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Brazil

First National Meeting of PSOL Ecosocialists approves Curitiba Charter

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More than a hundred people, including delegates and observers, took part in the PSOL's first ecosocialist gathering in the Brazilian city of Curitiba, in Paraná state, from 1 to 3 April. A series of panels focussed on aspects of the ecosocialist agenda both in the region and worldwide, on mapping socio-environmental conflicts within Brazil and on how to transform the PSOL into an ecosocialist party.

The meeting was also attended by the PSOL's General Secretary and Social Movements Secretary, both of whom emphasised the importance of the party as a whole taking up ecosocialist campaigns and principles. At the end of the meeting it was decided to set up an Ecosocialist Section in the PSOL, similar to the party's various secretariats, which will be a vital tool for promoting ecosocialist debates and activities both inside and outside the party.

The meeting discussed and adopted the Curitiba Charter, outlining the principles and campaigns that the Section will promote within the PSOL, in the environmental movement and in Brazilian society more generally. This Charter is dedicated to the memory of Chico Mendes and Dorothy Stang.

Curitiba Charter

The creation of an Ecosocialist Section of the PSOL

The ecosocialist members of the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSOL), meeting in Curitiba from 1 - 3 April, decided to address the whole of the party, the ecological and environmental movements and society in general, and after analysing the current planetary crisis, to put forward a common analysis and agenda of struggle.

There is no doubt that we are in the midst of a worldwide environmental crisis on a scale never before experienced by human society. Its most evident expression, but not its only one, is the overheating of the earth and climate change. Not a day goes by without some extreme weather or environmental event occurring in some part of the world. So intense and frequent are such events that the vocabulary of war has been adapted to the environment; we already have tens of millions of "climate refugees" and "environmental refugees" across the planet.

However, global warming and climate change are just the most visible face of a bigger crisis related to the current form of capitalist production. With its productivist-consumerist model of development built on energy from fossil fuels and a life style of conspicuous and extravagant consumption for the world's economic elite, this form of production is both environmentally unsustainable and socially unjust.

Other signs of this crisis include the shortage of water, where one in four people in the world today do not have access to drinking water; the extinction of species, now proceeding at its fastest rate in 65 million years; and the break-down of the earth's ability to re-generate itself, with the threshold already passed in 1980, meaning we now spend every year 25-30% of our natural capital.

The health of children and the elderly, women and men, is under constant threat from infectious disease, the contamination of water, air and foodstuffs, but mainly from the irresponsibility of governments and capitalists in

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developing environmentally damaging projects, as well as the historic dismantling of public health systems. On top of all this come the latest environmental catastrophes, like the landslides in the mountain region of Rio de Janeiro state and the accident at the Fukushima nuclear reactors, whose tragic consequences it is still too early to measure.

Given the multiple nature of the crisis, which is social and environmental, but also puts in question the character of civilisation itself, there then arises an ideological dispute over its causes and how to confront it. This pits the framework of “green” capitalism against that of “ecosocialism”. In other words it is a dispute over the kinds of society, or indeed of civilisation, that we want.

The view of those who lay claim to the traditions of 19th century egalitarianism and modern ecologism is expressed in the words of the International Ecosocialist Manifesto:

“The present capitalist system cannot regulate, much less overcome, the crises it has set going. It cannot solve the ecological crisis because to do so requires setting limits upon accumulation” – an unacceptable option for a system predicated upon the rule: Grow or Die!”

It is therefore not just an environmental and social crisis, but one of capitalist civilisation itself, of its economic logic and model of development, of its way of life and the values it promotes. These create an ever wider social gulf between a global oligarchy and the more than a billion human beings who have to survive on less than a dollar a day. The income of the 500 richest people on the planet is greater than that of its 416 million poorest inhabitants.

In Brazil, whose social, economic and cultural history was based on the production of single export commodities, on slavery, on the super-exploitation of indigenous peoples and those of African descent, and on the ravaging of our nature, the current Accelerated Growth Programme (PAC)¹ – with its environmentally unsustainable and socially unjust mega-projects – is the most visible face of our modern “developmentalism”.

Big hydroelectric and infrastructure projects like Belo Monte, Jirau, TKCSA, CSU and the diverting of the São Francisco river, with their catalogue of aggressive environmental, socio-cultural and ethnic impacts, are one part of the story. There is also the extension of Brazil's nuclear programme, even after the contamination at Caetités and the Fukushima tragedy; the attack on environmental protection laws, symbolised by the proposed reform of the Forest Code and laxer environmental licensing standards; and not least the exclusionary construction projects planned for the World Cup and the 2016 Olympics.

Together, these show just how far capital, acting through its governments and its corporations, aims to go in our country.

We denounce and resist the spurious and corrupt links between public bodies or elected representatives and big financial and industrial groups, building contractors and agribusiness, who finance their electoral campaigns only to charge the bitter price of destruction, making all forms of life impossible.

