



INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

News and analysis from the Fourth International

IV392 - September 2007



USA

Sun sets on Bush

Environment

Savage Capitalism



Plus
Bensaid
on
Mandel



Latin America

Indigenous struggle

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USA

Sun Setting on Bush's Empire

David Finkel

With the George W. Bush presidency limping into its final sixteen months and a line of rats led by torture boy Alberto Gonzales and dirty trickmeister Karl Rove jumping ship, several questions come to mind. Even if definitive answers aren't possible, the questions provide a kind of window into the state of the regime and the larger crisis it has helped to create.

Is this administration, as some serious historians suggest, the very worst in U.S. history?

Following its failure and debacle in Iraq, will this gangster regime take the ultimate plunge the world into the ultimate catastrophe of a war with Iran?

Will the Democrats who narrowly control Congress do anything to force Bush out of Iraq?

Will the sudden turmoil in financial markets triggered by the sleazy "subprime mortgage" collapse translate into political crisis for an administration on the brink? The question of the Bush regime's place in history should be divided into two parts. Certainly in its levels of corruption, mendacity, destruction of the Bill of Rights and of people's freedom from government abuse, this administration has combined the criminality of the Nixon (Watergate) and Reagan (Iran-Contra) presidencies and, as we say on this side of the pond, "taken them to a new level." Just take the Supreme Court – please!

Nonetheless, in terms of its damage to American society itself, the George W. Bush presidency can be considered only the second worse in our history.

Going back 130 years, it was the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes – who took office through a dirty political deal following a deadlocked election – that ended post-Civil War Reconstruction in the U.S. South, opening the way for generations of lynch law terror, the stripping of voting and civil rights from Black citizens, and the whole culture of white supremacy that has poisoned the United States ever since. There you have the most internally destructive administration ever.

In 1877, however, the United States wasn't yet a world power. If you examine the GW Bush presidency in terms of the damage done to the world – from the utter destruction of Iraq, the brutal impasse of Afghanistan, the destruction of Palestinian democracy (and all this in the Middle East alone) to blocking action on catastrophic climate change – these past eight years smash all previous records.

These considerations lead naturally into the other questions posed above, and a broader one: If the strength of the U.S. Constitutional structure – which we must admit has served the bourgeoisie very well indeed for over two centuries – lies partly in the fact that it doesn't assume or depend on presidents being necessarily wise, particularly competent or even honest, then why have there apparently been no serious checks on the runaway behavior of the current one?

This is clearly the most destructive of all the recent imperial presidencies, and now the most unpopular of them all, yet it has encountered the least institutional resistance.

Why, indeed, has a Democratic Congressional majority, elected in November 2006 precisely because the U.S. population is sick to death of the Iraq war, proven unwilling or unable to change the Bush regime's behavior when it's clear the war is lost?

There are conjunctural reasons, or if you like excuses: The Democrats' majority is thin and can't force an end to debate in the Senate (where 60 votes are required to stop a filibuster), let alone achieve a two-thirds majority to override Bush's veto of any legislation for withdrawal "timetables" or

adequate time at home between deployments.

What infuriates antiwar activists, however, is that Congress doesn't actually need to pass anything: All it would need to do is to refuse to pass the Bush administration's semi-annual requests for hundreds of billions of dollars in "supplemental," off-budget war spending.

Here's where political cowardice intersects with the objective crisis of imperialism. The Democratic leadership are not only terrorized by the "soft on terror" label; they have no real alternative to the Bush gang's emerging program for the regional crisis.

That "surge and beyond" program entails a longterm presence of U.S. occupation troops on the Korean model; a tactical alliance with Sunni insurgent tribes in Iraq to counteract Shia and Iranian power; sponsorship of a rightwing Palestinian leadership in the hopes of forcing Palestinian aspirations for an independent state into a miserable Bantustan.

The Democrats intend to win the 2008 election on the basis of Bush's incompetent management of the Iraq occupation, but not to bring about any fundamentally different direction. Tactically, the Democratic leadership's trick is to wage the facsimile of a fight against Bush sufficient to hold onto the antiwar vote on which they absolutely depend, but not to risk actually winning it. This is particularly true of the party's de facto leader Hillary Clinton.

A more serious fight might occur if the administration follows through with its plans to attack Iran. There is little doubt that the then-dominant neoconservative faction headed by Dick Cheney,



Rove and Gonzales

two years ago, committed the Bush administration to war with Iran before leaving office.

The catastrophic failure in Iraq, however, has left no popular support for this level of insanity, even if the "official" Democratic opposition pretends not to know the war plan even exists, let alone trying to block it. (Most of the military elites also consider it crazy, except for the air force brass who apparently think they can bomb anything into oblivion.)

In this writer's tentative opinion, there's a more serious new factor that tends to further push back the war drive: the threat of the housing and credit crunch morphing into a serious recession.

With oil prices already at \$80 a barrel, with stock markets very uneasy and with the U.S. dollar falling fast, with U.S. corporations' domestic profits falling (although propped up by their international operations) and the emerging realities of rotten debts not only in housing mortgages but throughout the banking system, the shock of a new war today might have implications greater than 1973. No one really knows – but it seems logical that the ruling class wouldn't want to find out.

One way or another, one expects that corporate capital will have ways and means of stopping this rogue regime from playing geopolitical Russian Roulette with trillions of dollars of its hard-earned money. Still, it would feel a lot better if we had a mass movement to rely on to impose sanity.

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Eco-Socialism

Savage Capitalism - the Ecosocialist Alternative

Socialist Resistance

This is an edited version of the main document discussed at the September 1/2 annual general meeting of Socialist Resistance in Britain. The document explains why Socialist Resistance is changing its political programme, perspectives and public profile towards being an anti-capitalist, ecosocialist organisation. This is to make explicit a change in its perspectives that has been underway for at least a year and now needs to be signaled publicly. At the core of this change is the contention that free-market, privatising neoliberalism has over 20 years arrived at a new and deadly phase – what we call ‘savage capitalism’. The document explains why now only a socialist response that centrally addresses the environmental crisis is adequate to the current period.

1. Introduction: Savage capitalism – wrecking lives, wrecking the planet

Hardly anyone now doubts that humanity is facing an enormous environmental crisis. The recent report by the International Panel on Climate Change, although watered down to meet the objections of the worst polluters, spells out what this means in graphic detail. Billions will face disaster from flooding, desertification, water shortage and other environmental consequences of global warming - unless there is a radical reversal of humanity's production and consumption consequences. The events of this year's 'Typhoon Summer', in which there have been massive floods in the China, India, Australia, the UK and many other European countries – combined with soaring heatwaves of 40o-plus in southern Europe – can only be explained by climate change, around which there is now a massive scientific consensus.

