the regime.

General Musharraf is now having more opposition than ever among the general public in Pakistan.

Musharraf is losing his internal and external support at a fast speed. He has almost lost the support of his most recent friend, Benazir Bhutto.

The religious parties have been forced to de-link their long lasting relationship with the regime. The old alliances and formations are in crisis. This is a real crisis of the Pakistan state. The regime is becoming more isolated day by day. Now, it is only two political parties supporting the regime, it is Muslim League Q and Muhajir Qaumi Movement, both are partners of the military government. But both are hated more and more by ordinary citizens of Pakistan.

The path of repression to control the opposition is losing its weight day by day. The state can not repress all the growing voices against the regime. The implementation of a neoliberal agenda on a faster speed has been marked by daily price hikes and growing unemployment. It is brutal rule of the free market resulting the monopolizing the economy. The growth of capitalist economy has not touched to the bottom line and the bottom line is over 70 percent of the 160 million population.

Several activists of Awami Jamhoori Tehreek, the left alliance of seven political parties and groups are under arrest including Nisar Shah, the chairperson of Labour Party Pakistan. Abid Hassan Minto, the convener of AJT and president of National Workers Party has asked all the left forces to join the movement and fight the military regime. The Left is not any more an insignificant force in Pakistan. The student uprising against the regime is mainly the work of the left wing forces and radical social activists.

The regime can not last long. The movement is on and is growing. The advocates unprecedented courage has influenced many and they are taking the road of active opposition.

The opposition to military regime will be strengthening by the active solidarity of our friends and comrades outside Pakistan. The pickets of the Pakistani embassies all over the world will be one the most effective way of opposition. We are not alone, we know, but we need to know more of it.

Musharaf isolated after attack by Bhutto

The 10th Day in Underground Life
[Farooq Tariq](#)

Lahore police are very busy raiding the homes of several LPP activists during the last three days. The home of Afzal Soaraya, secretary Labour Party Punjab has been raided several times during the last three days. Maqsood Mujahid, member National Committee LPP, home in Lahore has also been the target of regular visits by the local police. They have also stopped the vehicle of Farooq Tariq several times while dropping his children to school.

Nisar Shah Advocate chairperson Labour Party Pakistan is been charged with Anti Terrorist Act and several others charges. He is at present in Adiala Jail Rawalpindi along with other political prisoners.

Yousaf Masti Khan senior vice president of National Workers Party and member central committee Awami Jamhoori Tehreek, the left wing alliance of seven political parties and groups, along with Hasil Bazinjo secretary National Party and several other trade union leaders are kept in Karachi jail. They are facing treason charges. They all were arrested from Karachi Press Club after a demonstration of left wing and trade union activists.

Asma Jahnghir chairperson Human Rights Commission of Pakistan is still under house detention at her Lahore residence. I got a message from her "ok will pass this on. Keep underground. No bail this time". I had informed her about the arrest of Nisar Shah. She represented me as an advocate at Lahore Anti Terrorist Court on 28th September 2007 and got me released on bail. Now releasing on bail has become much more difficult.

It is estimated that over 5000 political activist and advocates are behind bar on 13th November, 10 days after the emergency was imposed. Lahore seems a deserted city and many ordinary people are totally against the actions of the military regime. I

was told by some friends who were in the markets that there is very thin business activity and many shopkeepers were saying that it is time the Musharaf must die, "there is no other alternative to get rid of him" most were saying with most seriousness.

I visited yesterday on 12th November, my home town, Toba Tek Singh. I was told that you find no one in sympathy with the military regime. It seems that everyone is against the military action. Many told me that they have all the respect for judges who have not taken oath. I could not walk freely but I met some friends and family members.

LPP is planning that I contest elections for the national parliament from this town. I feel that it is useless activity to take part in elections under an emergency, which is in fact a martial law. The general elections have been announced by General Musharaf on 11th November to pacify the international criticism of his dictatorial measures. It is joke that general elections will take place while all the opposition's parties are in underground or their activists in jail. It is joke to hold elections in the presence of the judges who have taken an oath in faithfulness of the military regime.

General Musharaf has asked his crony Election Commission to prepare for election before 8th of January 2008. They want to hold general elections at a time with utmost repression going on. The plan is very simple, "Opposition behind bar and government candidate with full freedom for election campaign". This is mockery of whole democratic process.

Labour Party Pakistan has not yet taken a formal decision to boycott the proposed general elections but we are in consultation with other Left groups and parties to have a common position on the question. We are holding an emergency meeting of leading comrades in Lahore today on 13th November and in consultation with others on telephone before we take a formal decision.

General Musharaf seems more isolated after an all out attack by Benazir Bhutto while in Lahore yesterday. She is been put under house arrest as well in Lahore from yesterday. She went around the city to mobilize the party activists and was determined to take out a rally today on 13th

November. But hundreds of police men have been deployed around her residence, telephone lines cut off and she refused to receive a detention order for eight days. The detention order is now been pasted at her homes wall. They want to show the world that they act according the procedures but what about thousands who have been arrested without showing any warrants or detention orders? There are still hundreds behind bars who have not yet been formally charged.

Benazir changing political position in favor of democratic forces is a welcome sign. I do not agree with Imran Khan President of Tehreek Insaaf (justice movement) who is still doubtful of Benazir intentions of opposing the military regime. He will ultimately come to the conclusion that the democratic forces have to unite on one platform to launch a more effective struggle against the military dictator.

Some trade union leaders have issued press releases opposing the emergency of General Musaraf. They include Khurshid Ahmad, president Pakistan Workers Confederation; Yousaf Baluch, chairman National Trade Union Federation, Choudry Gulzar Ahmad, secretary All Pakistan Trade Union Federation and so on. But workers from different sectors have not yet come out in demonstrations opposing the military regime. Although, there is great anger among the working class against the military regime in Pakistan .

I have learnt to some extent in underground. I have not made any blunder that could give a chance to the state oppressive machinery to arrest me. I am not staying more than a night at a friend's house anymore. I am changing my positions now and then. I have taken a new name to speak to the comrades.

On 11th November night, I had a chance meeting with Lal Khan, the leader of the (late) Ted Grant and Alan Woods' group in Pakistan. We had worked together in exile and started our Struggle Group together in Netherlands during my exile period from 1978 to 1986 in Netherlands. In 1991, we had departed our ways on the question of strategy of building a revolutionary party in Pakistan. His supporter was arguing to remain in Pakistan Peoples Party and do enterism to build the group. I was in minority and argued for a new independent political party to set up in Pakistan. It

was an unpleasant split in our group that was very committed. But we had to face the realities. They are still part of PPP and we have started building Labour Party Pakistan.

I met him in person after 16 years. His hairs have grown grey and were not in his usual youthfulness. We had a good but brief chat on the present political situation. He was of the view that the regime is very shaky and anything can happen. He recited one of my favorite poems that we used to listen from him in exile period (*Peshawar Qatloo Tum Sapahi Naheen*) (Of you the soldiers, you are not professional soldiers but professional killers). He seemed happy to see me. And I was also, although, we have a lot of difference of opinion on several questions. We had no moment to regret on the evening. One of my close friends had invited me for this evening at a safe place to share ideas with some friends.

On 12th November, I wrote an article for our Weekly paper *Mazdoor Jeddohd* (Workers Struggle) and faxed them to the office. The paper is still been printed regularly and with our ideas and reports. It has been closed by every successive military regime since it started it printing in 1980 including the present Musharaf regime. The very young activists mainly women have taken the responsibility to prepare the paper in the regular office of the paper. Very brave actions by these young women activists.

After writing the article in early morning, I had to travel four hours from Lahore to go to my home town. It was my father second death anniversary and family was all together. I was not asked by my brothers and sisters to come but I decided to travel and saw all the family members. They are all supportive and helpful. I traveled back to Lahore last night to attend an important meeting today and share some ideas with some comrades. Staying in a small city is quit dangerous and many know me well personally in my home town, so decided to leave the city as soon as possible.

The successful womens demonstration without many losses

The 18th Day Underground - More arrests and repression against journalists in Pakistan

[Farooq Tariq](#)

The best thing that happened during the week was a defiant demonstration of women belonging to Labour Party Pakistan. On 19th November, 14 brave women went to the busiest area of Lahore demanding an immediate end of martial law in Pakistan.



They all were wearing black ribbons of their heads with slogans like no to Martial law, release political prisoners and solidarity with advocates and media.

One newspaper Daily Express Lahore reported on 20th November that LPP women waited for over 30 minutes for police but police did not turn up. The paper reported a disruption of the traffic on several roads because of the demonstration.

It was very well planned and every aspect went according to the planning. A demonstration in Lahore at any road means an immediate arrest and baton charge.

We had discussed the plan of this demonstration with a title “women against martial law”. It was decided that only those women should be at the demonstration that are ready to be arrested. They should not be arrested peacefully but a resistance will be offered to police. There will be no escape plan and no one should run away from the scene. The vehicles will only drop women at the place but will not be there to pick them up. This was to save the comrades who were driving them. No male comrade will accompany them. But we will make sure that the demonstration is well documented. It will be all women show.

It was also agreed that the demonstration will last for half an hour, if police arrive then there will be resistance till the arrests. But we will not wait for the police after half an hour and would disperse afterwards.

It was discussed and agreed that two comrades will contact the media and will only disclose the place half an hour before the demonstration. We will not send any written invitation to the media. In the media, there is a large infiltration of the intelligence agencies and we did not want to take a risk that police should be there before our arrival. To our utmost surprise, no one from the media informed the police and the media was there in large numbers even before the demonstrators arrived.

There was another demonstration of Tehreek Insaaf of Imran Khan at the same time not far from this place. The TI had informed the media about their demonstration. A large number of police was there and as they arrived at Regal Chouck on main Mall Road, six of them were immediately arrested. Police did not expect another demonstration on the same time and they had no clue. The result was that it took time for police to arrive the place.

I waited eagerly at a safe place with another comrade to hear the outcome of the demonstration away from the place of demonstration. I was called by a journalist after 10 minutes of the demonstration telling me of women bravery and that there are intelligence agencies persons here taking photographs of the demonstration, but there is no police yet. He was pleased that many people are stopping and are waving to the demonstrators in happiness. Another journalist told me later that

they were looking like Palestinian women fighting a repressive regime with utmost bravery.

A comrade in guise of a press photographer told me later that another journalist told him that 30 minutes gone and the women are still chanting slogans. Are they waiting for police to be arrested? This comrade immediately realized the timing and pointed to the watch hinting to one leading comrade at the demonstration.

She then declared to the press and to the people gathered at the place that we are leaving now, but will be back with more force, we are here to stay and fight, and we will not tolerate the military regime. We are working class women fighting a military regime and we have not much to loose but our chains.

No one was arrested much to our pleasant surprise. It was making a point without many losses. The demonstration has left a very good moral on all the comrades. It has given an extraordinary courage to all our male comrades. They will be on the move and you will hear that too. It was the first show of defiance by a Left group in Lahore where the level of repression is much greater than other parts of the country. The women led the way.

The same evening we had a meeting of leading comrades to discuss the political developments, the regime tactics and the responses of other political parties and our future course of action.

Another action of honor is been taken by Awami Thereek, one component of our Left Alliance the Awami Jamhoori Tehreek AJT (Peoples Democratic Movement). [2] Till 21st November, over 300 activists of Awami Tehreek are been arrested in Sind province. They have a strategy of courting arrest at five district headquarters of Sind on the name of “fill the jails”. Every day five activists of AT are presenting arrests against the imposition of martial law. I had been several times in contact with the leadership of AT to discuss the outcome of the movement.

AT is mainly a Sind based radical organization and is led by Rasul Bukhsh Paleejo. Once in 2005, General Musharaf was asked by a journalist about his favorite politician in Pakistan. He named Rasul Bukhsh Paleejo as his most favorite politician in

Pakistan. Paleejo has spent seen years in jail under General Zia Ul Had dictatorship in the eighties. At the age of 79, he is still very active.

On 18th November, we also heard the news of the arrest of Akhtar Hussain the former president of Sind High Court and secretary general of National Workers Party, another component of AJT. He was picked up from his house in Karachi early in the morning. Comrade Nasir Mansoor lives nearby. He went to the police station where Akhtar Hussain was kept in custody and enquired about the situation and showed solidarity with him.

During the last four days, since I wrote "meeting Benazir Bhutto", I have been little more open than I did during the early 10 days of the martial law. But there is terrible feeling of being watched all the times. I always look behind, who is coming.

Yesterday morning, I had to fax an article to Daily Waqt (Time), a rising new bourgeoisie paper in Urdu, who asked me to write about the movement of students in University of Punjab for its editorial pages, I went out to a shop to do this. While I was there faxing the seven pages, a police van came and stopped outside. I was terrified inside. The police van had not come for me but they went for lunch to the restaurant next door. But sheer presence of police van made me very sensitive. A lot of thoughts, why they have come, why they are not coming inside to arrest me, who have informed them, where is the mistakes, is it the mobile I am using, is it the motorbike I am traveling and so on. I am becoming more of a psychological case. I am sometime up to my neck. Being in underground to hide myself is an easy option but that is what I am not supposed to do. I am in underground to play a role, to meet the comrades, contact them, talk to media if possible, motivate the contacts and party comrades, networking with all the friends inside and outside, replying to emails. Writing interviews, articles in Urdu and English etc for our weekly [Mazdoor Jeddjuhd](#) and other papers.

One of my foolish but lovely friends from Netherlands wrote me a mail in Dutch language and expected me to reply in the same language. I read and understood but the ability to write Dutch is no more. I had spent eight years in exile in Netherlands. I do not want to be in exile anymore.

The article on University of Punjab was printed today on 21st November, analyzing the recent revolt of students against the religious fundamentalist students who kidnapped Imran Khan and then handed over to police. I exposed the fascist nature of these religious fundamentalists and wrote about the future of the movement. The article is already very well read and the purpose served. Daily Waqt has over 40,000 circulations at present. It was to make contact with the new leadership of the student uprising and that was done today. I had been a student of this University in the seventies. It was marvelous to see over few thousand students demonstrating against the religious fundamentalist control of the University.

Today, I was invited for an interview with private channel AAJ (today). This was about the restriction on the media. Voice of America radio did an interview as well on telephone. I also gave an interview to Geo who is at present off air under the pressure of the military regime. Its transmission was aired from Dubai, but under the pressure of the military regime, the Dubai government asked GEO to close their transmission. Geo is the most popular private television channel in Pakistan. People are very angry and are speaking against the military regime.

The Punjab Union of Journalist (PUJ) invited me to a meeting this afternoon held at Lahore Press Club. This is the area where most of the demonstrations are taking place. A lot of police and intelligence agencies are always around the building. A journalist comrade imported me inside safely. I think no one noticed as I went in. The meeting was to discuss the yesterday beating and arrest of journalists at Karachi.

On 20th November, the police in Karachi arrested over 180 journalists who wanted to take out a protest. They were severely beaten up. A Karachi LPP leading comrade Sher Baz Khan along with several other comrades was with them. He was beaten up by police with the journalist and now has a broken hand; a fracture in hand will heal in weeks to come.

I refused initially to go to Lahore Press Club building for the meeting but then decided to take the risk. After two hours of meeting inside with food and tea, I had to climb a wall to leave the building from back doors. This escape rout from

the Press Club was not known to me but known to most journalist and was known as “thief door”.

While I was still inside the meeting, the news came from Faisalabad that over 20 journalists are arrested and six of them are seriously injured while they were inside the Press Club building. Police used tear gas and baton charge against the protesting journalist. After Karachi, same repressive tactics were used in Faisalabad. We condemned the act and spoke to some journalists at Faisalabad to express our solidarity.

While I was at my place of stay for the evening, I got a call to speak at a press conference with Hafeez Khan, Imran Khan’s cousin, at Imran Khan home. Imran Khan is on hunger strike for the last three day at Dera Ghazi Khan Jail, around 14 hours from Lahore. He has not taken any food since and is on very weak health. We offered our full solidarity and promised to raise it everywhere, but I told them that I can not come for security reasons. We also informed the press to attend the press conference.



Public Again after 20 days of underground life

[Farooq Tariq](#)

Since 23rd November, I am working normally. Most of the political prisoners were released and police raids were rare.

According to the Musharaf dictatorship, on 28th November, there were only 37 political prisoners in different jails and rest are released. The 37 include most of the main leaders of the advocate’s movement. I remained underground for 20 days and avoided arrest while still active in the movement.

This is a temporary interval. The dictatorship has got what they wanted. They wanted to get rid of the independent judiciary before they could announce the general elections and before general Musharaf final decision on his election as president in uniform. To do that, they had to arrest over 10,000 political, social trade unions activists and revolting advocates.

They had a positive decision by the hand picked judges of the Supreme Court on the issue of the president ship of general Musharaf. The dictatorship has even allowed [Nawaz Sharif](#), the former prime minister of Pakistan, to return after seven years of exile. Saudi Arabian kingdom has played some mediatory role. The details of the deal have yet to surface.

On 27th November, [Labour Party Pakistan](#) organized two events for the release of the political prisoners. At Karachi, over 60 activists of LPP were in front of Karachi Press Club for a vigil to demand release of political prisoners and solidarity with the journalists. The picture of the Karachi LPP vigil was printed all over Pakistan in front and back pages of most of the main newspapers. The majority of the sixty activists of LPP were women at Karachi vigil.

On the same day in Lahore, over 200 activists took out a rally to protest the ongoing arrest of the advocate leaders and to express solidarity with the struggling media. They went to Lahore Press Club and then to the office of GEO, the private television channel that is still off air under the direct orders of the military dictatorship. Surprisingly, there were no arrests at the two events. But in Lahore, a large contingent of police was accompanying the demonstrators. At Lahore demonstration, there were over 80 women participants.

I could not participate in Lahore demonstration as I was in [Toba Tek Singh](#), my home town, for the filing of the nomination papers to contest election for the national and provincial parliaments. Although the Awami Jamhoori Tehreek, the left alliance, has decided to boycott the elections under the present conditions of repression, but LPP wanted to make the boycott more effective.

The strategy was discussed and approved by the leading bodies of the LPP to file the nomination paper, get it accepted and then boycott the procedure after launching a mass campaign to boycott it. The Musharaf dictatorship has announced general election to be held on 8th January 2008 after the imposition of the emergency and after getting rid of the independent judges.

The elections are just a farce under the present repressive conditions. We had done some home work for my elections at Toba Tek Singh including opening an office at one of the main area of the city. We had organized several meetings including one of the women where over 150 women participated. We had planned the fourth national conference at the city but had to postpone it for the second time. So it was not a good strategy to boycott the elections and do nothing.

For the national assembly constituency number 93, 12 candidates including myself have submitted papers to contest the elections. They are from Pakistan Peoples Party, Muslim League Nawaz and Muslim League Q, Mutihida Muslis Ammal the religious parties' alliance, Labour Party Pakistan and several independents. I went along with some of the senior leaders of the Left alliance to submit my papers to the returning officer who is an additional district judge. You had to be a graduate to contest the general elections. Less than one

percent of the total population of Pakistan is graduates.

I was in Toba Tek Singh for two days and met some of the local party activists and friends to chart out the strategy. They all agree to boycott the elections.

Today on 18th November, I went to Lahore High Court to meet some of the leaders of the advocate movement. I met Sarfraz Cheema, the 32 year old secretary of Lahore High Court Bar Association who spent 17 days in jail and was released few days before. He told me about the brutalities of the police against the advocates. The police entered in their office to destroy the computer and fax machine on 5th November. Over 700 advocates were arrested on the day including him.

Later on the day, I spoke in one of [Action Aid](#) Pakistan seminar on poverty alleviation in association with Women Workers Help Line. The other speakers included Dr. Mubashar Hasan the former federal finance minister under Bhutto, Dr. Abdul Hai Baluch president of National Party, Rabia Bajwa advocate, Hasan Nasir from Revolutionary democratic Workers Committee, a part of Left Alliance and Bushra Khaliq secretary Women Workers Help Line. Earlier, Fikre Zwadie, the country director of Action Aid Pakistan welcomed the speakers for this political session of the seminar. All the speakers were against the emergency and for a boycott of the general elections.

Dr. Mubashar Hasan commented in his speech that Farooq has been arrested all the times because of the repressive nature of the regime.

I must thank all my friends and family in Lahore who has helped me in the most difficult period of repression. Without their full scale help, I would have not been out of jail. I also thank LPP members and supporters for all the help they could lend.

I also must thank all those friends and supporters from overseas for reading my mails and some time commenting with encouraging words. They include [John Pilger](#) (UK), Pierre Rousset (France), [Tariq Ali](#) (UK), [Eric Toussaint](#) (Belgium), John Hunt (UK), [Phil Frampton](#) (UK), Peter Boyle (Australia), Sue Bolton (Australia), Merrilyn

Treasure (Australia), Silla Vriesma Netherlands), Elisabeth van Hoval (Netherlands), Lidy Nicpal (Philippine), Srilata Sawminathan (India), Roger Silverman (UK), John Reiman (USA), John Throne (USA), Richard Miller (USA), Ahmad Shawki (USA), Roland Ekbohm (Sweden), Jan Hodann (Sweden), Toni Usman (Norway), Farooq Sulehria (Sweden), Asim Ali Shah (UK), Michel Eggermont (Netherlands), Hans Van Heijningen (Netherlands), Joost Kircz (Netherlands), Sue Bolton (Australia), Saqlain Imam (UK), Pam Curry (Scotland), Comrade Shahid (USA), Roger Silverman (UK), Sandeep Chachra (Thailand), John Samuel (Thailand), Rashid Titumir (Bangladesh), Taimur Rehman (UK), Frank Hazur (India), Kuldeep Kumar (India), Mohan Kumar (Australia), Tarek Fatah Canada), Alvin Dizon (Philippine), Chetan Patel (UK), Toqeer Ahmad (Canada), Dianne Feeley (USA), Qamarulah (UAE), Linda Waldren and Ray (Australia), Kenji Kunitomi (Japan), Dr. Mark (Russia), Silvana (Italy) and many more I like to mention but it is getting already a long list.

I also like to thank all those who have spread the news to other email lists, addresses and website. I have seen dozens of websites that have pasted these letters written during my underground time.

Good Books intends to publish these entire letters in a booklet with the only one picture of mine in a change get up that was taken by one of my close friend when I arrived to spend the night at their place.

I wrote all these stories in a very light manner with personal incidents and some political points. I have met many friends during the last one week in Pakistan who have read all these stories and were happy that they were in picture what was happening.

Socialist Workers Party splits Respect

Crisis in British Respect
[Alan Thornett](#)

Respect as we have known it for the last four years, based on an alliance between the SWP and George Galloway, is over. Following the decision of the SWP central committee last Wednesday that the Respect conference would go ahead as planned and unchanged - in other words on a completely undemocratic basis - 19 members of the non-SWP part of the National Council have issued a call for an alternative conference that on the theme of "Respect renewal". Work is going ahead to build it on the broadest basis possible.



George Galloway second left; Tariq Ali is far right

It is a remarkable situation. The SWP leadership has managed to alienate virtually all of the active non-SWP members of the National council. Among them are Linda Smith National Chair, Salma Yaqoob National Vice-Chair, Victoria Brittain writer and playwright, George Galloway the Respect MP, Jerry Hicks leading industrial militant and member of the SWP at he start of this, Ken Loach, Abjol Miah the leader of Respect on Tower Hamlets Council, Yvonne Ridley journalist, and Nick Wrack - the first national chair of Respect and a member of the SWP when this debate started.