We denounce the rhetoric and practices of those who claim to preserve ecosystems while concealing perverse interests in accelerating the exploitation of natural resources and destroying the various habitats and human ways of life that depend on them.

Such ecocapitalist practices are based on vague and often distorted arguments about the big environmental questions and tend to push environmental policy towards towards forms of social and territorial segregation, upsetting the balance of the ecologically most important protected areas.

We also denounce those who have betrayed the great causes of the left and, instead of defending the rights of the working classes, have chosen an alliance with the international bourgeoisie, becoming some of the main supports for

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environmental destruction and devastation. It is worth remembering that the choice of all-out economic growth is a direct result of tying the Brazilian economy to payment of interest on the public debt, since most large-scale production is aimed at exports. The export of commodities is also the export of water, energy and the life of our people and our ecosystems.

We find ourselves in a situation where a government coming out of social struggles has come to rest on support from the most conservative, reactionary and corrupt circles, with no sense of environmental responsibility at all. This means that the struggle is against two groups who, although opposed to each other electorally, are ever closer in the aims and interests they defend. Only a party that places itself firmly in the anti-capitalist tradition, but which has broken with the authoritarian, bureaucratic and predatory experiences of “really-existing socialism” – a party in constant exchange with traditional communities and social and environmental movements – can confront such regression and build the tactical and strategic alliances needed for ecosocialist struggle.

It is true that Ecosocialism remains a promise, a gamble on the future, but it is a pressing necessity if we are to ensure our survival as a species and as a society, as well as that of all other forms of life. It is something in process, under construction, which is based on principles of social equality, ecological sustainability, the defence of diversity in its biological, social, ethnic and cultural dimensions, as well as on a new way of life, that takes as its starting point “being”, not “having”.

Ecosocialists propose a transversal intervention, across the board, because the environmental struggle should interact with all the different movements that make up the struggle for social emancipation, including those that raise demands for land reform and urban reform, trade union and youth struggles, as well as movements against environmental racism and for racial and gender equality.

Our main organizational priorities are as follows:

The urgent need to develop an ecosocialist programme in order to improve the level of debate within the party and its relation with society;

Our institutional presence should occur in all areas where public policy is up for discussion, both in official councils and commissions as well as in the thematic forums of the social movements;

Areas of intervention and action proposals:

To denounce and combat the continuing attempts to make environmental policies laxer, particularly the modification of the Forest Code,

building the national action called by the social movements on 07-04-11 in Brasilia, the state-level actions called for 28-04-11 and the intervention by PSOL MP Ivan Valente, with his constant and powerful criticism of this further attack by capital on the environment;

To investigate, denounce and resist the excesses and negative impacts of the PAC projects, including those leading up to the mega-events (2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics), especially in relation to the attacks on working conditions, the forced evictions of poor communities, the encouragement of prostitution and the trafficking of women and children, as well as the reduction of biodiversity;

To demand that communities affected by big infrastructure projects, urban development plans, conservation zones and agro-industrial projects should be guaranteed genuine and continuous participation, with real authority, in all phases, from the initial assessments to the measures to deal with their impacts.

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To mobilise a broad movement on the nuclear question, and to block Brazil's nuclear programme both in parliament and through the social movements! For the decommissioning of the Angra 1, 2 and 3 nuclear plants! For the scrapping of new nuclear projects and power stations and of any military use of nuclear materials or reactors!

To extend the areas protected by conservation zones in the country's various ecosystems, with guaranteed and genuine public participation in their management and their integration into the local communities' ways of life;

For an ecological land reform and an inclusive and environmentally responsible urban reform! Against the Green Desert, single-crop agribusiness and land and property speculation!

Given the fundamental necessity of human mobility for the future of society, to give full support to movements against the high cost of public transport (movements for free passes and zero fares), as well as to the struggle for more transparent control of urban transport systems, the integration of different forms of transport and for an end to dependence on road travel.

Also in towns and cities, the challenge of rubbish disposal and other solid waste cannot be put off. It is urgent to attack in a didactic way the degrading aspects of existing production, including firms' irresponsible use of packaging and the absence of serious recycling policies, as well as to promote and protect the situation of workers in the urban cleaning and rubbish collection sectors.

Coastal areas should be managed as inalienable public patrimony and as sanctuaries for life. We therefore reject any activity that harms small-scale fishing and navigation, the public use of beaches and other natural coastal environments, or the genetic stock of the sea and river estuaries.

We are for the recognition and demarcation of indigenous lands, of the territories of traditional Afro-Brazilian communities and of sustainable, community, extractive reserves. Against Environmental racism!
Against the criminalization of social movements and the political imprisonment of social activists and leaders!

Finally, what is at stake for humanity is the challenge of building a new society that can be, at one and the same time, politically democratic, socially just and egalitarian, culturally and ethnically diverse and environmentally sustainable. As Michael Lowy suggests, we need to update Rosa Luxemburg's slogan to read, "Ecosocialism or Barbarism"!

In memory of Chico Mendes and Sister Dorothy Stang