Climate change may be a result of the industrialisation in general, but has been given a massive boost capitalist productivism, which has greatly intensified during the last 25 years of neoliberalism. To see how this has happened, it is worth looking at the old debate about the 'collapse' of work that was supposed to happen as computer technology became generalised.

In 1981 ASTMS (technical and scientific workers' union –ed) General Secretary Clive Jenkins published a book with the union's chief researcher, Barrie Sherman (now a Labour MP), entitled "*The Collapse of Work*". The basic idea was that with the application of computerisation, productivity would grow massively, leading to a rapid decline in the need for human labour. The question would be – how will we use all that leisure time? How are we going to ensure that the limited amount

of work is spread around, and that everyone gets paid? These problems, it was argued, could be easily overcome with a little bit of social engineering.

A quarter of a century on, nothing like this has happened. Computerisation has not led to the collapse of work; on the contrary there are more workers on a world scale than ever before – as Paul Mason puts it in his recent book *Live Working or Die Fighting*, the working class has 'gone global'. Even in countries with high levels of employment like Britain, people are working longer and harder. Average hours worked have gone up since 1981. The paradise of short working hours combined with affluence never happened. How can we explain this paradox? Jenkins' and Sherman's idea would only have worked if labour is mainly about social reproduction and satisfying human needs. But under capitalism it isn't.

The authors missed the crucial point – capitalism is about generating ever larger amounts of profits, which requires ever larger numbers of commodities and ever larger inputs of labour to exploit. So, 28 years down the line we live in a society with 42 brands of washing powder available at most supermarkets, 93 different personal bank account options, 72 family saloon car models available, 17 celebrity magazines, 56 brands of mp3 player in the shops (not counting the internet) and 541 different types of telephone you can install for your landline.

Cheap airlines go to 423 destinations from Britain, but domestic rail transport is unaffordable by most people! In return for all this, people work longer and harder, have less secure pensions and a more difficult old age, bad public services and health care, and



the poorer sections of society have a much worse quality of life overall. The gap between what is possible under the Sherman/Jenkins scenario and the realities of daily life today is immense.

It is this massive intensification of the production of (often useless and environmentally damaging) commodities that has given an extra twist to the environmental crisis.

All this has happened not only because of the general priorities of any form of capitalism, but because of the present phase of 'savage capitalism', stalking the earth with all sense of social responsibility abandoned, increasing amounts of surveillance, violence, war and torture, and aimed at short term profits squeezed from the labour of the poor, rather than the development of social solidarity, peace and the possibility for most people to live a happy life.

It is now obvious that this morbid phase of capitalism has brought upon humanity the biggest ever threat to its existence – the threat of environmental catastrophe.

The overall threat to humanity and the planet we sum up here under four headings – environmental catastrophe, imperialist war and the crushing of the third world, savage capitalism in everyday life and the surveillance-security lockdown state. They are all linked; they all are part of a single system of power and exploitation. 'Neoliberalism', with the added ingredient of US-style neoconservatism, has degenerated into a new and more barbarous phase – 'savage capitalism'.

This new phase of capitalism forces an inevitable conclusion – only by a total

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transformation in politics and production, in other words a transformation of our social relations, can a sustainable future for humanity be established. We are facing the biggest crisis of human civilisation ever. No previous crisis has ever posed the existence of human civilisation so directly. Revolutionary answers are needed, qualitative answers which go way beyond the standard 'no to' slogans of daily campaigns, and point the way to an eco-socialist alternative.

For *Socialist Resistance* this means a turn in our political stance, our campaigning priorities, our forms of organisation and our self-definition.

2. Ecological materialism and revolutionary ecology

Contemporary Marxism has been late in relating to the looming environmental crisis, ceding ground to the ecologists and the Green parties in the latter part of the 20th century - at least as far as the urgency of the situation is concerned. It is now time to reassert that not only is the defence of the environment firmly located in the Marxist tradition, but that it is only through such a critique that a lasting and adequate solution to the ecological crisis will be found.

A key theoretical refounder of this tradition has been John Bellamy Foster in his book *Marx's Ecology*. He systematically established that ecological conceptions were central to the ideas of Marx (and indeed of Darwin) in their battles to establish a materialist conception of history in the middle part of the 19th century. That it was the idea that humankind was a part of nature, a product of it rather than divine creation, which established the basis for the relationship between humankind and nature and an ecological as well as an historical-materialist conception of history.

Bellamy Foster consequently contends that: "Marx's world-view was deeply, and indeed systematically, ecological and that this ecological perspective derived from his materialism".

From the start Marx's notion of the alienation of human labour from what it produced was connected to an understanding of the alienation of human beings from nature. Marx pointed out that the commodification of nature under the capitalist mode of production and private ownership led to the "practical degradation of nature". In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* Marx points out that the large

towns workers had to endure conditions where light, air and cleanliness were no longer part of their existence but rather darkness, polluted air, and raw sewage, constituted their material environment.

It was in *Capital* that Marx's materialist conception of nature became fully integrated with his materialist conception of history. As Bellamy Foster points out: "Marx employed the concept of 'metabolism' to define the labour process as "a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism with nature in a rational way," completely beyond the capabilities of bourgeois society".

True Marx and Engels saw the issue of ecology as mainly from the point of view of the degradation of the life of the proletariat rather than a major factor in the revolutionary process itself - which is the concept ecosocialists or revolutionary ecologists have to come to terms with today. The goal, as Bellamy Foster puts it, is to "understand and develop a revolutionary ecological view of that links social transformation with the transformation of the human relation with nature in ways that we now consider ecological".

The *Socialist Resistance* ecosocialist turn also bases itself on work done by third world activists, including those clearly identified as part of the radical left, on the question of the environment. Vandana Shiva's 1992 critique of the Green revolution in India for example is a searing indictment of productivism in a rural agricultural context. Her activism and that of a whole section of the Indian left, particularly feminists, around water and in particular the question of dams has important lessons for us.

Our Latin America solidarity work has allowed us to discuss some of these questions, as Cuba and Venezuela have both attempted to integrate ecological dimensions into the revolutionary process.

3. Capitalist productivism

Revolutionary socialists have always been in favour of the development of the economy, on a global and national basis, to meet the needs of humanity. But that doesn't mean we favour the production of an increasing number of commodities of any type whatsoever. On the contrary, huge swathes of production under capitalism are socially useless, and either redundant or directly harmful. Some products - like cars - harm the environment directly;

others are useless and just use up huge amounts of the planet's resources.