No other organisation or nationally-known individual has remained with the SWP side in this. Faced with a Respect conference on November 17 and 18 which is organised on a totally undemocratic basis and which will have a built-in SWP majority after a campaign by the SWP to pack the conference with its own delegates, 19 members of the National Council have called an alternative conference on November 17th on the theme of "[Respect Renewal](#)".

Initial speakers include George Galloway MP, Linda Smith National chair of Respect, Salma Yaqoob, national vice chair and Ken Loach, National Council member. It will start the process of rebuilding Respect on a difference and more inclusive basis.

The start of the crisis was the SWP's disastrous reaction to a letter from George Galloway to the national council at the end of August. This raised some home truths about the development of Respect, which some of us had been raising for a long time, and made some modest proposals towards greater plurality. The letter was supportable but did not go far enough. The issue behind it was whether the SWP would relax the tight control which they exerted on Respect and accept some diversity particularly at the level of the leadership bodies and the national office.

The letter could have opened up an over-due and fruitful discussion about the development of Respect as a more inclusive organisation with a greater national presence. If the SWP had been prepared to discuss the issues politically, make some compromises - even symbolic compromises - to show that they were prepared to take other people's views into account and that Respect was not a wholly-owned subsidiary of the SWP there could have been a positive outcome. Instead they went in totally the opposite direction - confirming that they had no intention of relaxing control.

They took the letter as a frontal attack on the SWP, with all that implies, and launched a nationwide tour of SWP districts vilifying George Galloway and scandalously calling him and Salma Yaqoob (amongst many other things) communalists and characterising the letter as a part of a right-wing attack on the left in Respect.

And the George Galloway they were vilifying was the same George Galloway that the SWP had repeatedly shielded from criticism ever since Respect was founded. They now denounced him for unaccountability, yet at the time of the Big Brother debacle they fought might and main inside Respect to avoid a word of criticism of his unilateral decision to go on the programme being expressed by Respect. At the Respect National Council meeting on September 22 the dispute focused on the proposal in the letter for a new post of National Organiser alongside the national secretary. SWP delegates, reflecting their paranoid internal discussions about George Galloway, came close to driving out of Respect under conditions which would have collapsed Respect in front of an expected general election.

The meeting ran out of time and adjourned until September 29, where agreement was eventually reached that the post would be of equal status with the National Secretary. There was also a consensus that Nick Wrack a former national chair of Respect and an SWP member take up the post on a temporary basis, if possible. When this was activated Nick Wrack was instructed by the SWP Central Committee to withdraw his name from the frame. When he refused he was expelled from the SWP.

At the same time two workers in George Galloway's office who were members of the SWP were instructed by the SWP Central Committee to resign their jobs. When they refused they were also expelled from the SWP. On Monday October 15 a Respect Executive Committee meeting with an SWP majority voted against Nick taking up the National Organiser's post and set aside the decisions of the NC on the matter. Behind the national organiser issue was the wider issue of whether Respect was to develop as a pluralist organisation in which no single component part dominates or controls or one controlled at every level by the SWP.

The following night there was a meeting of the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC), at which Linda Smith, the national chair of Respect, raised the issue of the constitutionality of the CAC itself (which has never been endorsed by the NC). She also asked for the membership and financial records of the student members. She was unable to

get such records or resolve the problem of the CAC itself.

By now the SWP were presenting the battle inside Respect as a battle of right against left with themselves being the defenders of the socialist camp inside Respect. This was the same SWP who have always fought to lower the socialist profile of Respect. Publication after publication came out in the name of Respect with the SWP in control without a mention of socialism from cover to cover.

I was one of the first, when the SWP joined the Socialist Alliance in 2000, to say that the turn they had made towards working with others on the left, after many years of isolationism, was an important step forward for the whole of the left. Now after four years of the Socialist Alliance and three and a half years of Respect this turn outwards has effectively come to an end. It is impossible to see that the SWP with its current leadership and method of operation playing a positive role in the construction of a broad pluralist party in the foreseeable future.

In fact even as this battle for Respect has continued the SWP leadership have been theorising their exit from this strategy. The first bulletin for the SWP conference (in January 2008) has a last minute CC text (written in the middle of this debate) which argues that the period of the upsurge of struggle in the mid 1990s and through Seattle and into the first years of this century which created most of the left parties is starting to wither. Right-wings currents are developing inside these parties - including the current opposition inside Respect.

It is a short step from this to concluding that the era of such parties is over and that it is "time to build the party". It is hard to see how the SWP can have its heart in anything it salvages from the mayhem they have created. Other CC documents in the bulletin reinforce and entrench the sterile model they SWP have defended for building Respect. For the first time it is openly argued that Respect is an electoral (united) front for the SWP and that it is perfectly acceptable to deprioritise it between election and reprioritise it when an election comes along.

This precisely the model the SWP insisted on imposing on Respect and the model on which it foundered. What this got completely wrong was the relationship between the SWP and Respect itself. This was with the SWP as the dominant organisation with the highest possible public profile and its own press and priorities with Respect as an electoral wing.

More precisely it foundered on the way it conducted democratic centralism inside the SWP and the way this shaped the way they functioned in the broad organisation. This was that the SWP membership would be regimented inside Respect meetings and conferences in a way which alienated everyone else. They would be told what to do and how to vote in advance of meetings and conferences at caucuses prior to the event. In most cases they were told what to do and how to vote not having been involved in a process of discussion inside Respect itself.

Inside broad left formations there has to be a real, autonomous political life in which people who are not members of an organised current can have confidence that decisions are not being made behind their backs in a disciplined caucus that will impose its views they have to be confident that their political contribution can affect political debates. This means that no revolutionary current can have the "disciplined phalanx" concept of operation. Except in the case of the degeneration of a broad left current (as in Brazil) we are not doing entry work or fighting a bureaucratic leadership. This means in most debates, most of the time, members of political currents should have the right to express their own viewpoint irrespective of the majority view in their own current. If this doesn't happen the real balance of opinion is obscured and democracy negated.

Evidently this shouldn't be the case on decisive questions of the interest of the working class and oppressed like sending troops to Afghanistan. But if there are differences on issues like that, then membership of a revolutionary current is put in question. Revolutionary tendencies should avoid like the plague attempts to use their organisational weight to impose decisions against everyone else.

That's a disastrous mode of operation in which democracy is a fake. If a revolutionary tendency cannot win its opinions in open and democratic

debate, unless it involves fundamental questions of the interest of the working class and oppressed, compromises and concessions have to be made. Democracy is a fake if a revolutionary current says "debate is OK, and we'll pack meetings to ensure we win it".

This method is the polar opposite of the way the SWP has worked in Respect. It is also the polar opposite of the way things must work in a recast and reshaped Respect which emerges out of this crisis. In Socialist Resistance we have long advocated such a method.

We supported the way Scottish Militant Labour worked inside the SSP keeping their own organisation but never intervening in an organisational way inside the SSP. For example never, under normal circumstances, caucusing before meeting in order to ensure that they were a part of the process of discussion and not imposing an external discussion. Maybe they did not keep themselves organised enough at some stages but the general approach they pioneered is one we should continue to aspire to.

▶ *Alan Thornett is a leading member of the International Socialist Group, British Section of the Fourth International, and sits on the National Council of Respect.*



British militant left - Beyond Fake Unity

[John Lister](#), [Alan Thornett](#)

As events in Respect have spiralled downwards into crisis, various calls for unity have been raised which have a certain superficial attraction. Wouldn't it be better if the two sides of the National Council (basically the SWP and fellow travellers on one side, and everyone else, including recent expellees from the SWP, on the other) could just sort out their differences and work together?

But the idea has had less credibility by the hour: the actions of the SWP and its immediate supporters (in response to a crisis entirely of their own making) have been so damaging, so cynical and so reckless that it is now impossible to find a core of members of the National Council who would be willing to trust them to honour any agreement that might be proposed.

We already have the experience to show that these fears are well founded. This is not the first time around for a unity drive: after the acrimony of the September 22 NC in which 13 out of 14 SWP speakers had personally attacked Galloway, seemingly determined to force him out of Respect, before moving on to pass, in his absence some of the key proposals from his August letter to the National Council, peace appeared to break out. The September 29 National Council carried a succession of unanimous votes for unity. It:

- voted unanimously on a motion proposed by an SWP member to press George Galloway to reconsider his resignation as parliamentary candidate and to come back into a leading role in Respect
- voted unanimously for a formula which would allow the appointment of a national organiser to work alongside John Rees
- voted unanimously to endorse a resolution to conference originally written by Alan Thornett and John Lister, but moved at the meeting by Alan Thornett jointly with John Rees. This included a number of proposals which for three years had been points of

contention, including agreement in principle to launch a newspaper.

There was also an apparent consensus of the vast majority of delegates in proposing that Nick Wrack, then still in the SWP, should be nominated to the national organiser post.

It's worth recalling these slightly surreal discussions and decisions from September 29th, because since then every one of the unanimous decisions has been opposed and obstructed by the SWP leadership and its coterie who voted for them at the time. The frenzied, back-biting attacks on George Galloway have continued and intensified in closed SWP meetings and in more public arenas. This same process of polarisation has alienated more prominent members of the SWP.

Nick Wrack has been hauled before an SWP Star Chamber, instructed to decline nomination for the job as national organiser of Respect (for which he was the only candidate), and expelled when he refused. Rob Hoveman and Kevin Ovenden, long-standing and experienced SWP members working in George Galloway's office, were hauled before a similar SWP committee and instructed to resign their jobs or be expelled: they too have now been expelled from the party. Leading trade union militant Jerry Hicks did not wait to be expelled: he drafted a devastating critique of his party's leadership and resigned from the SWP.

The masquerade of unity was also promptly undermined by polarised meetings in Tower Hamlets, and more recently in other towns and cities, in which the SWP has battled to secure the lion's share of delegate positions for the conference, and hyped up the rhetorical attacks on Galloway, Salma Yaqoob and those who have supported them.

The conflict has not been accidental but deliberate: every clash, and every angry, frustrated statement or expletive that has been provoked, has then in turn been exploited to build up the fiction of a "left-right" clash in Respect, a "witch-hunt" against the SWP in which all of the various currents and individuals which have criticised the way Respect has been run, and identified with the points made by George Galloway and Salma Yaqoob, have been branded as the "right" wing.

A "petition" against the non-existent witch-hunt has been whipped up as a test of loyalty to hundreds of SWP members up and down the country, many of whom have as a result signed as "Respect supporter", indicating that they are not even members of the organisation.

At the top of the list are the names of four Tower Hamlets councillors, two of them SWP members and two very close to the SWP, who have subsequently held a press conference to publicise their resignation of the Respect whip and the establishment of a new party grouping in Tower Hamlets Respect (Independent) which may run candidates against Respect. The press conference was arranged by a full time worker in the Respect Office (an SWP member clearly working under the direction of Central Committee member John Rees), with the £300+ venue billed to Respect, and attended by Respect National Secretary John Rees, who has yet to voice any criticism of this very public and very damaging split in the organisation, which has given huge ammunition to New Labour and relegated Respect from its position as the main opposition party in Tower Hamlets.

The SWP leadership has resorted to ridiculous manoeuvres in their efforts to manipulate an artificial majority behind their position at the Respect conference, scheduled for November 17: large numbers of phantom members have been claimed for "Student Respect", an organisation wholly owned and controlled by the SWP, allowing the SWP to send along one delegate for every ten claimed members, and potentially outvote genuine delegates from real branches. When challenged to produce evidence that these students were genuine members, the SWP leadership has responded by claiming this is another part of the "witch hunt" and an attempt to exclude students.

Increasingly acrimonious Respect meetings in different cities are seeing battles over delegations to conference, in several instances leading to more SWP members resigning in disgust at their party's sectarian antics, as well as angry walk-outs by non-SWP members. Looking over the period since Galloway penned his critical letter at the back end of August, it is impossible to avoid concluding that the SWP leadership's tactics have been an absolute and unmitigated disaster not only for Respect,

which can never be restored, but also for the SWP itself.

From the prestige and credibility it gained by acting as the principal organised political current in the most successful political regroupment to the left of Labour since World War 2, the SWP leadership has now cemented itself into the position of a rigidly centralist and dogmatically sectarian current that would rather smash three years' work and destroy hard-won political alliances than tolerate any genuine pluralism or political development in Respect.

All of the worst fears and reservations so widely held on the left about the SWP and its methods have been confirmed: the Party's line has been so appalling that its every tactic appears designed to demoralise its best members, alienate non-SWP members and further isolate the party within Respect.

Even their very worst enemies could not have hatched up a scheme half as destructive as the one the SWP Central Committee has imposed upon itself. It must be the first time such a large-scale left current effectively launched a witch-hunt on itself, driving towards a split which if they were to go to a stitched-up Respect conference and win the vote would be a Pyrrhic victory, leaving only a downsized SWP and a wafer thin layer of hangers-on in Respect.

Such a formation would never attract any broader forces many of whom will instinctively recoil from the SWP for years to come as the reality becomes more widely known. The SWP leadership have also broken from most of the well-known figures who could draw a crowd for Respect notably Galloway and Salma Yaqoob, but also Victoria Brittain and Ken Loach.

In other words the SWP leaderships tactics have driven off virtually all of the independent forces that made Respect a genuinely broad-based coalition. After three years of work they now stand to walk away from the project weaker and more discredited than they were before it launched: their track record is one of politically hobbling Respect, under-selling it and failing to tap its potential in a period uniquely favourable to building a left alternative. And having failed to build it to its potential, rather than face up to any of the errors

that have been made, or correct them, they have embarked on a suicidal policy of polarising Respect for and against the SWP.

However, for those of us who have not stopped looking to build a broad left-wing party, the fact that the SWP leadership appears to have pressed the self-destruct button opens up a far from a satisfying situation. They are threatening to destroy something far more than the SWP itself.

The problem is that if the SWP leadership stick to their guns, reject the proposals that we have made for postponement, and insist on convening the conference on November 17 there is no viable basis for non-SWP members to participate in it. There could only be a negative outcome.

We already know that there is no way we would be allowed to win any votes, and that the process of checking credentials of delegations from Tower Hamlets, Student Respect and other areas would be a nightmare, with a real possibility of anger and frustration on both sides exploding into threats and even violence. But we also know that even if by some fluke we DID win a vote on a contested issue, there is no chance of the policy being implemented as long as the SWP leadership calls the shots.

Worse, we know from grim episodes in the history of the sectarian left, and from the way the SWP has now drummed up signatures for its current "petition" that it is possible for highly centralised groups such as the SWP to march in squads of delegates who know what they are going to vote for before they get there, who will be oblivious to the damage that they and their antics do to the organisation.

We also know the impact a polarised, packed conference like this would have on independent forces and those with no experience of the far left: they would be profoundly shocked, alienated and demoralised: the result would be that many valuable people would be lost to the project and quite possibly lost to the left for years to come.

So we have a real problem: do we march whoever we can gather into a stitched-up conference to be abused and reviled and voted down by SWPers accusing us of witch-hunting them and decide only afterwards how to regroup and rebuild?

Do we participate in a conference that not only cannot solve the problems, but which could make them many times worse and also parade them on the national stage in front of the press and mass media, to the delight of the real right wing and witch hunters? Or do we decide that that is a not a useful expenditure of energy and that the time has come to build something new and inclusive which can address the problem of working class representation for which Respect was originally launched to address?

Of course it would be a setback to accept that Respect as we have known it, with all the effort involved in getting it off the ground had been destroyed by the SWP leadership. But the fact is the political conditions which created it are as relevant now as they were then, even more so. And it is already clear that there are people all round the country who are ready to join or rejoin a more inclusive organisation.

With the emergence of Brown the situation is far worse in the LP than it was when Respect was founded. The possibility of reclaiming Labour for the left is dead in the water. The defeat of the John McDonnell campaign saw the Labour left at its lowest ebb for 60 years. There has to be a recomposition of the left which goes far beyond what Respect has been able to do.

We need a new organisation as soon as possible which will start to address these issues and create the condition to unite with those from the Labour left, the trade union left and the activists of ecological and climate change campaigns which can present a political alternative to the betrayals of new Labour.

▀ *John Lister is a long-time leader of the ISG in England and Wales, and an editor of Socialist Resistance. He is also an expert in the politics of healthcare and the Director of London Health Emergency. His book of the worldwide neoliberalisation of healthcare, "Health Policy Reform - Driving the Wrong Way?" was published by Middlesex University Press in 2005.*

▀ *Alan Thornett is a leading member of the International Socialist Group, British Section of the Fourth International, and sits on the National Council of Respect.*

Respect Renewal is underway

Launch conference success

[Liam Mac Uaid](#)

[Respect, the anti-capitalist left party in England and Wales, has split. Last weekend its two factions held separate conferences. Liam Mac Uaid, editor of Socialist Resistance, explains the roots of the division and the road forward outlined by the Respect Renewal conference.]



L to R: George Galloway MP, Kevin Ounden, Linda Smith, Ken Loach, Salma Yaqoob

Origins of the crisis

In August this year Respect's member of parliament (MP) [George Galloway](#) wrote a document to the organisation's National Council (NC). At the time it was generally believed that [Gordon Brown](#) would announce an early general election and Galloway was clearly alarmed by Respect's utter lack of preparation. Among his key points were

- * Despite being a rather well known political brand our membership has not grown. And in some areas it has gone into a steep decline.

- * We have stumbled from one financial crisis to another.

* With the prospect of an early general election we are simply unable to challenge the major parties in our key constituencies.

* There is a custom of anathematisation in the organisation which is deeply unhealthy

* There is a marked tendency for decisions made at the national council or avenues signposted for exploration to be left to wither on the vine if they are not deemed to meet priorities.

Respect's National Secretary [John Rees](#) is a leading figure in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Rees judged the document to be an attack on the SWP. Over the following weeks the SWP claimed that they were being attacked on account of their socialist politics and that a "witch hunt" was being organised against them.

Two camps rapidly formed on the NC. One comprised the SWP members and some allies and the other consisted of Galloway and nineteen non-SWP NC members including [International Socialist Group](#) (ISG) members [Alan Thornett](#) and John Lister.

The two day annual conference was scheduled for the weekend of 17th and 18 November. It quickly became a major source of contention. The SWP argued that it was the legitimate decision making body and would go ahead as planned. The other camp argued that there was strong evidence from all over the country that SWP branches were being instructed to get as many of their members elected as delegates as they could. In some confirmed cases SWP full timers tried to argue that delegations be comprised entirely of SWP members. Equally controversial was the selection of large numbers of student delegates, many of whom were not paid up Respect members. Another disputed issue was the election of delegates from [Tower Hamlets](#), the borough which contains Galloway's constituency. Two rival delegations each declared the other one illegitimate.

300 attend Renewal launch

The outcome was that on Saturday 17th November both sides of the dispute held separate conferences thus making the split *de facto*. Each conference attracted about 300 people. Supporters of [Socialist Resistance](#), the paper which the ISG

helps produce, attended the Respect Renewal conference. This was the conference which began to organise the majority of non SWP Respect supporters.

The *The Morning Star* newspaper, which reflects the views of the [Communist Party of Britain](#), said of the audience "The hall was packed out with a genuinely diverse crowd - young and old, men and women, black and white, Asian, Muslim, Christian and those of no faith, plus trade unionists and socialists from different traditions."

Linda Smith, Respect Renewal's chair and an official in the [Fire Brigades Union](#), opened the conference by declaring that it is the real Respect and that the other conference had no legitimacy.



George Galloway in his opening remarks observed that four years after its founding Respect has lost half of its membership and now has only 2500 paid up members. He argued that the SWP's leadership didn't want Respect to grow too large because they feared they would lose control of a large organisation. Summing up his politics he said "We set out to create a mass, broad party for working people. That party needs pluralism and democracy."

[Salma Yaqoob](#) spoke twice. After Galloway she is Respect's best known public figure. She directly referred to the Venezuelan revolution as an example of how some societies are rejecting the neo-liberal model and explained how Respect in Birmingham is trying to build itself as the anti-communist organisation.

Among the guests addressing the event was Penny Duggan of the [Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire](#). She reported on the strikes in France and told the audience of the LCR's commitment to building a broad party that will incarnate the resistance to capitalism in France.

Summing up the discussion Nick Wrack remarked on the participants' "feeling of liberation". Even though the organisation had been split down the middle the people in the hall, who formed the core of independent activists and contained significant numbers of Bangladeshi members from Tower Hamlets were determined to carry on building a party. He added that members need to see Respect Renewal as a part of a process towards building a broader party that will include people from the Communist left, the Labour Party and environmentalists. This process will start with a series of meetings and discussions across England and Wales in the coming months with organisations and individuals. George Galloway added that members will be invited to submit documents outlining their ideas on Respect's development and that the acting leadership would be doing the same. There will be a conference after the May elections to develop a programme.

Speaking on behalf of Socialist Resistance John Lister said that the organisation was willing to cease production of its monthly paper and hand over its financial resources as well as its production facilities to allow Respect Renewal to begin producing a monthly paper. This decision was welcomed and agreed by the conference. Socialist Resistance will shortly be discussing how to maintain its own public profile in the light of this step.

Hitting the ground running

The first issue of Respect Renewal's paper will be ready for the [Campaign against Climate Change](#) demonstration in December. The new publication will be different from the well designed but uninspiring, apolitical tabloids that Respect has traditionally produced. It will have analysis, discussion and give branches something to organise around.

The split in Respect is a temporary setback in the construction of a class struggle mass party in Britain. However the choice was either a separation

or a continuing slow decline. The Respect Renewal conference demonstrated that there are several hundred people who have tried working in Respect for three or four years and have concluded that its old way of working was stopping it from growing. In most parts of the country branches met infrequently or only to elect conference delegates. Many members felt, rightly or wrongly, that the SWP treated it as their own property and felt that the pain and disruption of a split was a necessary price to pay to allow the organisation to develop.



The omens are promising for the relaunched organisation's future. Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and parts of London sent along enough people to quickly establish viable, dynamic branches. A leadership and infrastructure are emerging quickly. This includes Salma Yacoob, Alan Thornett, Nick Wrack, Rob Hoveman and Kevin Ovenden. These last three were also recently expelled from the SWP.

The conference was a big success. Salma Yaqoob said that she had arrived with a heavy heart but was leaving with a light heart. She had reason to. We were present at the significant next step in the creation of Britain's class struggle, anti-imperialist working class party.

► *Liam Mac Uaid is an editor of Socialist Resistance and a member of its steering committee. His blog is online at liammacuaid.wordpress.com*

Socialist Resistance: what next?

Production suspended to support Respect
Renewal newspaper

[Socialist Resistance](#)

The resources used to produce the monthly Socialist Resistance newspaper are being used to support the launch of the monthly paper announced at the Respect Renewal conference.

[Socialist Resistance](#) agreed to make the offer at a joint meeting of its editorial board and steering committee in early November which was open to all our members. The proposal was agreed unanimously, and was accepted by the [Respect Renewal](#) conference. The first issue of Respect's paper will be on sale in December.

Socialist Resistance's support will be reflected through financial support, the use of our publishing systems, volunteer labour, and by the participation of SR's editorial team in producing the new paper.