In the past Marxists have acted as though the production of commodities and the use to which they are subsequently put have no impact on the environment. In fact they can have a huge effect on the environment. The profligate waste of the planet's resources in pursuit of an unending cascade of commodities, artificially created 'wants' generated by the advertising industry, is criminal. It only exists because that's the way that capitalism functions. The constant stream of 'new' commodities is vital to maintain profits and fight off rival firms.

However, our critique of the so-called 'commodity spectacle' does not mean we are against all further economic development, especially in the third world. Neither does it mean that decisive new inventions in the future should not be applied, and the level of technology should remain stagnant. But it does mean that new products have to be justified on the basis of their social usefulness, and not because they are a repackaging of an established product to make more profits.

We cannot abandon industrialisation and go back to the feudal village. But we can reorganise society so that the goods and services produced are socially useful and environmentally friendly. And we can make democratic decisions about the trade off that people want to make between working time and economic development. Maximising economic growth is far from rational because it means that the central priority in the lives of most people is (increasing amounts of) work.

That much production under capitalism is useless is obvious. A classic example is Margaret Thatcher's 'great car economy'. No rational person could possibly think that the socially and environmentally most friendly way to organise transport was to centre it on private cars, and leave public transport to fill in the gaps. But that is just what has happened in the last 25 years with catastrophic results to the environment and neglect of public transport.

Huge inputs of socially useless labour time are put into the design of competing yet near identical models, their advertising and sales, the consequences in terms of deaths and injuries on the roads, the production of oil to keep the cars going etc. A fraction of the inputs of labour time and energy could produce a functioning, socially useful and much more environmentally friendly integrated public

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transport system. But it doesn't happen because that is not the way that capitalism works. The 'great car economy' is a classic example of how human priorities are distorted by the priority of profits.

4. Social dimensions of the environmental crisis – Apocalypse Soon

The recent UN report highlighted the likely outcomes if global warming and carbon emissions are not tackled. It is not a question of whether climate change will occur – we are already in the thick of it. Rather the question is whether starting from today's position, how can we minimise further emissions of greenhouse gases and how we can manage the effects of global warming as they kick in.

In Britain the discussion of climate change has escalated but the "solutions" proposed remain marginal. The government has come up with a draft Bill which, though proposing statutory target for emissions, falls far short of what is necessary to tackle dangerous and accelerating climate change. Its proposed 60% cuts by 2050 and an interim 26-32% by 2020 are way below what is needed to prevent reaching the 2°C tipping point, when potentially global warming could spiral out of control. Many scientists and environmentalists now agree that reductions in the order of 90% are going to be necessary to reverse the global warming process already underway. Meanwhile airport expansion goes ahead at a great pace and the government tells us that there will be no need for people to restrict their flights.

We are told that in any case Britain only accounts for 2% of world emissions (not an accurate figure of course) and what ever we do will be massively cancelled out by the escalating rate of emissions in China and India - with China completing a new power coal-fired station every two weeks. This ignores the fact that it is the rich countries which have polluted the world and continue to be the main polluters. It also ignores that fact that there is little chance of countries like China and India doing anything serious about their emissions whilst the rich countries carry on polluting just the same.

As the IPCC report makes clear, the effects of desertification, water shortage and drought, crop loss and food crisis, an upsurge in diseases caused by lack of clean water and other environmental effects, will hit disproportionately at "those who are worst placed to deal with it" – ie the poor. The rural and urban poor are the least able to find the

resources to quickly modify their lives – to change location, to find alternative sources of water and food, to find medicines and medical care or to get emergency help in case of disaster. It will be the poor who will be the first victims of environmental crisis as the state and the ruling elite mobilises to defend the rich. This is true both in rural and urban areas, in the poor countries and the advanced capitalist countries as well.

In this context, the effects of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans was a highly symbolic warning. It is highly likely that it was a climate change induced event – hurricanes and tropical storms are becoming more frequent and fiercer as the oceans off West Africa and the Caribbean get hotter each summer.

Second, the victims were disproportionately poor. The troops rushed to the city were there to defend order (in the rich areas) and property (ditto). The poor were left to fend for themselves for days on end while hundreds died, while the rich plotted how to use the catastrophe for a class-based eviction of undesirables (ie the poor and black people). The tourist downturn area is restored to its full glory to ensure the tourist economy ticks over, while a huge section of the indigenous population is evicted.

In the third world, the increasing frequency of climate change-induced events, particularly floods, always hits the poor worst – because they live in the flimsiest housing, often in places were are insecure and dangerous – on floodplains, next to environmental squalor, with no adequate drainage and sanitation facilities.

Capitalism always rations resources in short supply towards the rich. Its weapons are military repression and the market – both are brutal killers. Environmental crisis will make security, health, food, water and adequate housing in extremely short supply – and the poor will go the wall unless they fight back. That's why we shall see increasingly that class struggles in the third world and beyond will take the form of struggles to get and to defend basic resources like food, food and housing. Privatisation will be deepened to make all resources difficult to obtain by the poor – and always available to the rich. For the rich, everything is cheap.

According to Mike Davis' *Planet of Slums*, of the world's 6bn people, one billion live and slums – and the number is increasing rapidly. Subject to the vagaries of environmental

damage, especially through floods, and with grave shortages of drinkable water and sanitation, the third world slums are likely to become – even more than today – massive centres for disease and the generation of pandemics. As Mike Davis points out, the first great wave of Avian 'flu is much more likely to come from Jakarta than East Anglia.

Mark Lynas in his book '*High Tide*' points out that the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine has estimated that 160,000 people are dying each year from the consequences of climate change - malaria, dysentery and malnutrition. And even that excludes some of the most extreme storm disasters plausibly linked to climate change, notably the tropical cyclone in Bangladesh in 1991, which killed 138,000, as well as Hurricanes Mitch and Andrew in the Caribbean, both hyper-intense category-five typhoons."

In it infamous document for a 'worst case' scenario, the Pentagon projects a world ecological collapse – not in 200 years but in 20 or 30 years. According to the *Observer* (22 Feb 2004):

"A secret report, suppressed by US defence chiefs and obtained by *The Observer*, warns that major European cities will be sunk beneath rising seas as Britain is plunged into a 'Siberian' climate by 2020. Nuclear conflict, mega-droughts, famine and widespread rioting will erupt across the world.

"The document predicts that abrupt climate change could bring the planet to the edge of anarchy as countries develop a nuclear threat to defend and secure dwindling food, water and energy supplies. The threat to global stability vastly eclipses that of terrorism, say the few experts privy to its contents."

The response of the Pentagon is a highly militarised society, "Fortress America", whose primary purpose is to keep out those fleeing from the poor countries, and to defend the rich internally from the wrath of the dispossessed poor. It envisages using massive amounts of violence, including nuclear weapons, against anyone who stands in the way of the US gaining the resources it needs from anywhere in the world.

If it is always the poor who will pay the price for environmental disaster, it will be particularly women and children who pay the price. Children because they are more vulnerable to disease, and less able to defend themselves from violence; and women because

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they have the main responsibility for childcare and child raising in nearly all poor societies – urban and rural, third world and first world. In the third world, it will be overwhelmingly women who have to try to find water, firewood and food for families. Climate catastrophe is not only a class question, it is also a gender question. Lack of food, shelter and water will increasingly force families to sell their children to become bonded labourers, virtual slave (as already happens on a mass scale in India) or sex slaves, as already happens in many countries of the third world.

A world of environmental catastrophe opens up the danger of massively increased militarism, repression and war. Ecological collapse may be survived by the rich minority, but it will devastate the poor. The fight against it is a vital part of the class struggle for socialism.

5. Population growth and the empowerment of women

World population is forecast to rise from a current 6 billion to 9 billion by mid century, if not before. Such levels are unsustainable under capitalism. So the debate about population control is already with us. If Malthusian, misogynist and racist solutions are not to triumph, ecosocialist solutions based on overcoming poverty and empowering women have to be fought for.

Whilst it is true that high birth rates generally accompany poverty and ignorance, most poor women do not actually want to spend their lives in childbirth and rearing. So a central demand of women's movements in both North and South has always been for access to safe and reliable (preferably free) contraception and abortion. Poor people often have large families as an insurance against poverty in old age. When people become richer, birth rates go down.

Collectivisation of housework has also been a demand of feminists and socialists, and we need to revisit this area, when considering an alternative to capitalist individualism. Domestic violence and violence against women always increases dramatically during any societal breakdown.

A world of environmental catastrophe opens up the danger of massively increased militarism, repression and war. Ecological collapse may be survived by the rich minority, but it will devastate the poor. The fight against it is a vital part of the class struggle for socialism.



6. Savage capitalism in the advanced countries: Treadmill Society

For 25 years the Western countries have been gripped by the policies of neoliberalism. This replaced the Keynesian, mixed economy, welfare-state model of the 1950s and '60s. The essence of this system is massive privatisation and marketisation; nationalised industries like the water and energy utilities are privatised, and privatisation to varying degrees is even introduced in to the education and health systems. Neoliberalism destroys social goods in favour of private goods; through privatisation of utilities and key aspects of social care like homes for the elderly, the financial surplus is squeezed out of workers current incomes and savings – all to the benefit of finance capital to whom all the utilities have huge debts. Mass insecurity is the result: the work process is transformed and labour discipline tightened. People work harder and longer to lead less secure and healthy lives.

This has been rightly characterised by John Bellamy Foster as the “treadmill society”. The devastating effects on the environment of the treadmill society have been described above. But now neoliberalism, as it degenerates into savage capitalism, is preparing another twist of the screw. This is called private equity capital (PEC). PEC constitutes a new and massive threat to millions of workers. Briefly summed up, private equity companies are short term arrangements for borrowing vast amounts of money for a limited time. These huge amounts of money are then used to buy up companies which are said to be ‘under-performing’ (like Sainsbury's, a target of private equity spivs). Once in the hands of PEC capitalists, the companies are asset stripped, workers fired, those retained pushed onto poverty wages without pensions or benefits, and a huge profit on the borrowed money. PEC evidently builds nothing, contributes nothing and makes nothing – except short-term profits. Gordon Gecko – Michael Douglas' asset stripping

sociopath in Wall Street - is a model of sanity and conscience compared with today's equity capitalist robbers. Needless to say PEC is warmly welcomed by New Labour, in particular Gordon Brown.

According to the *Independent* (2nd March 2007) “Gordon Brown praised the private equity industry's ability to create jobs yesterday despite the scathing attack on the sector from trade unions concerned over job losses.... Mr Brown is the latest Labour politician to address the private equity issue amid a growing storm around the industry. Trade unions and some Labour politicians have lambasted private equity companies for asset stripping, job cutting and a lack of openness over recent weeks as a potential bid for the supermarket chain Sainsbury's has thrown the publicity-shy industry into the spotlight.... Mr Brown's defence of the sector comes in the wake of Tony Blair's public support of private equity investment this week.” PEC mania comes at a time when savage capitalism is preparing for a major assault on the last-ditch redoubts of welfare capitalism – the NHS and education, where the methods of the market, artificial targets and the introduction of private capital are evident.

Neoliberalism has swiveled the priorities of production into luxury production, as more and more companies covet the luxury end of the market where profits are highest. You can see this clearly in the space allocated to ‘first’ and ‘business’ class on airlines, or on trains. Luxury goods – haute couture clothes, watches, luggage, yachts, luxury cars (including SUVs), luxury hotels, luxury mansion, high-value tourism and cruises – all these make much higher percentage profits per unit (often in the hundreds of per cent) than mass production goods. Luxury goods production adds insult to injury as far as the ordinary workers and the environment are concerned. Flaunting an unattainable lifestyle of comfort and ‘style’, these goods are literally socially useless and

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consume huge amounts of scarce raw materials (gold and silver!) and energy.

Savage capitalism is a counter-revolution against the gains of the workers movement in the post-war world. It wrecks the health and lives of millions of the working class and the middle class, and consigns them to the treadmill of insecurity and endless work, and increasingly to a poverty-stricken old age. All this in the interests of the mega-rich, who become richer by quantum leaps as class divisions and social inequality are deepened.

All this is held together by a deepening cultural dumbing down, the erosion of social solidarity and a brain-dead culture of 'success' and 'celebrity'. In a ghastly parody of Andy Warhol's prediction that everyone would become famous for 15 minutes, people now become celebrities for being famous, not for anything they have actually done. On humiliating and idiot TV programmes like Big Brother and Castaway, people compete to 'win' – and thus become famous and rich for being... a celebrity. The empty and boring lifestyles of the rich are endlessly celebrated to create a new morality which fundamentally breaks with that of even welfare capitalism – to be rich is worthwhile, to be poor is worthless. The inevitable result is a dumbing down of mass culture and the multiplication of worthless 'cultural' commodities – 85 television channels, nothing worth watching.

Our conclusion is that the fundamentals of inequality, power and wealth cannot be addressed in the advanced countries without a revolution in work, education, leisure and culture - not only in equality of reward, but in the nature of what is produced and how it is produced. Getting off the treadmill means leading a more human life with different priorities, different products, different sources of energy – and a different set of relations between people. A human society which defends the environment is incompatible with capitalism.