Our successful [pamphlet on the crisis in Respect](#) will be expanded, and published as part of a series of books intended for publication over the next months. We will also continue to hold major public events based on themes of interest to our readers such as our day schools on the Middle East, [Ecosocialism](#) and Latin America. Details of the next one will shortly be available.

Supporters of Socialist Resistance will continue to hold monthly political public meetings on a wide range of international and British topics.

A national meeting of our members in early 2008 will review our ongoing ecosocialism project and decide on a proposal to relaunch SR as a magazine. That will be the subject of further discussion over the coming months. Until Socialist Resistance is relaunched, our subscribers can choose whether to take the new paper instead, to extend their subscription period, or for a refund to be either paid to them or donated to Respect Renewal.

The new Respect paper is already set to have a much wider base of human and financial support than the monthly Socialist Resistance. The new

paper will deepen our five-year struggle to build a broad and democratic ecosocialist party that can give a voice to those effectively disenfranchised by [New Labour](#)'s right-wing agenda.

Socialist Resistance has demonstrated the seriousness of its commitment to building Respect over a number of years. Our decision to make our paper available to Respect is further proof of this. We are equally committed to helping develop a strong, vibrant ecosocialist current inside Respect and the rest of the British labour movement and our continuing activity will remain dedicated to this aims.

► *Socialist Resistance is a socialist newspaper produced by British supporters of the Fourth International in conjunction with other marxists.*



SR is expected to relaunch as magazine

Court to decide if FARC & PFLP are terrorist or liberators

Trial of 'Fighters and Lovers'
[Ron Ridenour](#)

“Ever since Colombia has been Colombia there has been political violence,” concluded Venezuelan historian Amilcar Figueroa, president alternative of the Latin American Parliament (LAP), and a witness for the defense in terror trial against seven Danes.

At stake in this second phase of court proceedings, rebegun November 14, is a precedent-setting juridical determination. Are the armed guerrilla organizations, [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia](#) (FARC) and [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine](#) (PFLP), terrorists or freedom fighters. If the three judges, two of them lay, conclude the former, the Danes will be found guilty of supporting terrorism.

Maximum punishment for economically supporting terrorism is ten years imprisonment. However, four years imprisonment is the most that a city court can render defendants found guilty of any crime. This trial is in Copenhagen City court jurisdiction.

In January 2006, these members of Fighters and Lovers began producing and selling t-shirts with FARC and PFLP insignias. Some of the proceeds would have gone to media projects in support of the liberationist groups.

Denmark's intelligence police unit (PET) arrested the seven activists a month later, confiscated sale proceeds and shut down the group's website. The state attorney charged them with violating a new anti-terror law, paragraph 114b.

Terror is defined as “terrifying a population...to destabilize or destroy a country's or an international organization's fundamental policies...economy or societal structure.”

The state contends that the two liberationist groups are terrorists because the EU has placed them on its terror list, following suit with the United States. The United Nations, Great Britain and the [Latin American Parliament](#) (comprised of 22 countries, including Colombia) have not so determined.

Before the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in the US, these organizations were universally viewed as national liberation armed groups.

Defense witness Figueroa views the armed conflict in Colombia as one that adversely affects much of the region, causing losses of lives in other countries, economic and social disaster for ordinary people, the ill fate of four million Colombians who have fled the country or to other parts of Colombia, as well as the loss of over 200,000 Colombians and institutionalized use of torture.

“We seek a peaceful solution to this long-standing conflict,” he said, “and right now a delegation of FARC is meeting with [Hugo Chavez](#), who is the chosen mediator by both sides.”

President [Alvaro Uribe](#) recently released 20 members of FARC from prison. He did not call them terrorists, said Figueroa, in an effort to establish diplomatic negotiations.

“The Danish court's decision will have an impact on these negotiations,” said Figueroa, who is also a Caracas city councilman.

Figueroa related the history of the violent conflict since FARC was formed, in 1966. He testified that para-militarists, in the pay of plantation owners, work with many military and police units in murdering and torturing thousands of civilians.

The defense produced documentation from the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHCHR), the Organization of American States Human Rights Commission (IACHR) and its court proceedings, which have sanctioned the government of Colombia, military units and para-militarists for systematic violations of human rights: extrajudicial murders, routine torture, gang rapes, disappearances; threats and violence against Colombia journalists, Colombian judges and states

attorneys, who attempt to try para-militarists and military officers.

In eight court cases in this century, IACHR has found the state of Colombia guilty in massacres of unarmed civilians. In some of these atrocities, the perpetrators have tried to cast blame on FARC.

The defense asserted that Colombia is not a state run by the rule of law. Most arrests and court cases occur outside the rights of citizens. Commission of Jurists and other human rights groups inside Colombia contend that only 17% of 259,400 prisoners were handled according to juridical procedures.

Contradictions within the “Establishment”, various sectors of the wealthy, and even within the United States government are pressuring Uribe’s and Bush’s regimes to dampen military aggression and find a peaceful solution, asserted Figueroa.

Even Colombia’s state attorney has recently begun trials against some military, police officials, para-militarist and several congressmen.

Senator Mario Uribe, the President’s cousin, has stepped down from office to prepare for the case against him for collaborating with narcotic traffickers and para-militarists. The defense said that there is evidence that one-third of congress members collaborate with para-militarists.

Another defense witness, Niels Lindvig, a Danish radio reporter with 25 years experience in covering Colombia and Latin America, said that President Uribe was forced to fire his foreign minister because his family was exposed for drug trafficking. Earlier, a police chief fired 8000 policemen for collaboration with narcotic cartels. Lindvig has seen reference to a 1991 USA Defense Intelligence Agency report, which indicated that Uribe collaborated with narcotic cartels (Pablo Escobar) when he was governor of Antioquia.

Lindvig said that FARC is primarily a Marxist oriented political organization, which seeks to overthrow a ruthless government. FARC conducted a cease fire and established a political party, Patriotic Union (UP), to run in elections in the mid-late 1980s.

In just three years, 3000 to 5000 of its members, including 2000 political representatives, were murdered by para-militarists in the pay of plantation owners, and in collaboration with the military and police.

“The survivors were forced to resume armed struggle: take to the mountains or go into exile,” Lindvig said.

“FARC is not terrorist. It has committed individual acts of terrorism but that is not an integrated part of its policies or actions. The few terror acts committed are condemned by the leadership, and compensation is given to victims families. FARC couldn’t survive for four decades if it mistreated civilians,” Lindvig concluded.

The state’s case

The state attorney did not cross-examine defense witnesses rather relied on its witnesses. Her witness, Angel Rabasa, is a senior researcher for [RAND Corporation](#), a California think tank which serves the weapons industry. It was started in 1948 by the United States Air Force and is a major strategist for US government defense and intelligence departments, and major industry.

Rabasa argued that FARC is a terrorist organization, because it kidnaps “innocent civilians,” many of whom it kills, murders many other civilians, and is a drug dealer.

The defense argued that FARC engages in three types of kidnappings: a) soldiers captured in battle; b) politicians who support or are in the pay of narcotic trafficking plantation owners; c) capitalists with one million dollars or more who refuse to pay a tax of 10% from their operations whatever their character in FARC controlled territory, about 40% of the nation.

The defense maintained that FARC acts as a sovereign government. It wears uniforms, establishes taxes, builds and operates health clinics, schools, civic councils and other infra-structures. It upholds the criteria set by the Geneva Convention of 1949, according to international juridical experts, including the *Droit Internationale*. It is legitimate, in popular armed conflicts, for both sides to exact taxes.

The International Commission of Jurists, an independent human rights organization of lawyers, recently concluded that 14,444 people have been kidnapped (most murdered) by government collaborating para-militarists.

Amnesty International's 2006 report states that FARC kidnapped 200 people in 2006.

The defense argued that FARC is not a drug trafficker, although it does not prevent small farmers from growing cocaine. They are taxed as is any other producer or property owner. On the other hand, there is evidence that government and parliamentary officials, including the president, profit from large drug traffickers and their para-militarists terror actions.

Rabasa defended Plan Colombia—the \$50 billion US-Colombia operation to eliminate cocaine plants and the guerrillas—with which RAND has played a role. It helps the government be “an open society” with a “free press” and an independent democratic court system, he said.

The defense introduced IACHR reports, such as #2005, paragraph 55, showing that “officers of the court are under pressure to legitimize the arrests made by military and police personnel,” which includes being arrested themselves, fired or subject to “disciplinary investigations”.

United Nation reports (among them #2005, page 25, and 2007, page 30) show that witnesses in court cases, attorneys and judges have been attacked in cases involving military and para-military terrorist units.

Both the OAS and the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights have released numerable reports, as late as 2005-7, showing that journalists face threats and violence for “providing news and comment viewed as independent and even critical of the Government” (UNHCHR 2006, annex 3, page 51).

Defense attorney Torkil Hoeyer disputed the state's witness' credibility. In cross-examination he exposed Rabasa, a purported expert on Colombian affairs, because he was unaware of UN and OAS documentation of atrocities made by Colombian governments and the military. Furthermore, Rabasa contradicted reality by contending that FARC had

never disarmed nor been a part of the legal political party UP.

In between sessions concerning FARC and PFLP, defendants expressed relief.

“The state's case is weak and her witnesses exposed for incompetence,” said one.

Another problem facing the state is its discriminatory use of the law, exposed in a national newspaper, Politiken. It reported that another Danish organization, veterans of World War resistance movement, had donated money to the FARC, in early 2006, and sent a letter of its action to the Minister of Justice, in a challenge to the repressive terror law. The government declined to initiate action. Its terror law apparently does not apply to old heroes only to newer ones.

► *Ron Ridenour's journalistic career started in the movement against the Vietnam war and in the US alternative press. In Cuba between 1982 and 1996, he translated, wrote and edited for the foreign publishing house, Editorial José Martí, and news agency, Prensa Latina. He now lives in Denmark. His books, 'Cuba Beyond the Crossroads' and 'Cuba at Sea', are published by Socialist Resistance.*

Other recent articles:

Denmark

[Court delivers a victory for liberation fighters the world over](#) - December 2007

[Red Green Alliance maintains parliamentary representation by narrow margin](#) - November 2007

[Copenhagen City Court terror trial verdict postponed](#) - November 2007

[Trial to judge PFLP and solidarity activist rights](#) - November 2007

[Red-Green Alliance conference](#) - May 2007

Trial to judge PFLP and solidarity activist rights

[Ron Ridenour](#)

“If the Copenhagen City Court determines that the PFLP is a liberationist organization it could have a positive impact for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict and worldwide,” summarized Israeli historian Ilan Pape, a defense witness for seven “Fighter and Lovers” solidarity activists charged with abetting terrorism by selling t-shirts with PFLP and FARC insignias. The police confiscated proceeds, which would have gone to media projects for these groups.

Pape gave testimony during the resumed trial sessions, November 14-16, in Copenhagen. The professor of the Arab-Israeli conflict for 25 years recently moved from his teaching job at Hafa University to head the history department at England’s Exeter University. Son of immigrant German Jews, Pape has lived his entire life in Hafa.

Pape outlined the history since the state of Israeli was established in 1948. He said that Israel has systematically ignored and violated the UN Charter, the Geneva Convention, and hundreds of UN resolutions ever since. This gives the Palestinian people legal right to defend themselves and fight for their sovereignty.

Israeli has forcefully expelled two-thirds of the Palestine population from their lands and occupied 92% of what was their country. It currently imprisons over 10,000 Palestinians, has murdered several thousands more, in addition to frequently torturing Palestinians. It denies Palestinian detainees the same civil rights of trial and defense as is granted Israelis, Pape testified.

“The West Bank is now encircled by a wall higher than the Berlin Wall, all against

international law and condemned by the International Haag Court, in 2004,” said Pape.

“Former President Jimmy Carter describes Israeli as employing apartheid. And Nelsen Mandela stated that what it does is, in some ways, worse than what South Africa’s white regime did.”

In the first years of the [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine](#), 1967 to 1974, it did employ the use of terror, Pape said, but has since ceased this policy. Attacking armed civilians who illegal occupy Palestinian territory is a legitimate act of defense, he maintained, as are attacks upon military targets.

Pape testified that the PFLP is not a terrorist organization rather a legitimate armed and political liberation group—“a very important part of Palestinian’s lives and political process.”

“It is often impossible to divide the military from civilians as they operate so closely together, especially in the illegal settlements,” he said.

“It is Israeli that is illegal. If it did recognize international law, it could not occupy Palestinian lands granted them by the UN. Israel has systematically destroyed over 12,000 Palestinians homes. Its objective is to take over the entire country. But the PFLP recognizes the rights of two states.”

The defense introduced documentation showing that the PFLP has concentrated on military targets throughout this century. It ceased using car bombings in 2001, recognizing them to be imprecise and a cause of harm to innocent civilians. PFLP also builds and runs social programs where Palestinians live, and participates in local and national elections.

In October 2005, the PFLP won 50 seats on local councils, and later that year won 4% of the votes in the legislative council election, giving it three seats. It is the third largest parliamentary party after Hamas and Fatah.

Ole Sippel, a Danish television journalist with 40 years experience in the field, many of them in Israel-Palestine and throughout the Middle East, testified for the defense.

“The occupied settlements are a main cause of the increased violence. There are 140 settlements now in and around the West Bank. Many of these civilians are in the army reserves, are well armed and often conduct unprovoked attacks upon Palestinians. The military protects them but not the Palestinians,” Sippel said.

Sippel knows many members and leaders of the PFLP.

“PFLP does not use terror as an integrated policy. It answers in kind to Israeli liquidation of Palestinian leaders,” he said, in answer to the Israeli accusation that it was a terrorist act when PFLP liquidated its tourist minister, Rehavam Zeevi, on October 17, 2001.

PFLP chose Zeevi because he was a key member of the Israeli cabinet and co-responsible for security forces’ illegal and brutal attacks upon Palestinians. It was also an act of revenge for Israel’s assassination—two months before—of PFLP general secretary, Abu Ali Mustafa, who had recently replaced its ailing founder, George Habash.

Israel arrested four PFLP members in connection with Zeevi’s death. US and UK forces took them to a jail in Jericho. In March, 2006, Israel’s military attacked the jail and kidnapped the four.

The state’s case

Once again state’s attorney Lone Damgaard chose not to cross-examine the defense witnesses, part of a “tactic”, she said.

Her witness, Reuven Paz, was employed from 1971 to 1994 by Israeli General Security Service, both as a researcher and with 17 years in the field. He has since started his own research consulting firm specializing on Middle East affairs.

The Israeli human rights organization, Bt’selem, and Amnesty International criticize the IGSS for using torture in interrogation of Palestinian detainees.

Paz read his statement, in which he characterized PFLP as a terrorist organization. Much of his testimony concerned its hijackings in its early

years, which it ceased in 1974. Most civilians killed since were armed settlers in the illegally occupied territories, although Paz considered these killings as terrorist acts.

Paz admitted that, unlike other Palestinians resistance groups, or, in his words, terrorist organizations, the PFLP is secular and is not financed by other countries or outside groups.

On cross-examination, Paz conceded that PFLP central command members denounce the use of suicide bombings, of which a handful has occurred by young PFLP members acting on their own.

Defense attorney Torkil Hoeyer asked Paz to explain why Israel is willing to negotiate and cooperate with Fatah—which forms part of the PLO alongside PFLP—even though it is also characterized by Israel and the EU as a terrorist organization.

“I don’t know,” he replied. Nor did the Middle East affairs expert know or remember if Israel violated basic human rights and civil liberties of Palestinians.

“I am not an expert on international law...The United Nations works out of political interests,” implying that Israel need not abide by it or the Geneva Convention.

Tomorrow, the Copenhagen City Court will hear a Danish intelligence police and army analyst report on the PFLP. His testimony will be held behind closed doors but will later be read to the interested public and media. The three-panel court should render a verdict later tomorrow.

Copenhagen City Court terror trial verdict postponed

Ron Ridenour

“This trial is the first of its kind. It is not easy to decide what constitutes terror,” State Attorney Lone Damgaard summarized in her closing argument before Copenhagen City Court.

Nevertheless, she did not hesitate in recommending prison terms of two to nine months for the seven defendants, Danish activists who produced and sold t-shirts with FARC and PFLP insignias. Some of the proceeds would have gone to media projects in support of the liberationist groups.

Following closing arguments, Judge Ulrik Stage-Nielsen postponed a verdict until the three-panel court can reflect on evidence. A verdict will be forthcoming on December 13.

Background

Denmark’s intelligence police unit (PET) arrested the seven in February 2006, confiscated sale proceeds and shut down the group’s website. The Ministry of Justice charged them with violating a new anti-terror law, paragraph 114b.

Terror is defined as “terrifying a population...to destabilize or destroy a country’s or an international organization’s fundamental policies...economy or societal structure.”

Maximum punishment for economically supporting terrorism is ten years imprisonment. However, four years imprisonment is the most that a city court can render defendants found guilty of any crime.

The state contends that the two liberationist groups are terrorists. EU placed them on its terror list, following suit with the United States. The United Nations, Great Britain and the Latin American Parliament (comprised of 22 countries, including Colombia) have not so determined.

The terror list is not judicial proof. That, then, is the unprecedented task of this lower court: to legally determine the status of FARC and PFLP. Whatever the verdict, appeals to higher courts are likely.

Final court session

The state attorney built her case entirely on partisan witnesses—all employees of private or state institutions working for the United States government, the Israeli government and PET.

The prosecution’s final witness, an undisclosed PET and army intelligence analyst, testified behind closed doors about the report he made on FARC and PFLP as terrorist organizations. His statement was read to a reopened courtroom. The secret agent’s sources were all second hand. He had never been to Palestine or Colombia, but he declined to state if he had been to Israel.

Neither he, the state’s other witnesses, nor the state attorney considered the actions of FARC and PFLP within the context of Colombia or Israel realities.

Damgaard said that killing soldiers and police is as much terrorism as killing unarmed civilians. The fact that both FARC and PFLP admittedly seek to alter the societal structure with violence is adequate to find them guilty.

Torkil Hoeyer and Helle Jensen, attorneys for the defense, argued that any judgment must be determined within the context of reality in the countries where FARC and PFLP are fighting.

Hoeyer and Jensen said that their clients should be found innocent. Two of them had not produced or sold t-shirts rather had set up placards or acted as a homepage server. None of the defendants view FARC and PFLP as terrorists rather as liberation fighters seeking to free their people from tyrannical governments, and, in the case of Israel, from a state which systematically violates 250 United Nation resolutions, and is judged to be an illegal occupier of Palestine by the International Court of Justice.

Furthermore, the defense said that no money was delivered since PET had confiscated proceeds.

The defense contends that EU’s terror list is compiled in counter-distinction to all rules of law. The commission members are undisclosed as is their determining criteria for what constitutes terror, and those accused have no opportunity of dispute. Although the list is not introduced as evidence, the case would never have been drawn had the organizations not been placed on the list.

Defendants’ final comments

Defendants offered final comments to a packed courtroom. One of the defendant supporters was Mikael Schøldardt’s 88 year-old mother-in-law, who

had been a resistance fighter under Nazi-occupied Denmark.

Other supporters overflowed onto the hallway while five local union standard bearers raised their banners outside the courthouse. One of a dozen local union supporters had just presented *Fighters and Lovers* with its cultural prize.

No state supporters were present in the audience.

Schøllardt told the court that RAND Corporation, which sent its researcher Angel Rabasa to witness for the state, is all but “independent”, having been a major military strategist think tank for the genocidal United States war against Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, as it is today for US wars against the Middle East, against Palestinians and Colombians.

He said that courageous people resisting Colombia state tyranny, among them ordinary people not involved in armed struggle, will be let down if the Danish government’s terror law is upheld against FARC.

“This is an attempt by Minister of Justice Lene Espersen to shut up ordinary people’s solidarity with decency.”

State witness lies

During court sessions, November 14-16, both sides had introduced their cases.

In this final session, Rabasa was challenged by the defense for incredibility and incompetence.

The purported expert on Colombian affairs had named people whom he said FARC had murdered.

Torkil Hoeyer showed that several of those, including parliamentarians Jorge Eduardo Gechem, Consuelo González de Perdomo and Orlando Beltrán Cuéllar, were still alive. This is confirmed by articles in the Colombia press, relatives, military and parliamentary statements.

Danish reporter Niels Lindvig contested another claim by Rabasa, that Colombia’s press is free. Lindvig said that several journalists have been murdered by paramilitarists, and that just weeks ago a Miami-based journalist, Gonzalo Guillén, fled Colombia after receiving 24 death threats within one day. President Uribe had endangered his life in a September 30 public statement, in which he claimed that Guillén had “mistreated” him in articles and was behind a book by the mistress of narcotic cartel head, Pablo Escobar, with whom Uribe had had political and economic ties.

Another key discrepancy was Rabasa’s testimony that he was certain that FARC never laid down its weapons in a cease fire and had no relationship

with the political party UP. Hoeyer introduced a quotation from Rabasa’s 2001 book, “Colombia Labyrinth”, chapter seven, page 71:

“A truce with the FARC and parts of the ELN was in effect from 1984 to 1987. The FARC established a political front, the Patriotic Union (UP), which contested the 1986 election and elected 14 senators and congressmen and scores of council members. However, the agreement unraveled amid mutual recriminations and assassinations of UP officials.”

Rabasa also had claimed that his work was independent of any government and military institution. Rand’s homepage announcement of his book (co-authored with Peter Chalk) states: “The research described in this report was performed under the auspices of RAND’s Project AIR FORCE.”

-Ron Ridenour’s journalistic career started in the movement against the Vietnam war and in the US alternative press. In Cuba between 1982 and 1996, he translated, wrote and edited for the foreign publishing house, Editorial José Martí, and news agency, Prensa Latina. He now lives in Denmark. His books, 'Cuba Beyond the Crossroads' and 'Cuba at Sea', are published by Socialist Resistance.

Denmark: Red Green Alliance maintains parliamentary representation by narrow margin

Thomas Eisler

In the national elections on 13th November the Red Green Alliance struggled to maintain parliamentary representation. With a result of 2,17 % of the vote it only passed the 2 % limit by a narrow margin.

It is the worst result for the RGA since it entered parliament in 1994. It expresses a huge drop in support in comparison with the last national election in February 2005 where 3,4 % was achieved.

In the opinion polls the RGA mainly lost support after choosing Asmaa Abdol-Hamid as candidate in May 2007. Some former RGA voters give her candidacy as the reason for not voting for the RGA again. The RGA conference in May gave a position which meant she would be elected for parliament if RGA maintained its 6 seats.

She is a young Muslim woman who wears a hijab and who doesn't shake hands with men. Her religion and the way she expresses it has created doubt, to which the media has contributed, about the RGA's positions on religion and rights. The RGA has never had as much media coverage as in the last six months: it has been all about Asmaa and whether she is really against the death penalty and religious fundamentalism. The RGA has not been able to regain credibility.

Asmaa's candidacy nevertheless can not be seen as the only reason for the RGA's decline in votes. The left reformist Socialist Peoples Party (SPP) was the big winner of the elections. It more than doubled its votes, from 6 % to 13 %, for two reasons. The new chairman Villy Søvndal seemed to be much clearer and more dynamic than former chairman Holger K. Nielsen in the 2005 elections. But it is also an expression of the radicalisation based on the big mobilisations for welfare in the last year and half. Furthermore, the RGA had no candidate with the same personal mass appeal as

was the case with Pernille Rosenkrantz-Theil in 2005 elections.