7. Fake pro-capitalist solutions

However, before turning increasingly to authoritarian solutions, capitalism will also try to mitigate and adapt to climate change, as well as co-opt anti-capitalist opposition. This involves the market, new technology and some rationing and taxation. It centres on the commodification of everything, down to the air itself. This is the meaning, for instance of Kyoto and similar regional and national agreements, which create carbon markets

basically advantageous to the imperialist North. We can expect a radical switch to 'low carbon economies' through lucrative investment in renewables and energy efficient products. This will include nuclear and all sorts of actually socially and environmentally damaging technology, spun as ways to save the planet.

As climate instability accelerates, corporate capitalism will also be faced with massive insurance bills (Hurricane Katrina is estimated to have cost \$140bn), a large part of which will be passed on to workers, but a significant part of which will be paid for by business itself. So we can expect panic measures to include ever more wacky and dangerous techno-fixes, such as giant sulphur screens to block out the sun and silver iodide bombs to divert the storm clouds (to where?). At the same time countries such as Canada and Russia will profit from a short term 'gold rush', as the melting ice-caps of the Arctic open up the last remaining fossil fuel deposits.

Measures such as the Clean Development Mechanism will colonise the South with carbon sinks and biofuel plantations, enabling the North to carry on polluting without changing lifestyles ecological profligacy in the North and consequent catastrophe in the South.

However it is necessary to be aware and critical of the role of the Southern elites in this process. Ugandan President Museveni recently called global warming "an act of aggression by the rich (of the North) against the poor (of the South)". Yet this man is currently allowing the selling off and destruction of his own country's rainforests and is brutally repressing opposition.

As precious resources are depleted and climate instability increases, so will the current wars in the South become more and more brutal (Darfur writ large). Millions will be forced to flee or submit 'for protection' and survival to ruthless warlords. We urgently need to integrate an understanding of this into campaigning work around refugees and asylum.

8. War and imperialism

Savage capitalism is at its most open and overtly brutal in its profligate use of violence. The term 'imperialism' to describe the US and British relations with countries of the third world, especially in the Middle East, is now hardly challenged – indeed in the case of people like Niall Ferguson and Michael Ignatieff – openly celebrated. Imperialist military intervention is

justified as part of the "war against terror". But it is clear that American imperialism has gone to war in the Middle East to capture control of the world's largest known oil reserves and the oil routes, but also to occupy a crucial part of Eurasia, which is regarded as central to ensure continued US economic and political dominance worldwide.

Faced with growing competition from Japan, Europe and now China, the United States has in the last 20 years unleashed the one instrument in which it is completely dominant internationally, the military. Today there are more than one million US service personnel stationed abroad. Eighteen years after the fall of the Berlin wall, the 'peace dividend' has not materialised, showing in its own way that US military aggression abroad was certainly not a matter of defending US interests against 'Communism'.

Today US military aggression – supported by the British, giving political cover – is aimed not just at regimes that the US regards as hostile, like Iran, but also against popular movements. In both the Philippines and Colombia US advisors and security 'consultants' from military firms like Blackwater, are part of a large scale US military intervention capability. US troops are now ensconced in the Central Asian republics and in the Horn of Africa, as well as their hundreds of bases worldwide. The vast expense of this massive military machine – and Britain's small scale imitation of it – is itself one of the most irrational uses of resources imaginable, and itself is causing massive environmental damage. Indeed imperialist militarism, savage capitalism and third world exploitation are at the 'cutting edge' of environmental damage.

Examples from imperialism's recent wars are legion. Israeli attacks on the Jiyee power plant in the summer of 2006 led to an oil slick which has probably destroyed Lebanon's coastal marine life and threatens the whole ecosystem of the eastern Mediterranean.

According to Mark Lynas: "More than 15,000 tonnes of fuel oil has leaked from the Jiyee power plant since it was attacked by Israeli warplanes on 13 July. As if deliberately to hamper any attempts to staunch the flow of oil, Israel then bombed the power plant again two days later, preventing emergency workers from gaining access to the site. An indication of the scale of the disaster comes from satellite photos showing a 3,000-square-kilometre

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slick along two-thirds of Lebanon's coastline. The oil has now begun to wash up in Syria.

"None of this will come as a surprise to the Palestinians, who have suffered the environmental consequences of Israel's scorched-earth policies for decades. The water supply to nearly a million people in Gaza was cut off by bombing last month. Untreated sewage lies in pools on the beach, thanks to Israeli shelling of the Gaza City wastewater treatment plant in 2002. Landfill sites are overflowing and on fire, and two pilot composting plants - constructed with outside help as an alternative to landfill - lie idle, having also been damaged by Israeli bullets."

The environmental effects of direct military intervention are of course just a small part of the overall environmental crisis for the peoples of the most exploited countries. Much of the most immediate environmental damage comes from extraction industries, notably logging, mining and the oil industry. Much of this is the result of bandit and semi-legal capitalism, which is generally in league with national governments and 'respectable' transnational corporations like BP, who drop their respectable mask when confronted with the 'natives'. Logging in particular is doing the most long-term damage with global implications, particularly the destruction of the Amazon rainforest and the destruction of Siberian forests to feed the demand of Chinese industry for wood, after the Chinese government banned logging in its own country because of a number of high profile disasters caused by logging (flooding and landslips).

The insanity of the military-imperial system is revealed by the massive expenditure and waste of two systems - the US anti-missile shield which over time will cost hundreds of billions of dollars and the Blair-Brown pledge to renew the Trident submarine missile system, which is expected to finally run out at a cost of something like £70 billion.

Today, the bi-partisan policy of the US ruling class that backed the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan has crumbled in the face of the setbacks (quagmire), which the US-led coalition has suffered. However, the debate in Washington is not questioning the strategic importance for the USA of controlling the Gulf region, but how to do it successfully. Nonetheless, the US administration has shown its determination to continue its war effort with the policy of the 'surge', but not only in Iraq. In Afghanistan, Palestine, the latent war in the

Lebanon, its intervention in Somalia and its very public preparations for war against Iran, indicate its preparedness to broaden the scope of its interventions. (See FI resolution: Middle East in Flames, published in Resistance No 43, March-April 2007.)

The divisions in the imperialist ruling classes are creating favourable conditions for a renewed offensive by the anti-war movements in the imperialist centres and it is urgent that we build/rebuild the movements.

We stand for:

- An end to all imperialist expeditions and the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan;
- Against any provocations or attacks on Iran;
- For the withdrawal of NATO troops from Lebanon;
- For an end to interference in Palestinian internal affairs and for the lifting of sanctions on the Palestinians.
- We support all resistance movements against imperialist intervention that do not engage in sectarian killings, in particular Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine, while criticising their religious fundamentalism and their political and social programme.
- We prioritise establishing links of solidarity with the trade unions (for example, the independent Oil Workers Union in Iraq), and political forces who are constructing progressive and socialist struggles in the region (for example, the Lebanese CP). Our aim is to assist in the emergence of a socialist left in the region, which is democratic, feminist and anti-imperialist.

9. Global injustice - Latin America fights back

Savage capitalism everywhere attempts to further enslave and exploit the countries of the third world. It is not surprising that some of the most advanced examples of revolt against neoliberalism and imperialist exploitation have emerged in the poor countries - particularly Latin America. As we saw negatively with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the existence of positive examples - in life and not just in theories and programmes - is vital for developing opposition movements and an anti-capitalist perspective.

On no continent is neoliberalism so widely rejected as in Latin America, and nowhere has the resurgence of the Left been so powerful. The election of Evo Morales in Bolivia and the evolution of the Hugo Chávez government in Venezuela are hugely ideologically important. Whatever the direction and eventual outcome of these governments, they have already done an enormously important thing - raised the banner of socialism as a mass current with mass credibility again. This is especially important in relation to the younger generations for whom the ideology and reality of socialism has less purchase.

Even the election of moderate centre-left governments, like those of Lula in Brazil, Bachelet in Chile and Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay are the product of a long period of struggle against neoliberalism and the right. While we solidarise with all movements fighting back against savage capitalism internationally, the central thing about the Latin American developments is that they centrally raise the question of socialism. A central part of our orientation in the next period will be:

- Solidarity with the developing revolutionary processes in Bolivia and Venezuela.
- Defence of Cuba against the deepening reactionary offensive of imperialism, which will hit crescendo levels when Fidel Castro dies.
- Propaganda on the advances made in Cuba, especially in the fields of social welfare, health and the environment, as demonstrations of what can be achieved, even in a poor country, on an anti-capitalist basis.

10. The surveillance- security, lock-down state

Today a new regime of security is being introduced by the major states, in the first place Britain and the United States. Savage capitalism has created a more unstable world and for the ruling class new methods of surveillance and repression. As well as restrictions on civil liberties are needed to deal with it. Terrorism is in reality a small problem and used only as the banner headline behind which the new repressive state mobilises against national and international protest movements.

The real targets are labour movements, global justice and peace movements and movements for national self-determination. Only a small minority of these struggles have a military dimension (Palestine, the Kurdish question),

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but increasingly movements which use the normal methods of mass mobilisation (which may include civil disobedience) are the victims of paramilitary repression.

The worst examples are still in the third world – for example the struggle in Oaxaca State Mexico in 2006, led by the school teachers, against a hugely corrupt state government. Dozens were killed and disappeared; others committed to indefinite jail with no appeal. However mass movements in advanced capitalist democracies also find themselves increasingly hemmed in by new police powers and restrictions, and sometimes simply by brutal police.

Surveillance of the domestic population is at its highest level ever. Vast new databases and sophisticated computer equipment enables the US government especially, but also governments in other imperialist states, to monitor all email and internet traffic and to build up a detailed real-time profile of the activities of any citizen. There is a secular trend towards the criminalisation of more and more forms of protest, or at least to make forms of protest dependent on the indulgence and toleration of the state – which can easily be withdrawn.

In the United States this has resulted in the Patriot Act, which essentially gives the state the right to illegalise anything, and hold anyone in secret detention for indefinite amounts of times and in secret.

At an international level this has led to the re-legitimisation of torture and the huge secret Gulag of US prison camps and ‘special rendition’, where torture is used or – in the case of special rendition, torture is outsourced to third world regimes.

The security-repressive state goes hand in hand with the new imperialism. In many places (the Philippines, Colombia and Palestine) local repressive states work hand-in-hand with US special forces, private armies like Blackwater and/or the CIA. Savage capitalism has created a vast continent of repression and violence with a daily toll of the murdered, the disappeared and the tortured. This is justified and even celebrated in the ideologically most backward parts of modern society (like video games).

Defending civil liberties and opposing militarism is a crucial part of the fight for socialism and human civilisation today. The move towards mass surveillance and restrictions on civil liberties, including the

para-militarisation of the policing of protest is, as we have seen in the Pentagon’s plans for eco-catastrophe, laying the basis for a more total lock-down state if apocalypse happens. The catastrophic results of environmental breakdown, including an outpouring of desperate eco-migration, could only be managed on the basis of military dictatorship.

11. Strategy and the fightback

Our strategic conclusion on planetary crisis should start with the following assumptions:

a) Creating a sustainable civilisation requires a wholesale conversion of production and consumption, and this is incompatible with capitalism. Not only are the corporations and government unwilling to act against short-term capitalist interests, but as we explained above a sustainable environment is contrary to the inbuilt productivism bias of the capitalist mode of production.

b) Environmentalism without class, without anti-capitalism, has massive limitations which invalidate it as a long-term strategy. Indeed the kind of green politics which attempts to counterpose itself to left and right can be positively damaging to the kind of alliances necessary to confront eco-catastrophe.

c) At the same time as trying to elaborate a new Marxism for the 21st century which builds on Marx’s understanding of a materialist approach to the environment in order to meet the challenge of climate change, we continue to put forward a Marxism that is feminist, anti-racist and opposed to homophobia.

In Britain at least some of the programmatic gains in sections of the revolutionary left that were won as a result of the self-organisation of women and of black people particularly have to some extent been lost in a period where the working class as a whole suffered a whole range of defeats under first Thatcherism and then New Labour.

This means that we need to rediscuss some of these questions in and of themselves with comrades who were not part of the same historical experiences and bring our analysis up to date in order to attempt a new synthesis in developing an accessible Marxism for today.

We don’t think there is any contradiction in doing this while at the same time developing an eco-socialist approach – rather we think that these discussions will enrich and complement each other. This is important at two levels: giving us a chance to succeed in the synthesis

that is necessary in its own right and developing the sort of profile we want through our press, web sites, educational events etc.

d) As is traditional in our politics we do not counterpose reforms to anti-capitalist transition. However we do point out the extremely small gains which are likely to be made on climate change without national and international planning and without a massive social and economic conversion.

e) The decisive force on a world scale for anti-capitalist struggle remains the workers’ movement. A central fight for Marxists is that to win the workers movement to an environmentalist (and hence eco-socialist) perspective. A massive aid to this is the example of environmentally friendly mobilisation and policies of Cuba, and to a lesser extent Venezuela.

Evidently the major forces willing to take to the streets today on the environmental question are in diverse protest movements (and none), and generally not from the workers movement. Huge forces can develop on this issue outside the workers movement. For us – as is normal in our united front politics – an alliance of the workers movements and social movements, on a class struggle and anti-capitalist basis, is what we fight for. However, we do not consider all these forces to be equivalent in strategic terms.