However, Abdol-Hamid's candidature has provoked a combination of several arguments. In the Red Green Alliance constituency, and the general public, there is a tendency to identify her way of being Muslim (for example, wearing the hijab and not shaking hands with men) as being reactionary. There are several other Muslims who stood as candidates for parliament, including the leader of New Alliance Naser Khader. However, they are not questioned because their religion is less noticeable in public. In so far as the forced wearing of the hijab is seen as being being reactionary then the hijab is an expression of women's oppression: a candidate wearing a hijab is then seen by some as promoting women's oppression.

Although the idea that Islam is a reactionary religion has been promoted in Denmark, and has some influence, more people have a problem with her not shaking hands than being Muslim. This is often seen as being strange, disrespectful and against gender equality by being discriminative towards men.

Several articles in the press quoted her in a way that suggested ambiguous positions on death penalty and other positions. She responded and made it very clear that she is against the death penalty, as she is also in favour of Gay-Lesbian rights. This contradiction has created an image of her being unclear and untrustworthy.

There is also some who think say the RGA should be an atheist party. Though this has never been the position of RGA it came up in discussions when we chose a Muslim as a candidate.

Abdol-Hamid is also less experienced and politically educated than most candidates, which the press have exploited. Almost all press coverage about the RGA has been about her candidacy, something which seemed a catastrophe to many RGA members.

The situation continued with negative press coverage and internal debate about her candidacy. Leading members of the RGA like myself came to the conclusion that it would have been better to give her a less prominent position as had been proposed by a minority of delegates at the May conference. The National Leadership decided to call for an extraordinary conference to be held on 17th November. Just as the conference planning got underway, the Prime Minister decided to call for elections on the 13th November.

Looking ahead, the discussion is what the RGA could have done to avoid its loss of support. There is no doubt that the candidacy of Asmaa was the main reason of RGA's loss. With hindsight, it was a mistake to have given Abdol-Hamid such a high position on the RGA's candidates in this election. She should have been a candidate in a position where she would become an alternate MP. Most delegates at the RGA conference in May didn't get to know her or her points of view.

Being Muslim is not a reason in itself to become a candidate, though should it be no hindrance.

The RGA has the problem after the election that the reaction to Asmaa's candidacy is a sign of the division in the working class concerning ethnic and religious minorities. The candidacy of a Muslim believer happens in a situation where, on the national and international agenda of the rulers, the enemy has changed from communism to Islam: And the ruling ideas tend to be the ideas of the ruling class.

Furthermore to this general view two other factors are relevant when making the balance sheet of Asmaa's candidacy. First of all, a part of the core voters for the RGA asked if it's possible to be both deeply religious and socialist. That relevant question wasn't clearly answered. The other point was that the positions of Asmaa - those she actually expressed and those she was attributed to have - created further confusion. That's why it's not that surprising that the candidacy of Asmaa had a certain influence on the electoral result.

The RGA is faced with a difficult discussion about this background and it is decisive that it doesn't lead to a split of the party. Our position is that being religious is in itself not a reason to discard people as candidates for parliament or other positions in the RGA. But at the same time we underline that there is room in the RGA for members who disagree.

-Thomas Eisler is a member of the national leadership of the Red-Green Alliance as well as the leadership of SAP - Danish Section of the Fourth International.

Other recent articles:

Denmark

Copenhagen City Court terror trial verdict postponed - November 2007

Trial to judge PFLP and solidarity activist rights - November 2007

Court to decide if FARC & PFLP are terrorist or liberators - November 2007

Red-Green Alliance conference - May 2007

There is a need for a new Ungdomshus in Copenhagen - March 2007

Electoral results %		
Party	2007	2005
Liberal Party	26,2	29
Social Democrats	25,5	25,8
Danish Peoples Party	13,9	13,3
Socialist Peoples Party	13	6
Conservative	10,4	10,3
Social Liberal Party	5,1	9,2
New Alliance	2,8	-
Red Green Alliance	2,2	3,4
Christian Democrats	0,9	1,7

The Russian Revolution - Ninety Years On

David Mandel

The October Revolution of 1917 was the most influential political event of the twentieth century. But since history is written by the victors, it is not well known that October was the opening shot of a vast and powerful challenge to capitalism that swept the industrial world and had echoes in the colonial countries. Between 1918 and 1921 union membership and days lost in strikes everywhere reached new heights, while the ranks of the revolutionary wing of the socialist movement swelled.

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Revolutions, in which the working class was the moving force, occurred in Germany, Austria, Hungary and Finland. Revolutionary situations (that is, the real, immediate potential of revolution) arose in Italy and parts of France and Poland. In a memorandum to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the British Prime Minister wrote: "The whole of Europe is in a revolutionary mood. The workers have a deep feeling of dissatisfaction with conditions of life as they existed before the war; they are full of anger and indignation. The whole of the existing social, political and economic order is being called into question by the mass of people from one end of Europe to the other."

The wave of unrest did not bypass North America either. Canada experienced a massive strike wave in 1919-1920, including several city-wide general strikes. Most of the strikers went out in solidarity with other workers, a sure sign of radicalization. The Prime Minister of the day, Robert Borden, later recalled: "In some cities there was a deliberate attempt to overthrow the existing organization of the Government and to supersede it by crude,

fantastic methods founded upon absurd conceptions of what had been accomplished in Russia. It became necessary in some communities to repress revolutionary methods with a stern hand, and from this I did not shrink." The Winnipeg general strike became a small-scale civil war, with the federal government arming a bourgeois militia after the police joined the strikers. Indeed, the need to contain and subvert labour was one of the government's motives in establishing the RCMP in that same period. It was felt that municipal and regional police on their own were not up to the job.

In the U.S. union membership doubled to five million in the period 1916-1920. In 1919, over four million workers, an incredible 20 per cent of the labour force, struck. That same year 365,000 steelworkers staged the biggest strike the U.S. had ever seen, and a general strike shut down Seattle.

But everywhere, except in Russia, the revolutionary wave was beaten back. This failure was at the root of the subsequent rise of fascism (an anti-worker, anti-socialist movement that everywhere enjoyed the sympathy of the bourgeoisie, and often its material support) as well as of Stalinist totalitarianism. Rosa Luxemburg, leader of Germany's revolutionary socialists, assassinated in January 1919 by proto-fascist troops, correctly assessed the alternatives that faced humanity as "socialism or barbarism."

Petrograd June 10 1917 - "All Power to the Soviets"

But if the relation between the failure of the revolutionary wave in the West and the rise of fascism is quite clear, the link with the rise of Stalinism is less well understood.

Russia had two revolutions in 1917, one in February and the other in October. In overthrowing the monarchy and its totalitarian regime in February 1917, the popular masses had no intention of challenging capitalism. This explains why they allowed the liberals, the main party of the propertied classes (that is, the capitalists and nobility), to form the provisional government. The workers' and peasants' goals were: a democratic republic, agrarian reform (confiscation of the aristocracy's land and its free distribution to the peasants), renunciation of the Russia's imperialist war aims in favour of an active, democratic peace policy, and the eight-hour workday.

The various socialist parties, including a majority of Bolsheviks, supported the liberal government. However, Lenin's return to Russia at the start of

April soon turned the Bolshevik party around. If he was able to do this so quickly, it was because the party's overwhelmingly working-class rank and file and middle-level leadership had long since concluded from past experience that the propertied classes were opposed to democracy and strongly supported Russian imperialism. According to this view, which the Bolshevik leadership temporarily abandoned in the euphoric days of apparent national unity that followed the February revolution, the revolution could win only if it was led by a government of workers and peasants and in opposition to the propertied classes.

What really was new in Lenin's position in April 1917 (summarized in his famous "April Theses"), at least as far as the Bolsheviks were concerned, was that he now called for a socialist revolution in Russia. He had arrived at this position sometime in 1915, based on his analysis of the world war and the possibilities for revolution that it opened in the warring countries. But in fact, Trotsky, among others on the left wing of Russian socialism, had even earlier concluded a revolution in Russia, whatever its initial goals, could only win if it overthrew capitalism.

From the end of April 1917, the Bolsheviks called for the formation of a government of soviets, councils which the workers and soldiers (the latter being overwhelmingly peasants) had elected in the course of the February Revolution. This would be an exclusively popular government that disenfranchised the propertied classes. This position at first received little popular support. It was seen as unnecessarily alienating the propertied classes, who in February seemed to have rallied to the revolution. It would provoke a civil war that no one wanted. (Petrograd's metalworkers, the radical core of the labour movement, were a notable exception. Here, in Russia's capital, some district soviets demanded soviet power during the February Revolution itself.)

But after eight months of inaction and sabotage on the part of the liberal government and in face of the growing threat of a counterrevolutionary military coup aided by a lockout by the industrialists, the correctness of the Bolshevik position became evident to the popular masses. Everywhere they demanded the immediate transfer of power to the soviets. This was done on October 25, or November 7 by the Western Julian calendar, with a minimum of bloodshed.

From that point of view, the October Revolution should be seen as an act of defence of the

democratic revolution of February against the immediate threat of counter-revolution. But since this second revolution was directed against the propertied classes, it necessarily unleashed an anti-capitalist dynamic. At the same time, October was more than merely an act of defence. The soviets took power in the hope of inspiring the popular classes in the West to follow Russia's example. This was not simply an expression of internationalist idealism. It was seen as a fundamental condition of the revolution's survival.

As Marxists, the Bolsheviks considered that Russia, a very poor, mostly peasant country, lacked the material and political conditions for socialism. Russia needed the support of developed socialist countries in the West to carry through a socialist transformation. But there were other, much more immediate problems that could not find their solution without the support of revolutions in the West. To begin with, the capitalist states would never accept a socialist revolution in Russia. And, in fact, all the industrial countries (and some non-industrial) sent troops against the soviets and/or financed the indigenous counter-revolutionary forces. They also erected an economic and diplomatic blockade against the soviet state.

The other immediate problem was the peasantry, about 85 per cent of the population. The peasants would support the Bolsheviks insofar as they carried out the land reform and took Russia out of the imperialist war, but as a class (especially their better-off and intermediary elements, the latter forming the majority), they were not spontaneously collectivist. Once the land was distributed, they would turn against the workers, who would be forced to adopt collectivist measures to defend the revolution and to ensure their own physical survival.

This analysis was not limited to the top Bolshevik leadership. It was broadly shared by the worker masses, who reacted strongly to the ups and downs of the class struggle in the West. The Mensheviks, who as "orthodox Marxists" had initially refused to support the October Revolution because Russia lacked the conditions for socialism, shared this analysis too. That is why the majority of the party finally rallied to soviet power once the German revolution broke out in December 1918: revolution in the West had made the October Revolution viable.

Against all expectation, Russia's revolution, which had to organize an army from scratch even as the economy collapsed, survived the onslaught

of the capitalist world despite its isolation. This was made possible in large part by the labour upsurge in the West, which limited the imperialist states' capacity to intervene militarily. As one historian explained, "The statesmen in Paris were sitting on a thin crust of solid ground, beneath which volcanic forces of social upheaval were seething... So there was one absolutely convincing reason why Allied powers could not fulfill the hopes of White Russians and intervene with large numbers of troops: no reliable troops were available. It was the general opinion of leading statesmen and soldiers alike that the attempt to send large numbers of soldiers to Russia would probably end in mutiny."

In response to Winston Churchill's urging to send more troops, the British Prime Minister replied that "If Great Britain undertakes military action against the Bolsheviks, Great Britain herself will become Bolshevik and we will have soviets in London." This might have exaggerated the immediate threat, but the port workers' refusal to load arms, the mass demonstrations across the country, the immediate threat of a general strike, and the hint of even more decisive action — 350 local labour councils had been established and awaited only the signal — kept Britain from large-scale intervention alongside France on behalf of the invading Poles in the August 1920. This selfless action by the Labour Party, quite out of character for its generally reformist leadership, is a measure of the times. And it made a direct contribution to the revolution's survival.

The revolution also withstood the hostility of the peasantry, alienated by the Soviet government's grain monopoly and its policy of requisitioning agricultural surpluses and much that was not surplus. But the peasants also understood that the Bolsheviks were the only force capable of organizing victory over the counterrevolution, which would have drowned the agrarian reform in a sea of peasant blood. For example, a major peasant uprising broke out in the central Volga region in the spring of 1919. A few months later White general Denikin launched a major offensive from the south, counting on the support of the peasants. For the Bolsheviks, this was one of the most desperate moments of the civil war. They tried everything, including repression, propaganda, tax breaks for middle peasants, amnesty for the participants in the revolt. Nothing worked. But the shift came only when Denikin's army drew close to Moscow and peasants saw that the landlords'

return as a tangible and! immediate threat. At that moment, the insurrection simply died out on its own, and almost a million peasant deserters voluntarily rejoined the ranks of the Red Army.

But the Soviet victory, after three years of civil war and foreign intervention came at a terrible price: millions dead, mostly from hunger and disease; a devastated economy; a working class, the moving force of the revolutionary movement, bled white and scattered. Along with the revolution's isolation, this was the socio-political terrain out of which the bureaucratic dictatorship grew and consolidated itself in subsequent years. That is why Stalin, defying Marxist analysis, declared in 1924 that Russia could indeed build socialism in isolation. Among other things, this "theory" served as justification for the subordination of foreign Communist parties to the interests of the Russian bureaucratic elite, a policy that called on these parties to abandon the goal of socialist revolution. The bureaucratic regime, that would soon crush its own working class under the heel of its repressive machine and that would keep it atomized for the next six decades, was not only not interested in revolutions abroad, especially in the developed capitalist countries, but felt directly threatened by them.

Explaining the demand of the factory committees in the spring of 1918 to nationalize the factories — a measure that had not been foreseen by the Bolsheviks in October 1917 — an activist explained:

The conditions were such that the factory committees took full control of the enterprises. This was the result of the entire development of our revolution, the inevitable result of the unfolding class struggle. The proletariat did not advance toward it so much as circumstances led it. It simply had to do that which in the given situation it could not refuse to do.

And as terrible as that may seem to many, it means the complete removal of the capitalists from running the economy. Yes, it means "socialist experiments", as our opponents mockingly say... Yes, we have to say it: that which the working class of Russia has to do is the removal of capitalism and the rebuilding of our economy on a new socialist basis. This is no "fantastic theory" nor "free will" — we simply have no choice. And since it is being done by the working class and the capitalists are pushed aside in the course of the revolutionary struggle, it must be socialist regulation....

Will it be another Paris Commune or will it lead to world socialism – that depends on international circumstances. But we have absolutely no other alternative.

Even ninety years later, it is too early to draw up a definitive balance sheet of the October Revolution from a socialist perspective. But today, when nothing seems to remain of that revolution (only time will tell if that is an illusion), one can at least say: “With their backs to the wall, they dared.” The Russian workers launched a bold counter-offensive that held out the chance of victory, rather than opting for impotent defensive tactics that promised certain defeat. Today, when the very survival of humanity is at stake, this is surely something workers can learn from the October Revolution.

From Canadian Dimension Magazine, October 10, 2007

-David Mandel is an international expert on the post-Soviet labour movement and the author of numerous works on the ex-USSR since the advent of perestroika in the 1980s. His latest book is Labour After Communism (South End Press).

Global Economic Turbulence - Blip or Crisis?

Danilo Connadi

Many newspapers have described the financial crisis of risky ("subprime") housing loans as being primarily the result of the manoeuvres of unscrupulous financial investors. According to them, what we are seeing is a crisis having essentially speculative roots and thus little impact on the real economy. The purpose of such a campaign is to "reassure" the markets and to support an economic system by "separating the wheat from the chaff".

Northern Rock bank - technically bankrupt

Some people have up to now put the blame on the psychic weakness and the mentality of investors who are in the grip of panic and are incapable of understanding the marginal nature of the crisis. Today, whereas the crisis is by no means solved, there is even a certain competition to demonstrate that "the worst is behind us". Not claiming to be a specialist in finance and markets, I would like to limit myself here to drawing attention to some elements which shed light on the nature of this crisis, which emerged in August 2007. To put it another way, is the crisis the result of the "lies" of the financial world, which has taken the risk of implicating the real economy, or is just the opposite? Is the capitalist system as a whole solid and exterior to what has just happened?

It would be enough to list the establishments which have been implicated in the crisis to realize immediately that the story of the wheat and the chaff is just a fable. We can find in particular Deutsche Bank, Morgan Stanley, Merrill Lynch, Union des Banques Suisses, JP Morgan, BNP Paribas, Unicredit, Crédit Suisse, Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, Countrywide, Landesbank Sachsen, Bayerische Landesbank, in other words both top-ranking investment funds and watchdogs of management. [1]

This list gets longer every day, because obviously both companies and banks are trying as far as possible to hide their direct involvement in the risky loan market and their indirect involvement through the acquisition of bonds which themselves

serve as guarantee for these loans. We will undoubtedly know more between the end of September and the beginning of October when the principal investment banks publish their quarterly statements. To those which I have just enumerated it is obviously necessary to add the 87 small and medium-sized American financial enterprises which have already filed for bankruptcy .

The list of these big investment and pension funds, banks, the property investors and insurance companies really does not lead us to think of an "anomaly" but much more of a wide-ranging crisis concerning the heart of Western finance, primarily American and German. In the space of fourteen days these companies needed some \$324 billion of short- or medium- term credit, obtained from the central banks, in particular from the European Central Bank (ECB). And we saw real rescue operations on companies, such as Countrywide, the principal supplier of credit in the United States, which controls 61 000 establishments.

And if we still had some doubts about the dimensions of the problem, it would be enough for us to remember the amount of these US credits: \$6 500 billion. An amount which exceeds, and by quite a lot, that of the Treasury bills issued by the state (\$4 300 billion) and also the amount of the bonds of private companies which come to only \$5 300 billion.

"Subprime" credits

High-risk loans are relatively recent "financial products". Their rise started in 1996 and they subsequently experienced a rapid boom, so that their total amount came to exceed \$1000 billion. They are loans granted by the banks and financial institutions to debtors who are "at risk", i.e. who do not have property to guarantee the loan and who have irregular incomes that come from precarious or intermittent work. The rise in the prices of real estate, which has been spectacular and uninterrupted for the 15 last years (between 10 and 20 per cent per annum between 2001 and 2006) thus served as a "solid" guarantee helped by the supply of "easy money" thanks to the very low lending rates of the central banks.

The risks and the profits were founded on these co-ordinates. We were witnessing a cycle that was apparently without end, where rising prices of real estate fed financial investments and facilitated new credits which in their turn made possible new construction and a further increase in real estate prices. Banks and financiers who had plenty of

capital issued loans and bonds which were supposed to guarantee in due course profits for those who acquired them. These bonds multiplied and, taking advantage of the excellent evaluation of their reliability, were massively acquired by investment funds, pension funds, the insurances companies and other banks and companies. With the new liquidities, even riskier credits were issued, while competition became increasingly fierce.

Demand and prices increased so much that between 1995 and 2004 investments in new construction industries increased by 80 per cent in the United States and by between 20 and 40 per cent in Europe, except for Germany which was experiencing a period of spectacular growth. At the same time the property loans granted to households increased annually by 3.3 per cent in Germany, 11 per cent in the United States and up to 19.2 per cent in Italy, producing a real boom in the relationship between debt and disposable household income, which went from 31.1 per cent to 52.2 per cent in Italy, from 64.7 per cent to 75.3 per cent in France, from 99.7 per cent to 109.9 per cent in Germany, from 106.6 per cent to 155.5 per cent in England, which thus attained a ratio similar to that of the United States.

In 2006 in the United States, nearly 70 per cent of the population own their own houses, but two thirds them - that is to say, around 50 million Americans - are behind in repaying their loans. Just in the course of the last six years, the total amount of financing of new houses went from \$5 100 billion to approximately \$10 000 billion. These figures give an almost everyone takes part, directly or indirectly, in the banquet of the housing market, based on growing household debt.

And if at a certain moment the increase in prices were to stop, what would happen of all the calculations of risks and expected profits? Pretty well what has just happened. All it needed was a slight increase in the percentage of failure to pay by debtors with "subprime" loans, a fall in demand and consequently a deceleration of the increase in prices, to make the foundations of the great castle of the housing market tremble. A deceleration which started in 2007 and was recorded by the US indicators during July, which noted that the increase in the price of real estate was slowing, that the construction of new residences was reduced by 6.1 per cent and that the number of new building permits had fallen by 2.1 per cent. Figures confirmed it again on August 28: the price of

residences showed an exceptional fall of 3.2 per cent on annual average annual, with high points reaching double figures in some large cities.

Many European analysts, especially those working for banks and property companies, sought to calm things down by underlining the diversity of the European market. We can understand them. But we have seen that the differences are not so enormous that it is not possible to imagine a structural crisis of the United States market which does not implicate the European market. The data that we have do not authorize excessive "optimism". In Italy for example, there is no lack of evidence of a deceleration of the rise in prices (+ 1.6 per cent in Milan in the first half of the year), and especially, the lengthening of the time necessary to sell or find a new tenant (indicators which record the fall in demand before that of prices). During the first half of 2007, in fact, in Italy the time necessary for the sale of a house was 37.2 per cent longer than in 2003. And it was necessary to await 53.1 per cent longer to conclude a rental agreement [2]. Standard & Poors mention that the index of non-repayment of credits at risk increased by 5 points during the second quarter of 2007 in England, and it envisages a further increase over the next six months. More than 10 % of customers are more than 90 days behind with their payments.

Bull market stumbles

The selling price of houses cannot increase ad infinitum. When the level of repayment of loans – whose duration is constantly increasing – comes to eat up 60-70 per cent of the monthly wages of the household, it becomes difficult to go any further and to increase demand. All the more so as average wages are stagnating, job insecurity is increasing and that the most recent "subprime" loans have been based on low repayments during the first two years which then sharply increase. That is what explains the increase in payment defaults and the tendency for prices to fall.

Obviously the crisis is extending to all the companies which have invested in bonds based on "subprime" loans, because the promised profits are suddenly proving to be precarious. It is the risk of an insolvency-bankruptcy-insolvency spiral which obliged the central banks to inject billions in short and medium term loans to avoid the bankruptcy of companies short of liquidities. At the same time the Federal Reserve (Fed) reduced the lending rate by half a point, while the ECB has frozen the

announcement of an increase in order to make new loans possible. Will that be enough? Will the banks and financial institutions manage to solve the crisis by taking advantage of the time that this imposing injection of "liquidities" gives them?

The crisis overcome?

So the crisis of the housing market now seems to be certain. During preceding decelerations of real estate prices in the United States – at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s – prices stagnated, but they never actually fell, especially because of the high rate of inflation. The current fall could be much more sudden, just as the rise was more rapid and longer, thereby contributing to reignite the panic effect in sales of property and accelerating the fall in prices. If that happened, bankruptcies could prove to be more numerous than in 1987, and especially they could reach some giants of the financial world. The crisis would be propagated not only via the bonds issued on the basis of credits, as described previously, but also by its effects on the fundamental elements of the US economy. We have already seen 20 000 layoffs in the financial sector (6 550 at American Home Mortgage, 2 000 at Countrywide, 1 900 at Capital One...) during the first twenty days, a figure destined to grow and to which must be added the foreseeable reduction of the number of jobs in the building industry. To that must also be added the future reductions of stock exchange profits and of those derived from investment and pension funds of pensions and the effects of these reductions. As if that were not enough, in the course of the last six months the United States recorded an increase of 30 per cent of unpaid overdrafts originating from the use of credit cards. [3]. All these elements then act to reduce the indicators of consumer confidence and the propensity of US households to consume.