This is not a moral question, but one of hard headed political and social analysis which has been explained well in recent articles by Daniel Bensaid and Martha Harnecker. Bensaid says:

“From a certain point of view, capitalism will indeed be overthrown by an alliance, or a convergence, of mass social movements. But even if these movements, because of their liberatory projects, perceive capitalism to be their enemy (which perhaps is the case for the women’s movement or the environmental movement, not just the workers movement), I don’t think these movements all play an equivalent role. And all are traversed by differences and contradictions that reflect their position, in the face of capital as a global mode of domination.

“There is a ‘naturalist’ feminism and a revolutionary feminism, a profoundly anti-humanist environmentalism and a humanist and social environmentalism... if you consider these arenas are not structured in a hierarchy, but simply juxtaposed, then perhaps you could devise a tactic of putting together changing

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coalitions ('rainbow coalitions' on immediate questions). But there would be no solid strategic convergence in such an approach. I think, on the contrary, that within a particular mode of production (capitalism), relations of exploitation and class conflict constitute an overarching framework that cuts across and unifies the other contradictions.

"Capital itself is the great unifier that subordinates every aspect of social production and reproduction, remodeling the function of the family, determining the social division of labour and submitting humanity's conditions of social reproduction to the law of value. If that is indeed the case, a party, and not simply the sum of social movements, is the best agent of conscious unification."

Martha Harnecker says:

"... when one criticizes parties, people think one is betting on the emergence of movements that will lead the struggle. Social movements are sectoral movements and require an instrument for articulation, call it party, sociopolitical movement, front, or whatever. But what's needed are political instruments that articulate and raise a national proposal, that make an ideological proposal in today's world, where the wars are fought in the plane of ideas, where the means of communication in the hands of the powerful are almost overpowering. We can see what is happening with the media in Venezuela."

Swiveling our orientation towards ecosocialism however does not alter our fundamental strategy, but it requires its renovation:

a) We maintain our orientation towards the creation of a broad anti-capitalist, ecosocialist party to the left of Labour, as a first step towards resolving the crisis of leadership of the working class and other popular layers.

b) We need to develop an action programme of immediate and transitional demands which incorporate the centrality of the fight to save the environment.

What does it mean to call Socialist Resistance 'Ecosocialist'?

To define ourselves by the term ecosocialist does not mean dropping our commitment to anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, feminism and the rights of the oppressed, anti-racism, etc. Nor does it mean a radical version of the Green Party: rather it is a recognition that capitalism cannot solve the problems posed by climate change and global warming as, by

its very nature, it is based on production for profit not need, regardless of the impact on the planet. It is therefore either 'Ecosocialism or Barbarism'.

12. Anti-capitalist positions on key environmental debates

However, as well as exposing the incapacity of capitalism, especially in its present 'savage' or 'morbid' phase, dominated as it is by neo-liberal economic strategies, to resolve the ecological problems it has created, we also have to develop our politics on more immediate issues raised by the crisis. But these responses have to be founded on a socialist framework – using Marxist theory and class analysis to pose solutions. For example on the vexed issue of green taxes, all other mainstream parties, including the Greens, have a policy of taxation to try and deal with carbon emissions. The congestion charge, already in place in parts of London (and being introduced in Manchester, Durham and elsewhere), has reduced the number of cars entering the centre of London. But it is clear that the reduction is based on the cars of the poor.

Traveling in central London during the week shows this clearly – only large expensive cars and taxis are on the road. Poor people have been forced, especially since the hike in the cost to £8.00 a day, to take inadequate and overcrowded public transport. It is true that some money raised has gone to improve public transport – but not to reduce fares that are the most expensive of any city in the world.

The congestion charge is a flat tax (like the poll tax) that penalises the poor, and is divisive. The only form of capitalist taxation socialists can support would be steeply progressive taxation intended to drive the large gas-guzzlers off the road. In other words a tax on the rich. Similarly on the question of air travel emissions. The government pretends that these are not very high, but international air travel is not at present counted as part of British emissions. It is true that there is no tax on air fuel as there is on fuel for cars, buses, etc. but the proposal to raise a flat tax on air travel, either on fuel or flights will again hit the poor and we should oppose it.

But we also need an answer to the problem of increasing air travel. The fairest way to reduce emissions would be to ration its use to say one or two flights a year, or to a number of air miles traveled. In addition, so that the rich cannot buy others' rations, this should be made illegal. No doubt in our present system

an illegal market would come into existence, but we have to argue for what is just and fair and in the interests of the working class and the poor, not only what is possible at once. Nor is it not simply a question of justice.

We have to work out ways of uniting as many as possible to what is necessary. Ordinary people will not change their outlook if they feel they are the only ones having to pay. This will certainly be the project of the rich – make the poor pay, both here in the developed world, and in the developing world, but we have to propose an alternative. "Contraction and Convergence" is another controversial issue on the left. Developed by Aubrey Meyer, the theory accepts that the present situation has been created by the industrialised world and that we have to drastically cut back our emissions – the 'contraction' bit. The developing world, quite properly also wishes to industrialise and this should be allowed – up to a certain point.

At a fixed point in the future and this must be agreed by international treaty for it to work, the contracting emissions of the developed world will coincide with the increased emissions of the developing world - this is the 'convergence' bit. But this theory incorporates a 'carbon-trading' element. That is the rich countries could buy rights of emission from the less emitting developing areas if they produce less carbon than their ration. We should therefore oppose it.

The majority of the more or less organised currents look to capitalist solutions in market mechanisms, carbon trading, supplemented by taxation. The currently operated system is the European Union's Emissions Trading System (ETS), is the most regressive of all carbon-trading schemes and operates according to the principle laid down at Kyoto. Permits for 6527 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emission have been allocated to big energy users.

This does not encourage cleaner energy but simply given them a profit bonanza, as the price of permits rose to €27, making the whole distribution worth €177 billion. They have also passed on 'extra costs' to the consumer even though they did not have to buy the permits – leading to rising prices. The EU officials have said that they new this would happen and state that the market economy is the only way (i.e., higher prices) that energy consumption will fall.

Most climate change activists oppose Kyoto and the EU schemes Contraction and

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Convergence (C&C) is seen as an alternative to the EU (ETS) and the Kyoto protocol and is the most widely supported system, but there are other systems that are hotly debated, most of which involve carbon trading and taxation of some kind, but some are more equitable (a key word in the movement) than others. The more equitable systems, for example, Cap and Share (C&S), or Tradable Energy Quotas (TEQs), which involve capping and the distribution of tradable allowance to the population based on the equal 'right to emit'. However, there is no such human right under capitalism except for those rights claimed by the owners of the means of production.