They also immediately set the alarm bells ringing in the sectors producing the durable consumer goods, in the first place the automobile sector. General Motors and Ford have already implemented the first reductions in production, envisaging a drop in sales of 10 per cent and estimating the increase in stock at 116 days of autonomy. The same economists who had been accused of having been too late in warning of the risks of investments related to "subprime" loans, today confirm the danger: the probability of an economic recession increased in August, going from 15 per cent to 35 per cent, whereas the

forecasts for growth were reduced by a point for the North American economy and by several decimals for Europe. So if the spiral effect of is not foreseeable today, it is no longer completely excluded, especially if the crisis of loans at risk ("subprime", which represents 10 per cent of the credit market) were to extend to "normal" credits (90 per cent of the market). If the chain of the bankruptcies reached the giants of the financial sector, the forecasts concerning growth could prove to be still too optimistic.

Property speculation and overproduction

Just as Joseph Halevi wrote [4], the crisis of the United States housing market is a crisis which was largely announced in advance. Two years ago economists were divided between those who announced a controlled landing from the period of growth and those who put forward the hypothesis of a crash... Today the second hypothesis seems to have gained in probability, even if nobody can sell certainties on how it will finish. The question that is essential today is why were there no interventions earlier, although everyone recognized that the growth of the housing market was an anomaly? The answer it is that it was not possible.

"The reality" - Halevi has written- "is that since 1970 during each decade the cumulative growth of the world economy (...) has been weaker than it was it during the previous decade, and that is still valid for 2000-2005. (...) Today, for capital, the best fruit of the present period is the compression of wages and of the pensions" One can only approve. We are still in the long wave of stagnation, caused by the crisis of 1973-1974 and the fall I the rate of profit, that is to say by the fall in the percentage of capital gained compared to that invested. The history of the following thirty years is the history of a capitalism which has been trying to increase its profits by a short-term strategy: reduction of wages to increase surplus value, reduction of the costs of raw materials in order to reduce the capital invested, increase in financial activities in search of easy money. The financial storms in South-East Asia at the end of the 1990s, the Argentinian crash of 2001 and the crisis of the so-called "new economy" are separate phenomena, but they are of the same nature as the crisis of the housing market. There is a latent crisis of the system, intrinsically related to the laws of capitalist accumulation.

Since the crisis of 1973-1974 the capitalist economy has been marked by a strong tendency to overproduction, in other words by productive

forces that are in excess compared to the market available. When you tend to produce too much, the rate of profit in relation to the capital invested decreases and thus productive investments are discouraged. If for example the existing factories of FIAT are able to produce more cars than they manage to sell on the market, then why should FIAT invest in creating new factories? We are certainly seeing the appearance of new products and of expanding economies, where it is possible to invest capital and hope for a profit, but that is not enough to guarantee a worldwide relaunch of capitalist accumulation comparable to that of the thirty years which followed the Second World War.

It is in the course of this long wave of thirty years of limited expansion and of weak increases in productivity that capital has implemented short-term strategies to obtain high profits:

1. By directly acting on direct and indirect wages and by operating the greatest reduction of wealth redistribution to the advantage of capital in the entire history of capitalism [5];

2. By trying to reduce the cost of energy and raw materials in order to lower the cost of investments;

3. By increasing through financial, technological, political and military means unequal exchange, to the advantage of the economies having a strong organic composition of capital;

4. By reinforcing fusions, concentration of capital and monopolies, including by the use of legal instruments, such as copyright;

5. By multiplying short-term speculative activities. [6]

The incredible rise of in the price of housing can be explained by the same causes. On average their selling price is 80 per cent higher than the cost of their construction. What we have here is clearly of a price very greatly superior to the actual value of the commodity that is housing. In Italy, from 1986 to 2004, the relationship between the value of housing and annual income increased by 98 per cent in the large cities [7]. The added value of real estate was higher than 10 per cent per annum, to which it is necessary to add the profits obtained from renting. The obvious speculation on the housing market was a safety valve for surplus capital in search of short and medium term profits, with risks that were apparently limited compared to other types of investment. And it is no accident that the spectacular increase in real estate prices took place after the three crises previously cited (South-

East Asia, Argentina, "New economy" and stock exchange indicators).

Moreover, "the positive contribution that the real estate sector offered to the business cycle, by supporting the demand for investments during the recessive phase which followed the crisis of the financial markets at the beginning of the decade, is largely recognized" [8]. According to the Economist the share market increased during the second half of the 1990s by only 80 per cent of the global revenue of this period, whereas housing property prices exceeded 100 per cent in 2001. Moreover the relationship between the price of rents and prices as a whole gradually widened to more than 35 per cent in Europe as well as the United States. Finally, the negative effects of the bursting of the housing bubble could be more devastating than those of the stock exchange bubble, because it is more directly linked to the level of possible household consumption.

We do not know if the crisis of the "subprime" loans will lead to an abrupt economic recession, even though it seems probable. But we can answer the question put at the beginning of this article. What is involved is not a speculative crisis, because speculation is the consequence and not the cause of a productive crisis. Capitalism is confronted with a systemic crisis related to the permanent tension between the immensity of the productive forces at its disposal and the limits of the market, both being the product of the law of profit. Fundamentally, as Joseph Halevi explained it well [9], the central banks, and in particular the Fed, actually tried to reactivate the speculative bubble by intervening on the lending rate: another question concerned with morality, the wheat and the chaff.

Rome, September 7, 2007

This article was first published on the web site of Sinistra Critica

1. I quote here only the companies mentioned in the data published between August 17 and 23. 2. According to Thomson Financial and the (Italian) Association of the financial and industrial markets. 3. Figures from www.internationalhouses.net. 4. Data from Nomisma, quoted by the supplement "Plus 24" of the daily newspaper *Il Sole 24 ore* of September 1, 2007. 5. Quoted by *Il Sole 24 ore* of August 30, 2007, p.2. 6. Joseph Halevi, writer and journalist, is a longtime collaborator of the left-wing Italian daily newspaper *Il Manifesto*. The quotation comes from his article in *Il Manifesto* of August 19, 2007. 7. According to the UN the

relationship between the incomes of the richest 20 per cent of the population and the poorest 20 per cent went from 30/1 during the 1960s to 86/1 at the end of the 1990s. 8. "(...) in 1979 71 per cent of the resources of French companies were intended for productive investment internal or external to the company, and only 2,9 per cent for financial activities; ten years later the ratio was 48 per cent to 35 per cent". M. Bertorello, *Per una nuovo movimento operaio* ("For a new workers' movement"), Alegre editions, Rome 2004, p. 57. 9. Data from the Bank of Italy, quoted by the supplement "Plus 24" of *Il Sole 24 ore* of September 1, 2007. 10.

www.internationalhouses.net. 11 *Il Manifesto* of August 29, 2007, op. cit.

-Danilo Corradi is a member of the leadership of the Italian section of the Fourth International and one of the organizers of the Critical Left (*Sinistra Critica*).

NOTES

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[9] *Il Manifesto* of August 29, 2007, op. cit.

Three Meanings of Ecosocialism

Ian Angus

Ian Angus has been a key actor in the organisation of an international ecosocialist conference, through his initiation - together with well-known figures like Joel Kovel and Michael Löwy - of the international ecosocialist conference in Paris in October. Here he is interviewed by the Greek socialist paper Kokkino.

Let's begin with a big question — what is ecosocialism?

ANGUS: Ecosocialism has grown out of two parallel political trends — the spread of Marxist ideas in the green movement and the spread of ecological ideas in the Marxist left. The result is a set of social and political goals, a growing body of ideas, and a global movement.

Ecosocialism's goal is to replace capitalism with a society in which common ownership of the means of production has replaced capitalist ownership, and in which the preservation and restoration of ecosystems will be central to all activity.

As a body of ideas, ecosocialism argues that ecological destruction is not an accidental feature of capitalism, it is built into the system's DNA. The system's insatiable need to increase profits — what's been called "the ecological tyranny of the bottom line" — cannot be reformed away.

With that said, it is important to realize ecosocialist thought is not monolithic — it embodies many different views about theory and practice. For example, there is an ongoing debate about the view, advanced by some ecosocialist writers, that social movements have replaced the working class as the engine of social change.

Finally, ecosocialism is an anti-capitalist movement that varies a lot from place to place. In the imperialist countries, it is a current within existing socialist and green-left movements, seeking to win ecology activists to socialism, and to convince socialists of the vital importance of ecological issues and struggles. In the Third World there is a growing mass pro-ecology movement that incorporates socialist ideas — that's especially true in Latin America, where anti-imperialist governments headed by Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and Fidel Castro in Cuba, are pressing for strong anticapitalist, pro-environment measures.

What is the Ecosocialist International Network?

ANGUS: The Ecosocialist International Network was formed in October 2007, at a meeting in Paris that was attended by ecosocialists from 13 countries. Its main goals are to improve communication and coordination among ecosocialists worldwide, and to organize a major ecosocialist conference in Brazil in January 2009, in conjunction with the World Social Forum.

The EIN is a very loose and open organization. Its only organizational structure is a steering committee to plan the Brazil conference. Anyone who supports the broad goals of the ecosocialism is welcome to participate — more information is available on our website.

How do you respond to socialists who argue that there is no need for specifically "ecosocialist" ideas or activity?

ANGUS: In a certain sense they are correct. Marxism embodies a wealth of profound ecological thought, far more than many green activists realize.

But while concern for ecology was a fundamental part of Marx's thought, and the Bolsheviks were certainly aware of the issue, the sad fact is that the Marxist left ignored this issue for many decades. It's important to correct that — and to do so publicly and explicitly.

Using the word "ecosocialism" is a way of signalling loud and clear that we consider climate change not just as another stick to bash capitalism with, but as a critically important issue, one of the principal problems facing humanity in this century.

But there is more involved. Marxism is not a fixed set of eternal truths — it is a living body of thought, a method of understanding society and a tool for social change. Socialists whose views don't evolve to incorporate new social and scientific insights become irrelevant sectarians — we've seen that happen to many individuals and groups over the years.

Just as Marx and Engels studied and adopted ideas from the scientists of their day — Liebig on soil fertility, Morgan on early societies, Darwin on evolution, and many others — so Marxists today must learn from today's scientists, especially about the biggest issues of the day. Ecosocialism aims to do just that.

Can capitalism solve global warming?

ANGUS: The depends on what you mean by "solve."

Dealing with global warming includes two components — mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation means reducing greenhouse gas emissions so that global warming slows down and eventually reverses. Adaptation means making changes that will enable people to survive in a world where some climate change is inevitable, and where climate chaos is increasingly likely.

In my opinion, capitalism's insatiable need for growth, combined with its massive dependence on fossil fuels as the dominant energy source, mean that it is very unlikely that we will see an effective mitigation program from any major capitalist country.

Scientists say that if the average temperature rises more than 2 degrees, dangerous climate change becomes very probable. There is no sign that any of the industrialized countries will implement measures sufficient to stop such a temperature increase — anything they do will be too little, too late.

But if we do not succeed in bringing this system to an end, capitalism will undoubtedly adapt to the new climate. It will do what capitalism always does — it will impose the greatest burdens on the most vulnerable, on poor people and poor nations. Climate refugees will multiply and millions will die. The imperialist powers will fight against the global south, and amongst themselves, to control the world's resources, including not just fuel but also food. The most barbaric forms of capitalism will intensify and spread.

In short — yes, capitalism can “solve” global warming, but the capitalist solution will be catastrophic for the great majority of the world's people.

-Ian Angus in the editor of the blog Climate and Capitalism and one of the organisers of the Ecosocialist conference in Paris in October. He is a supporter of Socialist Voice in Canada.

2007 - Year of Climate Change Catastrophe

Global Warming - Poor bear brunt of environmental disaster

Phil Hearse

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: Since this article was written the idea of accelerating disasters as a result of climate change has been rapidly confirmed by another flooding disaster in Bangladesh, in which at least 3000 people have died, and another round of brush fires in California, this time around Malibu.

Further detailed evidence of this trend was provided by Oxfam, the British charity, who on November 25 published a report detailing a four-fold increase in disasters attributable to extreme weather in the last 20 years. From an average of 120 disasters a year in the early 1980s, there are now as many as 500, with Oxfam attributing the rise to unpredictable weather conditions cause by global warming."

This year we have seen floods in South Asia, across the breadth of Africa and Mexico that have affected more than 250 million people," said Oxfam's director Barbara Stocking. "This is no freak year. It follows a pattern of more frequent, more erratic, more unpredictable and more extreme weather events that are affecting more people. The number of people affected by disasters has risen by 68 percent, from an average of 174 million a year between 1985 to 1994 to 254 million a year between 1995 to 2004. "Action is needed now to prepare for more disasters otherwise humanitarian assistance will be overwhelmed and recent advances in human development will go into reverse," Stocking said. (PH)

Against the hard-core climate change deniers no amount of evidence will make much difference. But evidence aplenty there has been in 2007 that environmental damage is accumulating because of global warming, and doing major damage to communities, nations and continents. As ever, it has been the poor who have been the most vulnerable, and who have lost most in terms of lives, possessions and livelihoods; in most places it is women and children who bear the brunt.

Most of all, 2007 has been the year of the flood. But it has also been the year of the forest fire on several continents, most notably in Greece and the United States.

Mega floods

Increased rainfall in many areas (although not all) is indeed one of the obvious consequences of global warming. This year we've seen:

- Two waves of massive flooding in China in June and September-October in the centre and south of the country that have killed more than 1000 people.
- Connected with the same storms over southern China, Vietnam suffered widespread flooding in October and November which by the time this was written (early November) had killed more than 120 people.
- The worst floods in living memory in Central Africa, stretching from coast to coast, devastating crops and drowning hundreds.
- Unprecedented flooding in north and central England in June.
- What the Mexican president called the "greatest natural disaster of the country's history" as the state of Tabasco was submerged for the second time in a decade, leaving dozens dead and making 100,000 homeless.
- Hundreds died in India in several waves of flooding from Mumbai, where 500 died, to Bihar where a similar trail of devastation occurred.
- Several waves of flooding in the south east of Australia that wrecked the wine crop in many areas.

Much of this catastrophe has hardly been reported in the Western media; the fire risk to homes of Malibu celebs is of course of much more interest to the right-wing media than millions of workers and peasants in Africa or Asia!

Africa

Twenty-two African countries are experiencing their worst wet seasons in decades, and experts say that global warming is to blame. Devastating rains and flash floods have affected 1.5 million people across the continent, killing at least 300 since early summer.

West Africa has seen its most severe floods in years, as torrents swamped the Democratic Republic of the Congo's capital of Kinshasa in late October, killing 30 people in less than 24 hours. In

northern Ghana, more than 300,000 people have been uprooted by devastating downpours.

In East Africa, meanwhile, hundreds of thousands have been displaced and scores killed in Uganda, Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia. As the rains continue, African meteorologists are warning that these events may be fulfilling predictions that the continent will suffer some of the worst effects of global warming. "Africa will be the hardest hit by climate change," said Grace Akumu, director of the Kenya-based nonprofit Climate Network Africa. "This is happening even faster than expected."

China

The China news agency says more than 1300 people HAVE DIED IN China this summer as a result of flooding. Another 332 missing; crops on at least 15.43 million hectares of farmland have been destroyed and 1.22 million houses ruined.

Direct economic losses were estimated to have amounted to 155.8 billion yuan (US\$19.3 billion), according to Vice-Minister of Water Resources E Jingping.

The middle and downstream of the Xijiang River in the Pearl River basin suffered a disastrous flood, and Hunan and Heilongjiang were hit by serious mountain torrents, mud-rock flows and landslides. The hardest-hit areas include the provinces of Fujian, Anhui, Zhejiang and Hainan in southern and eastern China, which have also been plagued by seven typhoons and cyclones that claimed 221 lives. However, continued heavy rainfall during the National Day holiday has caused the biggest flood in a decade along the lower reaches of the Weihe River and the middle reaches of the Hanjiang River in Shaanxi and Hubei provinces.

Sections of the rivers running through Shaanxi in northwest China overflowed, forcing 359,000 people to be evacuated. More than 4.6 million people in 61 counties were affected by floods and mud slides, which ruined 79,800 hectares of crops and destroyed 39,200 houses.

India and Bangladesh

Floods in the monsoon season are normal in the sub-continent, but this year have been particularly severe, with hundreds killed in Bihar and Mumbai. In Bangladesh two-thirds of the country is submerged and 164 people died in flooding this year. The monsoon rain is getting heavier because of warming oceans, but the human impact on the poor is made worse by poverty, the caste system and state corruption and indifference. In Bihar more than 2 million people were forced out of their

homes and overwhelmingly it was women who had to take the responsibility for finding food, firewood and shelter for themselves and their children. A high proportion of the worst affected were Dalits – so-called ‘untouchables’.

According to the Dalit campaign for Human Rights, relief was least likely to reach the low-caste villagers:

"The relative neglect of low-caste villagers was a reflection of how, even at a moment of shared hardship, the rules of caste dictate how Indian society operates, he added. The culture of discrimination which runs through Indian society intensifies in times of crisis." Aid distribution is often done in town centers, where well-off, upper-caste groups are more likely to live. Those who are geographically marginalized in low-lying, remote villages, far from the national highways, find that supplies dwindle by the time they arrive in town, if they are able to make the journey.

A heart rending account of the misery suffered by in Bihar State came last week with the story of an upper-caste police officer accused of drowning two lower-caste girls in the river after they stole firewood from his orchard.

Dry tinder has become a precious commodity in Bihar, vital to survival in the damp post-flood period. According to a villager who complained to the police, when the police officer found Chandani Kumari, 6, and Kamali Kumari, 13, taking wood from his property, he threw them into a fast-moving river. Neither of the girls could swim.

The officer was suspended and a compensation payment of 100,000 rupees, or \$2,400, was given to the girls' parents S.L. Das, the local police superintendent, said, adding that he believed the girls were chased, not thrown, into the river.

In Bangladesh flooding relief put big pressure of the national budget. The World Bank has insisted that to improve national finances the government must put up the price of heating fuel – and thereby deal a cruel blow to the vast majority of poor families who depend on it for heating and cooking.

The Bihar experience shows how wrong flood-control strategies, unscrupulous politicians, unresponsive bureaucracy and corruption have left thousands displaced and economically ruined. Since Independence, successive Bihar governments have sold embankments as an answer to floods, despite warnings that these earthen structures only exacerbate the problem.

The reason behind this pro-embankment policy is easy to understand: it helps perpetuate the well-

oiled politician-technocrat-contractor nexus. Cuts and kickbacks are the order of the day, as politicians get a rake off from the construction company firms, who receive large amounts of aid money for rebuilding the embankment levees, which again make the problem worse.

Mexico

In 1998 the Mexican state of Tabasco was inundated and in late October this year it happened again. The worsening of tropical storms in central America and the Caribbean is the direct result of sea warming in the Gulf of Mexico. In addition 16 rivers overran their banks in the rebel state of Chiapas. The effects of this flooding are still ongoing as this article is written. According to the BBC (4 November):

“Beyond Mexico’s borders the effects of the tropical depression have been felt in other Central American states. Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador have already suffered from three weeks of heavy downpours.

In total more than 50 people have been killed and 100,000 have been forced to evacuate.

Some large areas are facing epidemics and food shortages. Millions of dollars worth of crops across the region have been ruined and outbreaks of malaria, cholera and dengue fever have been reported in some of the worst hit areas.“

The floods completely wiped out crops in the region, and a farm association estimated losses at 480 million dollars.

Health officials have meanwhile started to fret about looming health risks from open sewage and the spread of disease-carrying mosquitoes. Dengue, cholera and diarrhea outbreaks now are very real possibilities. What has really animated the state and national government is that the hungry people of Villhermosa, capital of Tabasco have started to loot supermarkets to get food. Thousands of desperate and hungry people cannot be allowed to breach property laws for the mere purpose of getting something to eat!

Firestorms

Many parts of the Greek countryside burnt with savage ferocity this summer as temperatures reached 46 C, and more than 60 people were killed in cut-off villages. Even if some of these fires were started by arsonists, they widespread effect can only be explained by global warming. The ecology of Greece is changing permanently.

An arid country is threatened with becoming a desert if Mediterranean countries continue to experience routine temperatures above 40o in the summer.

Brush fires are normal events in California, part of the natural cycle, but events like this year's fires are not. According to American writer Mike Davis:

"The Los Angeles Times had an article that said climate change wasn't a factor in the fires. This is probably balderdash. Everything that's happening, including the dramatic number of mega-fires in the rest of the West, accords with the simulations generated in the climate models used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Not only are extreme events becoming more common, but it's possible that the base climate of the Southwest and most of the rest of the West is itself changing."

Davis also points out how an alliance of Republican politicians and property developers have been responsible for continued house building in the fire-prone backlands, despite repeated warnings about fire dangers. He also showed how the media had highlighted the danger to the houses of celebrities like John Travolta and Sting, rather than the much worse plight of poor people in areas like San Diego.

Capitalism Collides with Nature

There have always been floods and forest fires. But the intensity and widespread nature of these events is vivid evidence of the impact of climate change. No one can now possibly believe that climate change is a victimless crime; thousands of people are dying each year from its effects, many thousands more are being made ill, being made eco-refugees or losing their livelihoods.

Each of the floods and fires referred to above has its own unique causes. But behind each one of them is increasing global temperatures, and in particular rising sea temperatures. It's rising sea temperatures off West Africa which start many of the tropical storms that end up as hurricanes in the Bay of Mexico; it's the warming of the same seas that triggered the floods in central Africa this year. Sea warming is worsening the monsoons affecting the sub-continent and South East Asia.

In each cases it's the poor, living in flimsy houses in marginal areas near dangerous dams, levees or mountainsides that are the victims of the flash floods and the mudslides. In each case it's the poor who are the victims when disaster relief money is

siphoned off by the rich and corrupt officials. And it's the poor who have no back-up resources when their fields and crops are damaged, their homes are destroyed.

Climate change is not a danger, it's a reality. Its effects are hitting the poor now, and the rich and powerful are making things worse. Whether it's war, earthquake or climate change, the poor pay the price.

Climate change experts have long warned that global warming could have devastating consequences:

- More than a billion people may face freshwater shortages by 2050, especially in Asia, where rising living standards for the middle class will lead to increased water demand.
- Millions more will be threatened by floods due to rising sea levels, with island inhabitants and populations in large river-delta regions in Asia most at risk.

Dry areas may become drier, with crop yields dropping by as much as 50 percent in sub-tropical regions by 2020.

- Higher rates of climate-related illness, including malnutrition, malaria, dengue fever, and heatstroke could take effect.

Capitalist productivism, the incessant production of more and more useless commodities, is responsible for this crisis. Solving the crisis means ending the system.

-Phil Hearse writes for Socialist Resistance in Britain. He is the editor of Marxsite (www.marxsite.com).

The Pivotal Agent in the Fight against Global Warming

The Environmental Movement in the Global South

Walden Bello

The developing world's stance towards the question of the environment has often been equated with the pugnaeous comments of former Malaysian Prime Minister Mohamad Mahathir, such as his famous lines at the Rio Conference on the Environment and Development in June 1992 :

"When the rich chopped down their own forests, built their poison-belching factories and scoured the world for cheap resources, the poor said nothing. Indeed they paid for the development of the rich. Now the rich claim a right to regulate the development of the poor countries...As colonies we were exploited. Now as independent nations we are to be equally exploited. [1]"

Mahathir has been interpreted in the North as speaking for a South that seeks to catch up whatever the cost and where the environmental movement is weak or non-existent. Today, China is seen as the prime exemplar of this Mahathirian obsession with rapid industrialization with minimal regard for the environment.

This view of the South's perspective on the environment is a caricature. In fact, the environmental costs of rapid industrialization are of major concern to significant sectors of the population of developing countries and, in many of them, the environmental movement has been a significant actor. Moreover, there is currently an active discussion in many countries of alternatives to the destabilizing high-growth model.

Emergence of the Environmental Movement in the NICs

Among the most advanced environmental movements are those in Korea and Taiwan, which were once known as "Newly Industrializing Countries" (NICs). This should not be surprising since the process of rapid industrialization in these two societies from 1965 to 1990 took place with few environmental controls, if any. In Korea, the

Han River that flows through Seoul and the Nakdong River flowing through Pusan were so polluted by unchecked dumping of industrial waste that they were close to being classified as biologically dead. Toxic waste dumping reached critical proportions. Seoul achieved the distinction in 1978 of being the city with the highest content of sulphuric dioxide in the air, with high levels being registered as well in Inchon, Pusan, Ulsan, Masan, Anyang, and Changweon [2].

In Taiwan, high-speed industrialization had its own particular hellish contours. Taiwan's formula for balanced growth was to prevent industrial concentration and encourage manufacturers to set up shop in the countryside. The result was a substantial number of the island's 90,000 hectares locating on rice fields, along waterways, and beside residences. With three factories per square mile, Taiwan's rate of industrial density was 75 times that of the US. One result was that 20 per cent of farm land was polluted by industrial waste water and 30 per cent of rice grown on the island was contaminated with heavy metals, including mercury, arsenic, and cadmium [3].

In both societies, farmers, workers, and the environment bore the costs of high-speed industrialization. Both societies, it is not surprising, saw the emergence of an environmental movement that was spontaneous, that drew participants from different classes, that saw environmental demands linked with issues of employment, occupational health, and agricultural crisis, and that was quite militant. Direct action became a weapon of choice because, as Michael Hsiao pointed out :

« People have learned that protesting can bring results ; most of the actions for which we could find out the results had achieved their objectives. The polluting factories were either forced to make immediate improvement of the conditions or pay compensation to the victims. Some factories were even forced to shut down or move to another location. A few preventive actions have even succeeded in forcing prospective plants to withdraw from their planned construction » [4].

The environmental movements in both societies were able to force government to come out with restrictive new rules on toxics, industrial waste, and air pollution. Ironically, however, these successful cases of citizen action created a new problem, which was the migration of polluting industries from Taiwan and Korea to China and Southeast Asia. Along with Japanese firms, Korean and Taiwanese enterprises went to Southeast Asia

and China mainly for two reasons : cheap labor and lax environmental laws.

Environmental Struggles in Southeast Asia

Unlike in Korea and Taiwan, environmental movements already existed in a number of the Southeast Asian countries before the period of rapid industrialization, which in their case occurred in the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties. These movements had emerged in the seventies and eighties in struggles against nuclear power, as in the Philippines ; against big hydroelectric dams, as in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines ; and against deforestation and marine pollution, as in Thailand and the Philippines. These were epic battles, like the struggle against the Chico River Dam in the northern Philippines and the fight against the Pak Mun Dam in the northeast of Thailand, which forced the World Bank to withdraw its planned support for giant hydroelectric projects, an outcome that, as we shall see later on, also occurred in struggle against the Narmada Dam in India. The fight against industrial associated partly with foreign firms seeking to escape strict environmental regulations at home was a case of a new front being opened up in an ongoing struggle to save the environment.

Perhaps even more than in Northeast Asia, the environmental question in Southeast Asia was an issue that involved the masses and went beyond being a middle-class issue. In the Chico struggle, the opposition were indigenous people, while in the fight against the Pak Mun Dam, it was small farmers and fisherfolk. The environmental issue was also more coherently integrated into an overarching critique. In the case of the Philippines, for instance, deforestation was seen as an inevitable consequence of a strategy of export-oriented growth imposed by World Bank-International Monetary Fund structural adjustment programs that sought to pay off the country's massive foreign debt with the dollars gained from exporting the country's timber and other natural resources and manufactures produced by cheap labor. The middle class, workers, the urban poor, and environmentalists were thrust into a natural alliance. Meantime, transnational capital, local monopoly capital, and the central government were cast in the role of being an anti-environmental axis.

The environmental movements in Southeast Asia played a vital role not only in scuttling projects like

the Bataan nuclear plant but in ousting the dictatorships that reigned there in the seventies and eighties. Indeed, because the environment was not perceived by authoritarian regimes as "political," organizing around environmental and public health issues was not initially proscribed. Thus environmental struggles became an issue around which the anti-dictatorship movement could organize and reach new people. Environmental destruction became one more graphic example of a regime's irresponsibility. In Indonesia, for example, the environmental organization WALHI went so far as to file a lawsuit for pollution and environmental destruction against six government bodies, including the Minister of the Environment and Population [5]. By the time the dictatorships wised up to what was happening, it was often too late : environmentalism and anti-fascism fed on one another. *Sommaire Environmental Protests in China*

We might be seeing the same process in China today.

The environmental crisis in China is very serious. For example, the ground water table of the North China plain is dropping by 1.5 meters (5 feet) per year. This region produces 40 percent of China's grain. As environmentalist Dale Wen remarks, "One cannot help wonder about how China will be fed once the ground aquifer is depleted" [6]. Water pollution and water scarcity ; soil pollution, soil degradation and desertification ; global warming and the coming energy crisis—these are all byproducts of China's high-speed industrialization and massively expanded consumption.

Most of the environmental destabilization in China is produced by local enterprises and massive state projects such as the Three Gorges Dams, but the contribution of foreign investors is not insignificant. Taking advantage of very lax implementation of environmental laws in China, many western TNCs have relocated their most polluting factories into the country and have exacerbated or even created many environmental problems. Wen notes that the Pearl River Delta and Yangtze River Delta, the two Special Economic Zones where most TNC subsidiaries are located, are the most seriously affected by heavy metal and POPs (persistent organic pollutants) pollution [7].

Global warming is not a distant threat. The first comprehensive study of the impact of the sea level rise of global warming by Gordon McGranahan, Deborah Balk, and Bridget Anderson puts China as the country in Asia most threatened by the sea

level rise of up to 10 meters over the next century [8]. 144 million of China's population live in low-elevation coastal zones, and this figure is likely to increase owing to the export-oriented industrialization strategies pursued by the government, which has involved the creation of numerous special economic zones. "From an environmental perspective," the study warns, "there is a double disadvantage to excessive (and potentially rapid) coastal development. First, uncontrolled coastal development is likely to damage sensitive and important ecosystems and other resources. Second, coastal settlement, particularly in the lowlands, is likely to expose residents to seaward hazards such as sea level rise and tropical storms, both of which are likely to become more serious with climate change" [9]. The recent spate of super-typhoons descending on the Asian mainland from the Western Pacific underlines the gravity of this observation.

In terms of public health, the rural health infrastructure has practically collapsed, according to Dale Wen. The system has been privatized with the introduction of a "fee for service" system that is one component of the neoliberal reform program. One result is the resurgence of diseases that had been brought under control, like tuberculosis and schistosomiasis. Cuba, in contrast, has won plaudits for its rural health care system, which is ironic, says Wen, given that the Cuban system was based on the Maoist era's "barefoot doctor" system [10].

Another big public health issue has been food safety. The combination of the industrialization of food production and the lengthening of the food chain from production to consumption is strongly suspected to be the cause of bird flu, which has migrated from China to other countries. The government has become an unreliable actor in dealing with new diseases such as bird flu and SARS, prone as it is to engage in minimizing the threat if not promoting a cover-up, as it did in the case of SARS.

As in Taiwan and Korea 15 years earlier, we see unrestrained export-oriented industrialization bringing together low-wage migrant labor, farming communities whose lands are being grabbed or ruined environmentally, environmentalists, and the proponents of a major change in political economy called the "New Left." Environment-related riots, protests and disputes in China increased by 30% in 2005 to more than 50,000, as pollution-related unrest has become "a contagious source of

instability in the country," as one report put it. Indeed, a great many of recorded protests fused environmental, land-loss, income, and political issues. From 8700 in 1995, what the Ministry of Public Security calls « mass group incidents » have grown to 87,000 in 2005, most of them in the countryside. Moreover, the incidents are growing in average size from 10 or fewer persons in the mid-1990s to 52 people per incident in 2004 [11]. Notable were the April 2005 riots in Huashui, where an estimated 10,000 police officers clashed with desperate villagers who succeeded in repelling strong vested interests polluting their lands.

As in Taiwan, people have discovered the effectiveness of direct action in rural China. « Without the riot, nothing would have changed, » said Wang Xiaofang, a 43-year-old farmer. « People here finally reached their breaking point » [12]. As in Southeast Asia, struggles around the environment and public health may be leading to a more comprehensive political consciousness.

The strength of China's environmental movement must not be exaggerated. Indeed, its failures often outnumber its successes. Alliances are often spontaneous and do not go beyond the local level. What Dale Wen calls a national "red green" coalition for change remains a potential force, one that is waiting to be constructed. Nevertheless, the environmental movement is no longer a marginal actor and it is definitely something that the state and big capital have to deal with. Indeed, the ferment in the countryside is a key factor that is said to have made the current Chinese leadership to be more open to suggestions from the so-called "New Left" for a change of course in economic policy from rapid export-oriented growth to a more sustainable and slower domestic-demand led growth.

The Environmental Movement in India

As in China, the environment and public health have been sites of struggle in India. Over the last 25 years, the movement for the environment and public health has exploded in that country. Indeed, one can say that this movement has become one of the forces that is deepening Indian democracy.

Environmental and public health struggles go way back, but perhaps the single biggest event that propelled the movement to becoming a critical mass was the Bhopal gas leakage on December 3, 1984, which released 40 tons of methyl isocyanate, killing 3000 people outright and ultimately causing 15,000 to 20,000 deaths [12]. The struggle for just

compensation for the Bhopal victims continues till this day.

There is today a proliferation of struggles in this vast country.

There is the national campaign against Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola plants for drawing ground water and contaminating fields with sludge. There are local struggles against intensive aquaculture farms in Tamil Nadu, Orissa, and other coastal states. There is a non-violent but determined campaign by farmers against GMO's, which has involved the uprooting and burning of fields planted to genetically engineered rice.

In public health, the key issue has been the tremendous pressure from foreign pharmaceutical companies to get India to adopt patent legislation that would be consistent with the WTO's Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPs). The great fear is that this would affect the ability of the country's pharmaceutical industry to produce cheap generic drugs for both the home market and for export. With between 2 million and 3.6 million people living with HIV—putting India behind South Africa and Nigeria in numbers living with HIV—and with so many African countries with large HIV-infected populations depending on cheap Indian drug imports, to comply or not to comply with TRIPs has become a life-and-death issue.

Two years ago, key amendments pushed by progressive forces were incorporated into the Indian Patents Act, resulting in what one influential journal described as “a relatively loose patents regime for now”. [13] One key amendment was that Indian companies could continue to produce and market drugs they were producing before January 1, 2005, after paying a “reasonable royalty” to the patent holder. They were banned from doing this under the previous patent regime. Another important amendment made the process of exporting drugs to another country less cumbersome by eliminating the need for a compulsory license from that country [14]. These may seem to be minor gains, but in the byzantine world of TRIPs, the devil is in the detail.

It would be worthwhile, at this point, to look closely at what has become the most influential of India's mass-based environmental movement : the anti-dam movement.

Dams often represented the modernist vision that guided many Third World governments in their struggle to catch up with the West in the post-War period. The technological blueprint for power

development for the post-World War II period was that of creating a limited number of power generators—giant dams, coal or oil-powered plants, or nuclear plants—at strategic points which would generate electricity that would be distributed to every nook and cranny of the country.

Traditional or local sources of power that allowed some degree of self-sufficiency were considered backward. If you were not hooked up to a central grid, you were backward.

Centralized electrification with its big dams, big coal-fired plants, and nuclear plants became the rage. Indeed, there was an almost religious fervor about this vision among leaders and technocrats who defined their life's work as « missionary electrification » or the connection of the most distant village to the central grid. Jawaharlal Nehru, the dominant figure in post-World War II India, called dams the « temples of modern India, » a statement that, as Indian author Arundhati Roy points out, made its way into primary school textbooks in every Indian language. Big dams have become an article of faith inextricably linked with nationalism. “To question their utility amounts almost to sedition” [15].

In any event, in the name of missionary electrification, India's technocrats, Roy observes in her brilliant essay, *The Cost of Living*, not only built « new dams and irrigation schemes...[but also] took control of small, traditional water-harvesting systems that had been managed for thousands of years and allowed them to atrophy » [16]. Here Roy expresses an essential truth : that centralized electrification preempted the development of alternative power-systems that could have been more decentralized, more people-oriented, more environmentally benign, and less capital intensive.

The key forces behind central electrification were powerful local coalitions of power technocrats, big business, and urban-industrial elites. Despite the rhetoric about « rural electrification, » centralized electrification was essentially biased toward the city and industry. Essentially, especially in the case of dams, it involved expending the natural capital of the countryside and the forests to subsidize the growth urban-based industry. Industry was the future. Industry was what really added value. Industry was synonymous with national power. Agriculture was the past.

While these interests benefited, others paid the costs. Specifically, it was the rural areas and the environment that absorbed the costs of centralized

electrification. Tremendous crimes have been committed in the name of power generation and irrigation, says Roy, but these were hidden because governments never recorded these costs. In India, Roy calculates that large dams have displaced about 33 million people in the last 50 years, about 60 per cent of them being either untouchables or indigenous peoples

India, in fact, does not have a national resettlement policy for those displaced by dams. The costs to the environment have been tremendous. Roy points out that « the evidence against Big Dams is mounting alarmingly—irrigation disasters, dam-induced floods, the fact that there are more drought prone and flood prone areas today than there were in 1947. The fact is that not a single river in the plains has potable water » [17].

Things changed when the government announced its plans to dam the mighty Narmada River in the late seventies. Instead of quietly accepting the World Bank-backed enterprise, the affected people mounted a resistance that continues to this day. The Narmada Bachao Andolan movement led by Medha Patkar at the Sardar Sarovar Dam and Alok Aggarwal and Silvi at the Maheshwar Dam drew support from all over India and internationally. The resistance of the people, most of them adivasis or indigenous people, succeeded in getting the World Bank to stop funding the project and saddling it with delays, making the completion of the dam uncertain. The Supreme Court, for instance, ordered rehabilitation for all those affected by the Sardar Sarovar Dam's construction, and in March 2005 ruled to halt construction on the dam until this had happened. Construction of the dam has now been halted at 110.6 meters, a figure that is much higher than the 88 metres proposed by the activists, and lower than the 130 meters that the dam is eventually supposed to reach. It is unclear at this point what the final outcome of the project will be or when it will be completed, though the entire project is meant to be finished by 2025 [18]. The fate of the Maheshwar Dam is similarly unclear.

Equally important was the broader political impact of the Narmada struggle. It proved to be the cutting edge of the social movements that have deepened India's democracy and transformed the political scene. The state bureaucracy and political parties must now listen to these movements or risk opposition or, in the case of parties, being thrown out of power. Social movements in the rural areas played a key role in stirring up the mass

consciousness that led to the defeat in 2004 of the neoliberal coalition led by the Hindu chauvinist BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) that had campaigned on the pro-globalization slogan "India Shining." While its successor, the Congress Party-led coalition, has turned its back on the rural protest that led to its election and followed the same anti-agriculture and pro-globalization policies of the BJP, it risks provoking an even greater backlash in the near future.

The environmental movement faces its biggest challenge today : global warming. As in China, the threat is not distant either in space or in time. The Mumbai deluge of 2005 came at a year of excessive rainfall that would normally occur once in a hundred years [19]. The Himalayan glaciers have been retreating, with one of the largest of them, Gangotri, receding at what one journal described as "an alarming rate, influencing the stream run-off of Himalayan rivers" [20]. Six per cent, or 63.2 million, of India's population live in low elevation coastal zones that are vulnerable to sea-level rise. R. Ramachandran, "Coming Storms...". On the Gujarat coast, sea level rise is displacing villages, as it is many more places along India's 7,500 km-long coastline. One report claims that in the "Sunderbans, two islands have already vanished from the map, displacing 7000 people. Twelve more islands are likely to go under owing to an annual 3.14 sea level rise, which will make 70,000 refugees. Five villages in Orissa's Bhitarkanika National Park, famous for the mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles, have been submerged, and 18 others are likely to go under" [21].

As in China, the challenge lies in building up a mass movement that might be unpopular not only with the elite but also with sections of the urban-based middle class sectors that have been the main beneficiaries of the high-growth economic strategy that has been pursued since the early 1990's.

National Elites and Third Worldism

The reason for tracing the evolution of a mass-based environmental movement in East Asia and India is to counter the image that the Asian masses are inert elements that uncritically accept the environmentally damaging high-growth export-oriented industrialization models promoted by their governing elites. It is increasingly clear to ordinary people throughout Asia that the model has wrecked agriculture, widened income inequalities, led to

increased poverty after the Asian financial crises, and wreaked environmental damage everywhere.

It is the national elites that spout the ultra-Third Worldist line that the South has yet to fulfill its quota of polluting the world while North has exceeded its quota. It is they who call for an exemption of the big rapidly industrializing countries from mandatory limits on the emission of greenhouse gases under a new Kyoto Protocol. When the Bush administration says it will not respect the Kyoto Protocol because it does not bind China and India, and the Chinese and Indian governments say they will not tolerate curbs on their greenhouse gas emissions because the US has not ratified Kyoto, they are in fact playing out an unholy alliance to allow their economic elites to continue to evade their environmental responsibilities and free-ride on the rest of the world.

This alliance has now become formalized in the so-called "Asia Pacific Partnership" created last year by the US, China, India, Japan, Korea, and the United States as a rival to the United Nations-negotiated Kyoto Protocol. Having recently recruited Canada, which is now led by Bush clone Stephen Harper, this grouping seeks voluntary, as opposed to mandatory curbs on greenhouse gas emissions. This is a dangerous band of states whose agenda is nothing else than to spew carbon as they damn well please, which is what voluntary targets are all about.

The Need for Global Adjustment

There is no doubt that the burden of adjustment to global warming will fall on the North, and that this adjustment will have to be made in the next 10 to 15 years, and that the adjustment needed might need to be much greater than the 50 per cent reduction from the 1990's level by 2050 that is being promoted by the G 8. In the eyes of some experts, what might be required is in the order of 100 or 150 per cent reduction from 1990 levels. However, the South will also have to adjust, proportionately less than the North but also rather stringently.

The South's adjustment will not take place without the North taking the lead. But it will also not take place unless its leaders junk the export-oriented, high-growth paradigm promoted by the World Bank and most economists to which its elites and many middle strata are addicted.

People in the South are open to an alternative to a model of growth that has failed both the

environment and society. For instance, in Thailand, a country devastated by the Asian financial crisis and wracked by environmental problems, globalization and export-oriented growth are now bad words. To the consternation of the Economist, Thais are more and more receptive to the idea of a "sufficiency economy" promoted by popular monarch King Bhumibol, which is an inward-looking strategy that stresses self-reliance at the grassroots and the creation of stronger ties among domestic economic networks, along with "moderately working with nature" [22].

Thailand may be an exception in terms of the leadership role for a more sustainable path played by an elite, and even there the commitment of that elite to an alternative path is questioned by many. What is clear is that in most other places in the South, one cannot depend on the elites and some sections of the middle class to decisively change course. At best, they will procrastinate. The fight against global warming will need to be propelled mainly by an alliance between progressive civil society in the North and mass-based citizens' movements in the South.

As in North, the environmental movements in the South have seen their ebbs and flows. It appears that, as with all social movements, it takes a particular conjunction of circumstances to bring an environmental movement to life after being quiescent for some time or to transform diverse local struggles into one nationwide movement. The challenge facing activists in the global North and the global South is to discover or bring about those circumstances that will trigger the formation of a global mass movement that will decisively confront the most crucial challenge of our times.

- From Focus on the Global South, 12 October 2007. The assistance of my colleagues Afsar Jafri and Dale Wen in the preparation of this article is gratefully acknowledged. They are not, however, responsible for any possible errors of fact or interpretation.

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Globalisation: What Happened to the Global Justice Movement?

Fighting Neoliberalism - The view from Scotland

Frances Curran

A few weeks ago during an interview with the Sunday Herald Naomi Klein author of *No Logo* and prominent spokesperson for the anti globalisation movement was asked about the high point of the movement at Seattle in 1999 when tens of thousands of activists and trade unionists closed down the World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks in protest at the neo liberal, unfair global trade arrangements.

She replied that she doesn't believe the anti-globalisation movement is finished but states that the moment has passed, (Sunday Herald 22.09.07). So what has happened to the anti-globalisation movement, more recently referred to as the global justice movement?

The policies of neo-liberalism which introduced unfettered market forces, privatisation of public services and an imposition of unfair trade using international institutions, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have provoked massive struggles of opposition and resistance. Neo-liberalism is not just an economic system; it affects every aspect of society - economic, political, social, cultural and ideological.

What the global justice movement has done is to recognise that the system is global and therefore the opposition has to be global, it has created an international consciousness amongst activists across the world and has tried to bring together those from very diverse campaigns through action. Millions have taken part in protests against the institutions of neo liberalism, mass protests and blockades of the WTO, the IMF, the World bank, the EU, the G8, the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) have United protestors under the slogan of Seattle, The World is Not For Sale.

International Solidarity

This active international solidarity has broken down barriers and has assisted in the creation of

international networks, which puts Indian peasant communities resisting Coca Cola stealing their water supply in touch with students in Europe and the US who act in solidarity by campaigning for a boycott of Coca Cola on University Campuses, who in turn are linked with Columbian trade unionists fighting against Coca Colas attack on trade union organisation. It connects womens organisations fighting sex trafficking with Euro MPs drafting legislation on the issue. It was the initiator and co-ordinator of the biggest anti war demonstration the world has ever seen when on 15 February 2003, 12 million people simultaneously took part in protests against the invasion of Iraq.

Following the global capitalist circus around from continent to continent to protest outside fortified doors raises the international profile of the movement and keeps the global solidarity banner flying but it has its limitations, not everyone can get on a plane to a G8 summit or a WTO meeting to protest and is it effective in resisting the policies of neo liberalism? Certainly news pictures of G8 leaders being forced into smaller and more isolated spots to hold talks because of the opposition to their policies is a success of the strength of the movement, but the talks still take place.

There was recognition amongst some sections of the movement that mobilisations of this sort although important are not enough. There is a need not just to develop action but to develop ideas, an alternative global model to that of neo liberalism. Under the slogan Another World is Possible, the first World Social Forum (WSF) took place in Porto Alegre in Brazil in 2001. It is no accident that the left of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) were in power in Porto Alegre and that the movement was offered facilities from the local council. Everyone and anyone fighting neo liberal globalisation was invited.

The enormous strength of the WSF is its openness and diversity, also the emphasis on democracy and creating an inclusive space. Drawing on past experiences there is a culture of suspicion against those who attempt to gain hegemony over the movement. From the outset political parties have not been allowed to be formal participants in the gatherings and structures of the WSF the reason being the fear of the domination of the space by those parties. However members of parties and leaders of parties have taken part and have spoken at events and rallies of the WSF, in particular Hugo Chavez the Venezuelan President. The emphasis has been and still is on networking .

The WSF movement has travelled through various phases and is also on the move in terms of its political analysis and alternative programme. The political spectrum gathered under the WSF umbrella is broad to say the least, from the Christian organisations, through development NGOs and leadership bodies of international trade unions to socialists and revolutionaries.

There are wide political differences within the International Council of the WSF which involves about 100 organisations. Views range from those who believe that you can negotiate fair trade and debt cancellation with the institutions of capitalism to those who present a critique of the entire capitalist system and who want to develop alternatives to capitalism.

Co-opting The Movement

We have had our own front row view of these tensions during the protests against the G8 summit at Gleneagles in 2005. The Make Poverty History demonstration saw 250,000 take part, and the follow up Live Aid concert announced by Bob Geldof were often portrayed in the press and by politicians as the acceptable face of the global justice movement. We saw the attempt by Blair and Brown to co-opt the movement, to bring it in to the negotiating table, to tame and paralyse it. In contrast the G8 Alternatives demonstration which grouped the more radical wing of the movement was initially banned. Bob Geldof declined the direct invitation to publicly support the G8 Alternatives demonstration on the opening day of the summit at Gleneagles. The G8 Alternatives Summit in Edinburgh had speaking on its platforms and at its workshops some of the leading figures of the anti globalisation movement but was very much ignored by the mainstream media.

Since the first WSF in 2004 there has been an annual WSF, the biggest of which were Mumbai (India) in 2004 (140,000) and Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 2005 (150,000). There have also been European Social Forums, Polycentric World Social Forums, emphasising the geographical spread of the movement, these took place in Bamako (Mali), Karachi (Pakistan) and Caracas (Venezuela), and Regional Social Forums in Asia.

The grass roots of the WSF are strengthening and renewing not just in organisational terms but also in political and programmatic developments and it is a very progressive and inclusive process. The latest WSF was held in Nairobi in Kenya, the first one held in Africa. Although smaller than some of

the others (40,000) it brought together grass roots organisations fighting the neo liberal agenda that had never before shared a space. Allowing experiences to be exchanged, solidarity links strengthened and ideas clarified.

The Charter of Principles of the WSF adopted at Sao Paulo in on 9 April 2001 states that it is, An open meeting place where groups and movements of civil society opposed to neo liberalism and a world dominated by capital or any form of imperialism, but engaged in building a society centred on the human person.....to debate ideas democratically, formulate proposals, share their experiences freely and network for effective action.

The movement is reclaiming the ground of international solidarity and an international consciousness which had been lost for a period. The Nairobi WSF in January of this year placed on the agenda, - social justice, international solidarity, gender equality, peace and defence of the environment. The big question facing the movement is how will these aims be achieved?

Despite the 12 million who took to the streets in a global movement to prevent war in Iraq, US and British Imperialism invaded. We did not stop the war. This has definitely had an effect on the consciousness and the retreat of the anti war movement. The analysis put forward by the anti war movement has been borne out, the Bush administration and US foreign policy is in a quagmire. The lasting legacy will be instability in Iraq which will destabilise other regimes in the Middle East. We could not prevent it happening.

In our own direct experience we saw the biggest demonstration ever in Edinburgh, a quarter of a million people protesting at the policies of the G8 and demanding that action be taken on cancellation of debt, fair trade and aid to support the countries of the South. Despite Blair and Browns slick PR and sound bite promises nothing has happened to change the neo liberal policies of the G8, WTO, IMF or World Bank in Africa or anywhere else. Numerous attempts have been made by varying governments to co-opt the movement into government and offer access to neo liberal institutions. In particular leaders of the big NGOs have been offered policy making roles. Attempts have been made to hi-jack the space created such as Brown attempting to speak at the Make Poverty History Demonstration. Politicians who are carrying out neo- liberal policies have gained access to platforms and have attempted to speak for the movement. Sponsorship for WSF events has

been offered by the Ford Foundation amongst others.

Independence of the Movement

So far the movement has maintained its independence, the openness and emphasis on democracy as well as autonomous organisation at a grass roots level has been a factor in this. It has neither been co-opted nor institutionalised.

So what is it going to take both in terms of action and political programme to halt the neo liberal agenda and reverse the economic, social and ecological impact of these policies? More importantly what conclusions are being drawn by the millions of people worldwide, including the hundreds of thousands in Scotland who participated in action during the anti war and G8 protests demanding change, only to be failed by those in the seats of political power. What has happened to that consciousness?

There are voices within the movement who are pushing the debate further. Remy Herrera a leading public figure, academic and prominent campaigner for cancellation of third world debt in addressing The WSF in Mali said he came to defend two positions, the necessity of passing from consciousness to anti imperialist action and [to go]beyond the anti neo liberal critique to the more fundamental critique of capitalism.

There are many voices who are contributing to the global debate from this position, the very experience of the movement is posing new questions and developing a deeper anti capitalist consciousness. Socialists have much to contribute to this debate and the process of understanding the nature of power in the capitalist society we live in, the power of ideas, the power of effective action and the power of organisation including political and trade union organisation.

As Naomi Klein said the movement is in no way finished, but it needs to negotiate the steps to go forward. There is a danger of fragmentation but there is the greater possibility of a strengthened and more united movement capable of co-ordinating effective action.

A New Model

You may even get a big section of the grassroots organisations, many of them mass organisations, who make up the WSF agreeing with a critique of capitalism and supporting an alternative. The big problem for all of us is what does that alternative

look like? Socialists have to find ways of bridging the gap between this consciousness and presenting a credible, global political and economic alternative. There is no model and we are still carrying on our backs, although less so, the totalitarian nature of Stalinism and the lack of democratic rights.

That's why the events in Latin America, Venezuela in particular, are important. In a concrete way the Bolivarian Revolution the policies of the Chavez government and the forms of organisation and participatory democracy at a grass roots level are redefining and contributing to the programme for Socialism in the 21st Century.

Hugo Chavez closed the Social Forum in Caracas in 2006 by stating, It is impossible, within the framework of the capitalist system to solve the grave problems of poverty of the majority of the world's population. We must transcend capitalism. But we cannot resort to state capitalism, which would be the same perversion of the Soviet Union. We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project and a path, but a new type of socialism, a humanist one, which puts humans and not machines or the state ahead of everything. That's the debate we must promote around the world, and the WSF is a good place to do it.

During the last election campaign I was at a hustings hosted by Energy Watch Scotland, not surprisingly all of the questions were about energy. I was asked to exercise my imagination and assume that the SSP have been elected as a majority government (I've got a vivid imagination) what is the first thing I would do the next day when I got to Parliament? I replied, phone Hugo Chavez and ask him to fax through the documents relating to how to take into public ownership and run a state owned oil company, and invite the Minister responsible to come to Scotland to address the Scottish Parliament.

There is an article in this Frontline which goes into much more detail about the situation in Venezuela, I want to just briefly touch on the programmatic issues.

The international capitalist class has for two decades promoted the idea that there is no economic alternative to neo liberalism, only with free market access everywhere, privatization of public services and liberalisation of trade will we create economic growth.

The most recent economic report on the Venezuelan economy from the Centre for Economic and Policy Research released in July this

year document that there has been a 76% growth in the economy since 2003, public spending has increased from 34-44%, and investment has grown.

Households living in poverty have dropped from 55% to 30.6% and those in extreme poverty from 25% to 9.1%.

How can this be possible when the Chavez government has done the exact opposite of what neo liberal economists recommend, such as strict currency controls, price controls, nationalisation of key parts of the economy, repeated increases in the minimum wage, policies which strengthen workers rights and trade union organization, increasing taxes on the wealthy and cracking down on corporate tax evasion? This disproves not in theory but in action the argument that national governments can do little and are at the mercy of international neo liberal economic policy, it proves in practice that dissenting from the neo liberal agenda does not mean economic collapse, on the contrary if you seriously want to tackle poverty this is the type of programme you have to implement in government.

Interestingly the movement in Latin America is also trying to challenge the global dominant ideology of capitalism and to provide alternative organisations the existing global institutions of neo liberalism.

The proposal of a Debtors Fund bringing together governments of Latin America and the countries of the South to negotiate with the banks and governments of the North and to co-ordinate effective action around repayment and cancellation of foreign debt. Sure seems more effective than a Live Aid concert and Bob and Bono going for tea at Gleneagles.

There is a proposal to establish a trade agreement across the continent called ALBA (Alternativa Bolivariana para las Americas) as an alternative to the US Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. ALBA would be a different model of trade co-operation. It would push for solidarity with the economically weakest countries, setting up a fund to assist their development of infrastructure, prioritizing food sufficiency in every country and protecting internal production from the predatory role of multi nationals. The proposal to challenge the media monopoly of the neo liberal view of the world by setting up a TV station which would go global presenting information, debate, argument and concrete experience of Another World Being Possible. A socialist CNN!

Having this emerging alternative will enormously assist in bridging the consciousness gap between a critique of capitalism and a viable, credible socialist alternative. Of course the programme for socialism would be different in different national countries but the task of redefining it is given much assistance from the living experience of Latin America, including the movement for workers control of industry in Argentina which I haven't touched on here.

An obvious point to make here is that the movement in Venezuela would not be able to advance any of these policies or more importantly implement them if they hadn't had popular social movements linked to parties standing in elections, who then won a democratic mandate for power. Networks are not enough. It also emphasizes the importance of the creation of anti capitalist parties like the SSP as part of this process. The lesson for us however is that political parties are not enough, there is enormous strength in being linked with networks and popular movements who still retain their democratic autonomy.

The WSF and the global justice movement are helping create an international consciousness, links are strengthening between diverse and dispirit campaigns and organisations, and there is a space to exchange ideas and to find solutions to the unanswered question of how to organise effective action on a global scale to stop privatisation and multinational domination of the world's resources and protect our environment.

The decision has been taken not to hold a World Social Forum in 2008. Instead it will be replaced by two global days of action around 26-27 January 2008, with a plan to hold the 8th WSF in 2009; the location is still to be agreed.

In Scotland we have never really managed to establish a national Social Forum type umbrella. There was the possibility to develop something concrete from the G8 Alternatives initiative, but for reasons which I have written about previously in this magazine it didn't prove possible.

As socialists we should consider how we can link up with other groups in Scotland to prepare for the global days of action next January. The thousands of young people who took part in the Make Poverty History demonstration and those who took their protest to Gleneagles haven't gone away and I am sure many of them are still committed to the idea that Another World is Possible. Creating a social forum space in Scotland to discuss our

visions of that other world would be a huge step forward.

-Frances Curran is a leader member of the SSP.

France: Mass Mobilisation against Sarkozy

Facts and figures about the Nov 25 strikes

The strikes and demonstrations against Nicolas Sarkozy's attempted neoliberal reforms have been massive. We publish here an initial report by the LCR. More detailed material will be published soon.

The 20 November public sector demonstrations in facts and figures

700 000 demonstrators in 148 demonstrations across France of which: 70 000 in Paris, 8 500 in Orleans, 5 000 in Brest, 3 000 in Quimper, 8 000 in Tours, 10 000 in Toulon and Saint-Etienne, 15 000 in Grenoble, 15 000 in Lyon, 60 000 in Marseilles, 30 000 in Nantes and Bordeaux, 35 000 in Toulouse, 25 000 in Rennes, 4 000 in Strasbourg, 19 000 in Lille, 20 000 in Caen, 18 000 in Rouen, 15 000 in Le Havre, 30 000 in Nantes, 5 000 in Saint-Nazaire, 15 000 in Grenoble, 1 500 in Réunion, 10 000 in Pau...

Strikes at Yoplait.

The employees of the three production sites of Yoplait France, in Le Mans (Sarthe), Monéteau (Yonne) and Vienne (Isère), struck massively, following the call of the CGT, to demand the reopening of the 2007 wage negotiations 2007 and a rise in their purchasing power.

UNEF [the main student union] estimates at 40 000 the number of students and high-school pupils who demonstrated.

Approximately 40 000 university and high-school students demonstrated, on the one hand, in support of the public sector workers, while on the other demanding the abrogation of the Pécresse law on the universities, according to , which said it was "satisfied" with such a mobilization. The universities, in particular in Lille, Nantes, Rennes and Lyon, were particularly mobilized, notes the union.

Booed, Francois Chèreque takes to his heels and leaves the demonstration

The calls for the end of the transport strike launched on several occasions by the leader of the CFDT, Francois Chèreque, were not forgotten by the demonstrators. The general secretary was booed by a group of about twenty militants, some wearing CGT stickers saying "Chèreque is with the bosses! ", " Sarkozy-Chèreque, on the same side!" "Chèreque, stop stabbing us in the back !", they shouted, while Mr. Chèreque ran away from the demonstration, protected by his escort.

Strike strongly supported in the national education system, according to the trade unions.

Nearly six out of ten teachers in colleges and the high schools in strike on the day of the mobilization of the public sector. "We have an overall rate of 58 per cent of strikers in the colleges and high schools. The mobilization is particularly strong in the colleges, with rates of 60 per cent and peaks of 80 per cent ", declared a spokesperson of the SNES [the main secondary school teachers' union]. These figures were assembled by the trade union from a sample of 200 "test-establishments". The FSU [the main federation of teachers' union] indicates that an average of 65 per cent of primary school teachers and 58 per cent of teachers in colleges and high schools were on strike.

"There is something of the smell of 1995"

PARIS, Nov. 20, 2007 (AFP) - Olivier Besancenot, spokesperson of the LCR, estimated that the strikes and the demonstrations of public sector and rail workers on Tuesday have "something of the odour of 1995" and should not stop "as long as the government does not give anything". "The mobilization this Tuesday is even stronger than on October 18" at the time of the last big day of mobilization, Mr. Besancenot, who demonstrated in Paris with his post office worker colleagues, told AFP. In addition, he stressed, "the railway workers are standing firm, in spite of the attempts at diversion and division by the government".

"There is something of the odour of 1995, there is something which is mounting", said the Trotskyist leader, in an allusion to the retreat of the government faced with the mobilization of the railway workers in December 1995. "As long as the government does not give anything, I do not see why it would stop", added Mr. Besancenot. "There are people who are outraged by the policy of the government, there are people who are resisting and who do not want to submit", according to him. "On Wednesday morning, there will be general assemblies at the post office to see how we can continue the movement ", affirmed the young postal worker.

Two thousand people attended the LCR rally in the Mutualite hall in central Paris on 23 November.

-Olivier Besancenot was candidate for the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR - French section of the Fourth International) at the French presidential elections in 2002 and 2007.

Strong resistance to Sarkozy's agenda

Ingrid Hayes

Sarkozy's election in May 2007 was a serious political defeat. But the recently elected president, hand in hand with the bosses' union, had yet to inflict a major social defeat to the working class.

It was uncertain whether the team in power would try to go as fast as possible in inflicting that defeat, or if it would choose to buy time only concentrating on some specific categories hoping they would not be supported by the population (railway workers, students ...). With the economic crisis imported from the United States, the uncertainty was over: it would have to be everything at the same time, especially as the government had started off by giving billions of euros to the richest among the rich and had nothing much left to deal with the situation.

Apart from the ruling classes, literally everyone is under attack. A few examples: on the pensions issue, workers are supposed to work longer to get less in the end, sick people will have to pay a "franchise" (fixed rate fee) to be allowed access to social security, immigrants are submitted to more restrictive laws, the possibility of DNA testing of immigrants to prove family relationships was voted in Parliament, illegal immigrants' children are threatened, the right to study is put in jeopardy both by the loss of thousands of teacher jobs and the autonomization of universities, preparing the competition between them...

But the government is facing two major problems. First it is quite risky to carry out all the attacks at the same time. Second, Sarkozy was elected not only because of the absolute lack of alternative on the side of the Socialist Party but also on a fairytale: he would increase buying power. And buying power is not increasing.

The LCR had said from the beginning that there would be some resistance to Sarkozy's attempt to deepen neo-liberal policies in France, and it had

called for resistance when virtually everybody sank into depression, or got ready for the next presidential elections, or, as a good number of Socialist Party leaders, decided to join the government. The consensus was that nothing could be done because the president had the legitimacy of the vote. This consensus has been proved wrong. The resistance has now been active for a number of weeks, fishermen, junior doctors, judges and more recently (and more classically) railway workers, students, employees in the state public sectors, which is very broad and includes health services workers and teachers.

The major conflict has been between the government and the railway workers. They form one of the last categories of workers who do not have to have 40 years of contributions to qualify for a full pension, they are still on a special regime (which is self-financing !) of 37.5 years.

This was the number of years every worker was supposed to work until the 1993 reform of the private sector and the defeat of 2003 concerning the state sector. These last special regimes are also the last deadlock left to break so as to force everybody to work 41, 42 or even more years. Therefore it is a priority reform for Sarkozy. The movement started on the 18th of October with a massive 24 hour strike among railworkers (75% of the workers were on strike, it hadn't happened since 1953!). Then the strike started again on the 13th of November and lasted for ten days, although the leaderships of all the main unions (sometimes even publicly) disapproved, and didn't even try to oppose the massive campaign waged against the strikers by the government and the media. The strike has now been suspended, but the railway workers are not defeated, they have already forced the government to make some significant changes, and the strike may start again in December depending on the results of the negotiations in process.

The students are still blocking a good half of the universities around the country. This movement came as a surprise as the government had negotiated a deal during the summer with the main students union and the presidents of universities. But the deal didn't convince the students. They reject a reform meant to privatize university education by introducing private funding, disengagement of national government, submission of education to the immediate needs of the bosses. The movement is strong and radical, and seems to be spreading to secondary schools.

We must now build a convergence of all these movements. The perspective is that of a large movement, taking on all specific demands but also unifying on the key questions, wages, pensions and jobs. The strike on the 20th of November was a first step. The situation requires to go further. And more and more people see the need for it. Prices are rising, rent, food, petrol, health expenses, while Sarkozy has given himself a 172% rise of his wages! The pensions are under threat while the members of Parliament voted themselves a special regime of 22.5 years to qualify for a full pension! As we say in France, "tous et toutes ensemble!"

-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.

Netherlands: Building the movement against neoliberalism

15th Congress of the Socialist Party

Paul Mepschen

At the end of November 2007 the Dutch SP will hold its 15th national congress. The congress is of crucial importance to the building of the movement against neo-liberalism in the Netherlands, in which the SP plays a central role.

The Socialist Party is the main anti-neoliberal left force in the Netherlands. The party was built as a socialist alternative to the social-liberal Labour Party. The formerly Maoist SP, which broke with orthodox Maoism in the seventies and has drifted further away from that strain of thought ever since, entered parliament in 1994. The party now has over 50.000 members, half of whom have joined since 2000. The SP has 145 local groups and thousands of active militants. Among them are most members of the Dutch section of the Fourth International, Socialist Alternative Politics. In Rotterdam, Leo de Kleijn of SAP is a member of the city council for the SP.

The 15th congress of the SP takes place in turbulent times. In November of 2006 the party made an enormous electoral breakthrough, gaining almost 17 percent of the votes and going from 9 to

25 seats in the country's lower house (150 seats). The party came second in the country's biggest cities, Rotterdam and Amsterdam, just behind traditional (social-liberal) Labour, scoring almost 20 percent in both cases. In a few cities and towns, like Nijmegen and the industrial city of Heerlen, the SP came in first. In another industrial city, Eindhoven, traditionally in the hands of Labour and Christian Democracy - the SP scored a resounding 23,4 percent of the vote. The vote for the SP was a working class vote. The lower people's income, the higher the chance they voted SP in November last year - which is exactly what we saw when we looked at the composition of the "No" vote against the European constitution in 2005.

The battle for the Left

The breakthrough is of course of crucial importance. One year after the elections the SP finds itself at a crossroads: will the party develop into an active, pluralist party strongly rooted among militant workers and activists and committed to building the opposition to neo-liberalism, or will it turn into a 'normal' social-democratic party? Both developments are possible. A clear and loud choice for option number 1 needs to be made. And that is why the 15th congress is so important.

After the November 2006 elections different authors argued in *Grenzeloos*, the radical and socialist magazine and webzine published by SAP, that 'the battle about socialism in the Netherlands has started'. The breakthrough of the SP marked the beginning of the demolition of the dominant position of Labour on the Dutch Left. For a long time Labour was without any doubt completely hegemonic as the most important expression of leftwing politics. Both the elite and the base of the unions and the most important social movements in the country made up the backbone of supporters of the social-democratic party. Parties, currents and movements that wanted to be an alternative to social-democracy were doomed to play a role on the fringe. They either only bore ineffectual witness to leftist principles; or they hoped to influence Labour by attacking it from the left. The breakthrough of the SP fundamentally changed the relationship between Labour and the movement to the left.

Labour's love for neo-liberalism

The rise of the SP has everything to do with the evolution of Labour from a social-democratic party to a social-neoliberal party. In other words, with the genuflection of Labour before neo-liberal economic policies. As Naomi Klein describes so well in her new book - *The Shock Doctrine* - neo-liberalism has an extremely violent and anti-democratic history. She argues that it was first established by cruel dictatorships in Latin America in the sixties and seventies, which with the support of Chicago School free-market professor Milton Friedman and the CIA crushed the Left and the social movements while forcing radical neo-liberal policies down the throats of the people. Klein describes how that history of Chicago School economics became mixed up with torture and shock. Literally, because neo-liberalism could only be enforced through the use of electroshock on the bodies of those who resisted. And symbolically, because Friedman and other neo-liberal theorists knew and propagated that neo-liberalism succeeded best in societies that were in 'shock'. The shock following a traumatic experience or radical change or war or natural disaster, should in the eyes of neo-liberals be used to force radical reforms down the throats of the workers.

This neo-liberalism, which in Latin America tried to destroy the backbone of the people, took root in Western Europe after Margaret Thatcher took office in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the US. The Dutch Thatcher was Ruud Lubbers, a Christian Democrat who initiated radical neo-liberal reforms in the early eighties as an answer to the economic crisis which in the mid-seventies marked the end of a long wave of economic boom. The neo-liberal answer to falling profit rates was: lower wages; fundamental cuts in social security; privatizations and a larger role for 'the market' in public services. The power of the unions needed to be broken. Big waves of privatization and the demolition of the welfare state were the result. The rights of workers were under pressure.

The neoliberal agenda has dominated politics and economy ever since. The commercialization of public health care and the attacks on redundancy legislation stem from that agenda. The neo-liberal agenda has from the very beginning been accepted by Labour. Unlike some European social-democratic parties, the Dutch Labour Party has always been quite enthusiastic about neo-liberal reform. This culminated during the period when

Labour leader Wim Kok – a former union boss who became a leading social-neoliberal politician – was Minister of Finance (between 1989 and 1994) and Prime Minister of the so-called Purple government (between 1994 and 2002), containing two (neo)liberal parties and Kok's own Labour Party. Kok and his party were among the architects of the radical neo-liberal reform of Dutch society and the economy. And this enthusiasm for neo-liberalism was not limited to the Netherlands. As Minister of Finance, Kok met Nelson Mandela just after his release, and made it abundantly clear that no other development for South Africa than neo-liberal development was imaginable. In *The Shock Doctrine* Naomi Klein describes how Mandela pointed out that he wanted nothing more radical than a kind of Marshall Plan for his country. Kok in response stated that 'no economy can develop separately now'. Mandela should, in other words, not imagine that he had the right to independently choose an economic policy for his country.

The rise of the SP

The neo-liberal conversion of the Labour Party – an enormous betrayal of the base of the party – created the space for the Socialist Party to grow in. The SP arose as the voice of the opposition to neo-liberalism. After years of patient work in towns and cities where neither Labour nor the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN, which later merged with other parties into the GreenLeft) had strongholds, the SP finally broke through with two MPs in 1994. That happened after Labour had got rid of what Kok called its 'ideological baggage' and after the Communist Party had lost its influence among the most radical elements of the workers' movement. The SP quickly became the face of anti-neoliberalism. More than the GreenLeft – which has flirted with liberalism lately, has an elitist and middle-class-profile and is a 'politicians' party' – the extremely popular and charismatic SP leader Jan Marijnissen and his party managed to cross the bridge between the will to change the world and the daily needs of people.

The crossing of this bridge is extremely important. Because it is 'normal people' who are the victims of neo-liberal politics. The women who work in health care and their clients, for instance, are the ones who receive the blows of neo-liberal reforms and have to live with the consequences. It is the workers in the factories who may lose protection against redundancy. It is the people in the poorer neighbourhoods of cities like Rotterdam

who become the victim of the mass demolition of cheap social housing, which in effect means they have to make space for the rich. It is the Socialist Party that supports the struggles of these people, supports them and gives them a voice and helps build resistance to the indecent, uncivilized and inhuman politics of neo-liberalism. During the campaign leading up to the referendum against the EU constitution, the SP was the only left party which campaigned for the NO. Contrary to parties like the GreenLeft and Labour and to most of Dutch civil society, the SP understood the growing dissatisfaction with neo-liberalism among 'normal people'. A dissatisfaction that was expressed by the mass character of the NO against the European constitution, but also by the mass turnout at the demonstration in Amsterdam against pension reforms. The 400.000 people who were in the streets of the capital in 2004 were part one of the biggest demonstrations in the history of this country.

The key to understanding the SP's breakthrough is understanding the role of the SP in giving voice to anti-neoliberal sentiment. The party has become the most crucial political representation of dissatisfaction with neoliberalism. The Labour Party is of course frightened to death that the SP is winning this struggle for the Left in the Netherlands. Because that struggle is about so much more than seats in parliament – it is about the meaning of socialism. It is about the opposition between the social-neoliberalism of Labour and socialism as a political and economic alternative, as represented by the SP.

Crossroads

Hence, the SP arose because of its consistent opposition to neo-liberalism. The enormous problem the SP and the whole of the militant Left face is that the amount of electoral support for the party stands in no proportion to the power of the social movements and the political activity of the people. It is true that the times of total passivity are over. That is illustrated, for instance, by the struggle of people in many cities and large towns against the neo-liberal attacks on social housing. It is also illustrated by those who resist the commercialization of health policies now meet resistance, even in the Netherlands. But that resistance is weak. This is a crucial challenge for the SP.

The SP sees itself confronted with an impressive task: building a left alternative in the Netherlands,

a counter-power to neoliberalism. Which is something else than building the SP only. The party should be conscious of the fact that it will not be able to make it by itself. Both a one-sided emphasis on building the party – ‘if the SP is doing well, the social movements are doing well’- and parliamentarianism are very real and important dangers.

The SP needs to strengthen the foundations of the party – the position and role of the thousands of militants. From all corners of the party militants have proposed building working groups and commissions in which SP members can organize on the basis of their activity or political priorities. Union militants; activists who work in international solidarity; environmental activists; LGBT activists; feminists – they should be able to organize themselves in commissions or working groups inside the SP, so as to build the visibility of the party on these issues and to work on educating militants.

‘Working groups’ and commissions like these can function as alternatives to the practice in the party that most of the development of ideas and views happens in and around the parliamentary group. As member of the Rotterdam city council for the SP Leo de Kleijn recently argued: ‘The problem is that in the SP the weight of the parliamentary group and the groups in city councils have become much greater in comparison with the weight of militants outside of such institutions.’ That one of the most important arguments against the proposed commissions is that the parliamentary group already has a lot of knowledge, underscores the relevance of what De Kleijn says. This development needs to be countered. SP members should be able to organize themselves on the basis of specific knowledge or activities. The themes that need to be developed are many: globalization and international solidarity; a different Europe; radical democracy; economic alternatives; emancipation and liberation; the struggle of immigrants. The SP should develop from a defensive party – which concentrates on protecting society from neoliberal attacks – into an offensive party which develops alternatives to capitalism, and discusses and proposes them.

A pluralist party

The SP should and must choose to become a party of active militants, as diverse as they come. Society changes all the time – changes we need to see within the SP. Diversity is one of the core

elements of modern society. Among other things, that means the SP should develop a clearer anti-racist profile. The SP should be in the forefront of the struggle against the xenophobic and islamophobic right. What is needed is a consequent political line which makes clear that the SP is on the side of immigrants. That is why the proposals for building a working group of immigrants in the party which develops socialist and anti-racist positions on emancipation and integration of immigrants, is very important.

Diversity also means: more space for women and lesbians and gays in the party; more of a profile on feminist and LGBT themes. And the party also needs to work on its internationalist profile – the SP is not afraid of globalization, but is struggling for another globalization, socially and ecologically responsible.

The utopian vocation

The consequences of the neoliberal attacks are enormous. The American Marxist Fredric Jameson has talked about the withering of the utopian vocation. In her newest book Naomi Klein makes a similar argument: the rise of neo-liberalism has gone hand in hand with the demise of the belief that another world is possible. Not only did revolution disappear from the minds of workers, the very idea of a more just society went into crisis. There was talk about the end of history. The belief in an alternative to capitalism and imperialism needed to be rebuilt from the ground up. And this is happening now, for instance in the global justice movement.

In the Netherlands, the SP has a crucial role to play in rebuilding hope. The party should take up this role extremely seriously. In this light, there is a great deal of reason for doubt about the real-politics that has dominated the latest election campaigns. A more moderate view on the monarchy, on NATO and on socio-economic questions was supposed to create an image of a ‘reasonable party’. The move was explained by arguing that ‘we should only make demands that we can make happen in four years, in other words until the next elections.’ But for socialists elections are not only there for that, but especially and more importantly to use such politicized times to lay the seeds of rebellion, of the dream of a better and more just world. And these are the times for doing that. Unlike in the past, the Dutch working class is no longer under the spell of social-democracy. In fact, it is common knowledge that the majority of

the electorate has completely lost its faith in traditional politics. Now is the time for the SP to win people to the utopian project that is called 21st century socialism.

One of the most striking aspects in the introduction of the main text that is to be discussed during the 15th Congress is the remark that the SP has to prepare for government responsibility. Perhaps it would be better to prepare for something quite different. Instead of becoming a trustworthy partner for social and Christian democracy, the SP should build and lead the counter-movement of the Left and win as many people as possible for a project that breaks with neo-liberalism and provokes Capital.

-Paul Mepschen is an editor of the radical and socialist magazine and webzine Grenzeloos (www.grenzeloos.org) and a member of the leadership of Socialist Alternative Politics, which represents the FI in the Netherlands. He is active in the Rotterdam branch of the SP and works full-time for the SP-group in the Rotterdam city council.

Other recent articles:

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Equador: A Triumphant Advance

Landslide victory for the Alianza País

Hugo Blanco

[The Country Alliance Movement (Movimiento Alianza País) and President Rafael Correa's anti-imperialist government won a landslide victory in the recent elections for Ecuador's new Constituent Assembly.]

Today Ecuador is undergoing a triumphant advance. Of the three anti-imperialist governments in South America that are now pursuing a process of change, the regime in Ecuador has the broadest support.

Bolivia is advancing, but the Right, which holds office in four departments, has unfortunately been able to line up a sector of the middle class against change.

In Venezuela the Right achieved some success in its campaign of lies against the supposed violation of "freedom of the press" with regard to a company whose broadcast permit should have been lifted when it supported a coup d'état. Instead, it was permitted to continue through to the end of the license term.

In Ecuador, as in Bolivia, victory in the presidential elections was no more than one successful step in a long process of massive popular struggles. This process had seen the repeated ouster of presidents who, obedient to the interests of the large corporations and the United States, had promoted the pillage of their countries and accelerated environmental degradation, driving their countries into poverty.

The previous Ecuadorian president, to gain the support needed to govern, had initially surrounded himself with some progressive ministers, a set-up that soon collapsed. One of these transitory ministers was Rafael Correa, and his fleeting presence as minister led him to be seen as someone who could direct the economy. He was elected president in 2006.

The people deeply despised parliament, the heart of reaction. They demanded a Constituent Assembly. Correa not only promised to convoke such an assembly, but refused to present candidates

for parliament, convincing voters of his consistency.

After his election, Correa paid homage to the indigenous mass movement that was so crucial in his victory by going to the mountain village of Zumbahua to receive a staff of office from the indigenous peoples. Promising that his would be "an indigenous government," he explained, "This is not an epoch of change; it is a change of epochs."

Once elected, of course, he ran into the frontal opposition of the reactionary parliament. Not only did it stand in total opposition to convening the Constituent Assembly; it even had the nerve to vote a huge increase in deputies' salaries.

The first great battle was to hold a referendum approving election of a Constituent Assembly. Parliament was dead against that, of course, but the highest electoral authority decided to go ahead with the vote. The deputies voted to fire that tribunal's chairperson. But he responded that it was the deputies that should be ousted, for having moved against him in violation of the constitution.

This disagreement was resolved by the people through mass demonstrations that surrounded the parliament. Fortunately, Correa did not restrain the people as Juan Perón of Argentina and Salvador Allende of Chile did in the past, when they were threatened by a right-wing coup. Correa did the exact opposite. He said that the people had every right to mobilize peacefully and that this mobilization was the only guarantee that the needed changes could go forward.

In March 2007, the electoral authority removed 57 deputies for having obstructed convocation of the Constituent Assembly. The law provided for their replacement by alternates chosen by their parties. Of course the parties, which did not recognize the deputies' removal, ordered the alternates to refuse to be sworn in. But such is the hunger for posts in these circles that many alternates quickly took the oath and voted approval for the referendum on convening a Constituent Assembly. This should not be taken as a sign that the present deputies are any less reactionary and corrupt than their predecessors.

The referendum was held on April 15, and 80% voted for convening the Assembly, with 10% opposed and 10% spoiling their ballots.

The Constituent Assembly elections will take place on September 30. In my opinion, this assembly will not have the rough ride experienced by its equivalent in Bolivia. It will be a great triumph for the people, from which will emerge a

constitution far different from the present one, which serves to exploit the country and subject its people to poverty. The new constitution will be a tool enabling the Ecuadorian people to manage their country in the interests of the population in a framework of respect for the environment.

That of course will not end the struggle. The process of liberation is lengthy. The Ecuadorian people have taken control of the government, but they do not have power, which remains in the hands of the large corporations. The election of the Constituent Assembly will be an important step in this struggle.

Greetings, brothers and sisters of Ecuador!

(This article was published by 'Socialist Voice' in October. Translation is by John Riddell.)

-Hugo Blanco was a leader of the peasant uprising in the Cuzco region of Peru in the early 1960s, a symbol of the unity and renewal of the Peruvian revolutionary left in 1978-1980, imprisoned, threatened with death, exiled and freed thanks to international solidarity.

Other recent articles:

Ecuador

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Venezuela at the crossroads

International media prepare a coup

Guillermo Almeyra

All the fuss over the incident provoked at the Ibero-American Summit in Santiago, Chile by Franco's Bourbon godson is nothing more than a smokescreen designed to divert attention from attempts to destabilize the democratic and constitutional government of Venezuela and at the same time, a part of this attempt.

The Venezuelan opposition media (nearly all of it) and the international media are seeking, in effect, to psychologically prepare a coup creating the false impression that Hugo Chavez is alone, isolated, with no other support than a few cronies who are as weak as he is. In this campaign the key moment will be the referendum on the constitution, as the right opposition, if the "NO" camp gets around 40 percent, tries to argue that in fact the majority is due to fraud, to drag a vacillating sector of the middle classes behind the oligarchy and, above all, to win support in the more conservative sectors of the armed forces, already prepared by the statements of the former Chavista Defence Minister, General Raul Baduel.

Popular power, the municipal councils, the handover of nearly 2 million hectares to peasants, are, from the point of view of the capitalists and, simply, rich Venezuelans who are racist and regard dark skinned workers as inferiors - intolerable actions. Not to speak of the multinationals, which, while still earning large sums, fear expropriation.

There has been no lack of "theorising" that 21st century socialism would be undertaken in Venezuela with the support of the transnationals, using the most modern means of electronic control and with the active participation, in its leadership, of people like Baduel, supposedly "scientific". But the class struggle, without which the most basic foundations of socialism cannot be created, requires a leap in the political consciousness and the decision-making capacity of the workers (in the broadest sense of that word). It always passes through the construction of power at the base, which drives to the right to the big capitalists, like those leading multinationals, and the conservatives in the state apparatus, namely the Baduels, in the

armed forces, and many governors and apparatchiks, in the civilian field.

This class struggle divides and subdivides all sectors: there are right-wing putschists, and there are others, more realistic, who fear that the failure of their adventure will radicalise further a regime where there is still space to be exploited, and there are sectors of the political centre which, under the pressure of events, move to the right, which will use them. The rule in a revolution, therefore, remains that of Georges Danton: audacity, ever more audacity. An alliance between the centre (Baduel) and the left (Chavez) would be fatal, however, because the centre is now the right and alliance with it is tantamount to capitulation, as was the case with Juan Domingo Peron in 1955 when he capitulated to General Eduardo Lonardi, head of the coup but not a fascist, who soon afterwards was overthrown by the gorillas, who had until then used him as a front man.

Fidel Castro warns Chavez that it is dangerous to continue with his practice of the "bath of multitudes" mingling with the people who applaud him. Assassination is a very real possibility, especially because nobody doubts that Chavez will win the next referendum, as he has overwhelmingly won all previous elections (and, we must add, he will be powerfully aided by the repudiation of the arrogant Bourbon fascistoid that Franco educated and by the neocolonialism of the Spanish bourgeoisie).

But the real danger, more than assassination, is the "Baduel effect" in the senior ranks of the Venezuelan armed forces, and the influence of Chavez in the lower ranks is crucial. Indeed, if there have been no pronouncements by other military leaders, as often happens in pre-coup periods, it is because there is a strong popular vigilance over the army, with the armed forces divided horizontally and vertically (between opponents and Chavistas, and between legalists and putschists), because a coup will automatically align Venezuela with the United States, and many military personnel are conservative but not agents of imperialism, and because many potential putschists fear the possibility of a clash which will involve Chavista civilian militias (i.e., a kind of Spain in 1936, but in Latin America today).

Unfortunately, the government of Chavez, which is paternalistic, hinders the autonomy of the bodies of popular power and, as it is top-down, does not want to break the discipline of the armed forces by calling on them to disobey any suspicious orders or

to wound the prestige of the same by calling for stronger and better armed civilian militias. It continues imperturbably with its election campaign, which of course is necessary, although relatively of less importance, as if the fight was just a normal election.

No doubt Chavez, who is a soldier, wily and combative, will mobilize the military intelligence services and must also be using Cuban intelligence. But the only real protection is preventive popular mobilization, which will also influence within the armed forces and put the low ranking cadres and officers on a state of alert, thereby impeding the action of imperialism (which can only buy a few senior officers) and blind adherence to vertical discipline.

Another powerful protection is the urgent mobilization of the peoples of Latin America against imperialist arrogance and in support of Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba and Ecuador. Both could be facilitated by a call from President Chavez.

-Argentinian-born academic Guillermo Almeyra is Professor of Social Relations at UAM-Xochimilco University and Professor of Contemporary Politics at UNAM University as well as editorial writer at La Jornada (Mexico). He is a member of the editorial council of Sin Permiso.

Howard's overboard - but the struggle continues

Peter Boyle

The Socialist Alliance "Howard Overboard" election night party in Green Left Weekly's offices in Sydney spontaneously spilled into the streets when John Howard conceded defeat. Jubilant activists celebrated with chants, whistles and pots and pans in a lap around the block which drew out people from their homes. A right-wing government that has plagued Australia since 1996 has been defeated and we have much to celebrate.

Most of all we have to celebrate the people's power that was mobilised to defeat the Howard government over the last three years.

There can be no doubt that it was the outrage at attacks on workers' rights and the resistance to "Work Choices" — that crude euphemism that was the official name for the biggest attack on workplace rights won over a century of workers' struggle — that helped finish off the Howard government.

The hundreds of thousands of people who took to the streets against Work Choices spoke for the majority of people. They were dismissed by Howard and they remembered his ruthless arrogance on election day. Many trade unionists spread out through the suburbs of the major cities to campaign against the Howard government during the election campaign in one of the biggest electoral campaign mobilisations organised by the trade union movement in many years, most building the vote for Kevin Rudd's Labor.

The tens of thousands who marched on in the Walk Against Warming demonstrations on and around November 11 also helped bury the Howard government. The great majority of Australians who want serious action to address global warming was another majority arrogantly dismissed.

The thousands who defied the police-state conditions to take to Sydney's streets when US President George Bush came to Sydney for the APEC summit in September also symbolised the majority who dissent over the imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the associated war on

civil liberties. This was another nail in Howard's coffin.

Such was the popular backlash that Howard looks set to lose even his own parliamentary seat in Bennelong to Labor's Maxine McKew, who won 45.9% of the first preferences counted on election night. The preferences from the Greens' 5.4% should assure Howard is ousted from the seat. It would be the first time a sitting prime minister has lost his seat since 1929.

But our celebrations should not blind us to the fact that the trade unions and other progressive movements will have to continue mobilising to push the incoming Rudd Labor government to deliver on its promises to rip up Work Choices, bring the troops home from Iraq and take action on climate change.

Already there is a gap between the promises Rudd has made and the reasons why people voted for Labor. On Work Choices, the Rudd version of "ripping up" will leave in place many elements of the Howard government's attack on workers and their right to organise. Labor has no serious program to tackle climate change and implement the kind of "renewables revolution" that we need — and Rudd's vision for sustainability includes a place for coal, one of the worst greenhouse-gas generating fuels. Rudd's policy is to maintain troops in the Middle East, withdrawing only combat troops from Iraq (and even that will have to wait until mid-2008). Moreover the US-led war in Afghanistan continues to have the blessing of Labor's leaders, despite most Australians wanting troops withdrawn.

Rudd has told us that he is an "economic conservative" and experience tells us that economic conservatism = social and environmental vandalism. That's a lesson we cannot ignore after three decades of bipartisan support for the corporate profits-first agenda, demonstrated in action by federal and state governments (all of which are conservative Labor governments).

On election night Rudd congratulated Howard for his "extensive contribution to public service in Australia" and declared it time to "put aside the old battles of the past" between business and unions, between "growth and environment", "public and private".

"I extend our greetings tonight to our great friend and ally the United States", Rudd said in his victory speech and right-wing US President George

Bush reciprocated by issuing a statement overnight congratulating Rudd on his victory.

"The United States and Australia have long been strong partners and allies and the President looks forward to working with this new government to continue our historic relationship", the statement said.

Labor's 6.3% swing was a strong endorsement for change but voters attached a note indicating which way they want his government to move by delivering a strong vote to the Greens, the most progressive party currently represented in federal parliament. The Greens look set to win at least two extra Senate positions.

Socialist Alliance national coordinator Dick Nichols told GLW that it was movement's against Howard's policies, in particular those against Work Choices and the pulp mill in Tasmania, that made sure the Howard government was smashed. "The Socialist Alliance played a big role in building these movements, and did well in those seats where that work was most visible", he said.

Nichols said there had been modest increases in the vote for alliance candidates in the Sydney seats of Grayndler, Parramatta and Blaxland, the Wollongong-based seat of Cunningham and the western Melbourne seat of Gellibrand. This is a result of the alliance's role as a builder "on the ground" of the movements that helped defeat the hated Howard government.

The Socialist Alliance congratulated the Greens on their good result and pledged to continue to work as partners in building the progressive movements. Many progressive-minded people gave their first preference vote to the Greens because they see them as having the best chance to win parliamentary seats at this time, said Nichols, but a number have sought to triple the value of their vote by voting "1" Socialist Alliance and "2" Greens.

More detailed reports on how the Socialist Alliance candidates did in the elections will be published in the next issue of GLW.

The election outcome was a massive rejection of Howard and everything his government stood for (regardless of Labor's unctuous "me-tooism"). One illustration of this was Mal Brough's failure to win re-election. Brough was Howard's notorious minister for Indigenous affairs who led the jackbooted military invasion of Northern Territory Indigenous communities (which, shamefully, was supported by Rudd Labor) — his defeat at the ballot box was a rejection by voters of the racist

attack on Indigenous people and land rights. To make the changes that the majority of Australian voters have made clear they want is still going to take a fight — dumping Howard was just the beginning.

From: Comment & Analysis, Green Left Weekly issue #733 28 November 2007.

-Peter Boyle is the national secretary of the Democratic Socialist Perspective, a tendency in the Australian Socialist Alliance.

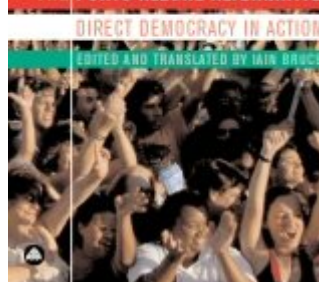
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The Porto Alegre Alternative: Direct Democracy in Action



The Porto Alegre Alternative: Direct Democracy in Action
Iain Bruce editor

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Brazilian socialists
André Passos Cordeiro,
Ubiratan de Souza, Pepe

Vargas, Raul Pont and João Machado describe in *The Porto Alegre Alternative* how Porto Alegre's participatory budget was born, how it works, how it developed in interaction with popular movements and spread with local Workers' Party (PT) victories, and how it has staked out new ground in promising a radically democratic alternative in the interests of the poor to top-down political and economic decision-making. They argue that the 'Porto Alegre' model does offer an alternative to capitalist politics as usual, but that Brazilian President Luis Ignacio da Silva ('Lula') unfortunately does not seem to have learned its lessons. As editor Iain Bruce writes, the participatory budget's linkage of socialism and direct democracy takes up 'an inescapable task for those seeking to restate the case for socialism in the twenty-first century, in an idiom that makes sense to the new generations coming to politics after Seattle and the immense movement against war in Iraq'.

Iain Bruce is a British journalist and filmmaker who has made documentaries for Channel 4 and the BBC. His latest documentary touches on Porto Alegre and its connection with the wider global justice movement.

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