Our biggest immediate policy difference (there is a big programmatic gulf) with the capping movement is their insistence on tradable allowance. We oppose this because it benefits the big emitters and penalizes the working class (ironically this is often the main objection to a tax perspective by those left leaning Greens).

We should support planned capping (or equitable rationing) without the right to trade (e.g., as in Second World War). The reply, like all reformists of the existing system, is that we are unrealistic because without trading of carbon permits it would be totally unacceptable to big companies and would probably bring the capitalist system down.

Carbon trading (along with taxation) is the premier bourgeois answer to climate change, allowing the rich north and west to buy their way out of trouble while keeping the poor south and east in a pre-or semi-industrialised state. The Stern Report itself, while recognising the failure of the market, nonetheless poses the same mechanism to solve the crisis.

13. Our Demands

Ecosocialists have to start from a class analysis, an analysis that can unite the largest possible number of people to make the rich, not the poor, pay. We support the building of a mass movement, nationally and internationally to impose the types of demand below.

- For a unilateral reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in Britain of 90% by 2030, with similar reductions in other developed countries;
- For an international treaty to cap global carbon emissions, not because we think this is an easy option, or even likely to be achieved (this depends on the balance of forces), but

because it is necessary and can unite the movements internationally against the failures of the capitalist system;

- For international rationing of air travel, any market in rations to be made illegal;
- Opposition to nuclear energy and the building of any new nuclear power stations;
- For a massive expansion of renewable energy;
- For subsidies from national and local government:
 - to replace the use of cars by providing cheap, accessible and frequent public transport;
 - to ensure all new buildings are zero-carbon;
 - to provide insulation, energy conservation, etc. for all homes to make them energy efficient.

• On climate change we should campaign around the following transitional and immediate demands which are designed to halt and reverse the global warming process and thus prevent climate chaos and rising sea levels. These should include a 90% reduction in fossil fuel use by 2050, based on a 6% annual target, monitored by independent scrutiny. The industrialised countries, who have caused the problem, must take the lead in this. The most impoverished peoples are paying the highest price for the actions of the advanced countries. There is no point in asking them to take measures not being taken in the industrialised countries.

This means:

- Cancellation of the third-world debt. There is no point on calling on impoverished countries to tackle climate change if they are saddled with debt.
- A massive increase in investment in renewable energy including solar, wind wave, tidal and hydro power (with the exception of destructive mega-dam projects). These should be monitored for anti-social consequences. No nuclear power.
- End the productivist throwaway society: production for use and not for profit.
- Tough action against industrial and corporate polluters.

• Free, or cheap, integrated publicly owned transport systems to provide an alternative to the car.

- Nationalisation of rail, road freight and bus companies.
- Halt airport expansion, restrict flights and end binge flying. Nationalise the airlines.
- Redesign cities to eliminate unnecessary journeys and conserve energy
- Scrap weapons of mass destruction and use the resources for sustainable development and renewable energy.
- Massive investment to make homes more energy efficient. Moves towards the collectivisation of living spaces.
- Nationalisation of the supermarkets, localised food production and a big reduction in food miles.
- No GM crops for food or fuel.
- End the destruction of the rain forests.
- Defend the rights of climate change refugees and migrants. Protect those hit by drought, desertisation, floods, crop failure and extreme weather conditions.
- Renationalise water and protect water reserves. End the pollution of the rivers and the water ways.

14. Tasks

Another document deals with the detailed tactical and organisational consequences of the ecosocialist turn.

However, our strategic approach will be governed by the following guidelines

- We seek to build a broad ecosocialist, anticapitalist, current in the labour movement and the left, among young people and among environmentalists, including the Greens.
- We fight to win the labour movement to campaigning against environmental catastrophe as a central concern and priority.
- We fight to win environmentalists and youth to an understanding that ecological sanity is incompatible with capitalism and that an eco-friendly world means socialism.

Socialist Resistance is a Marxist tendency in Britain involving supporters of the Fourth International and other revolutionary socialists.

Marxism

Thirty years after: A critical introduction to the Marxism of Ernest Mandel

Daniel Bensaïd

The first edition by the Fondation Léon Lesoil of this Introduction to Marxism [1] dates from 1974. The date is not without importance. After the "oil shock" of 1973, Ernest Mandel was undoubtedly one of the first to diagnose the exhaustion of the post war boom and predict the reversal of the long wave of growth which followed the Second World War [2].

The debates inside the European left and workers' movement nonetheless remained marked by the illusion of an unlimited progress guaranteed by a Keynesian compromise and a "Welfare State". This optimistic vision of historical development gave the parliamentary left and the trade union apparatuses the hope of socialism at a tortoise pace, respectful of existing institutions while awaiting the political majority to join the social majority, in countries where – as illustrated in May '68 by the greatest general strike in history – waged labour represented for the first time two thirds of the active population. Mandel's Introduction is not then a text out of its time.

If it is still valid today for its pedagogic qualities in the presentation of the genesis of capitalism, the functioning of the economy, cyclical crises, combined and unequal development and so on, it nonetheless has a polemical dimension, of which certain essential elements have been amply confirmed by the thirty years which have passed since its publication.

- The logic of capitalism does not tend to a progressive reduction of inequalities, indeed to their extinction. If these inequalities had seemed to decline in the post-war period, it is not because of the generosity of a compassionate capitalism, but a social relationship of forces emerging from the war and the resistance, the wave of colonial revolutions, and the great fear which the ruling classes had experienced during the 1930s and the Liberation. Since the beginning, in the 1980s, of neoliberal counter-reform, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has recorded from year to year a growth of inequalities, not only between countries of the South and the North but also between the richest and the poorest even inside the developed countries, and between the sexes despite the conquests of women's struggles. Not only were "the social state" and the "mixed economy" not eternal, not only were they not the solution finally found to the contradictions and crises of capitalism, but nothing, contrary to reformist illusions, is definitively won for workers as long as the possessors hold ownership of the great means of production and the levers of power. Thatcher and Reagan would not be slow to demonstrate it. And George W. Bush confirms in his manner that the epoch remains that of wars and revolutions.

- Private ownership of the means of production, exchange, communication, far from being diluted by popular share ownership, is undergoing an unprecedented concentration, and it exerts the corresponding effective power, not only in the economic sphere, but in the political and media sphere. For anyone who has not renounced the urgent necessity of "changing the world" the radical transformation of property relations in the sense of social appropriation remains just as decisive as at the time of the Communist Manifesto. And it is still truer at a time of globalisation, where capital commodifies everything, where the privatisation of the world extends to education, health, living organisms, knowledge and space.

- If the state is not longer solely a "band of armed men" or the "night watchman state", if it fulfils sophisticated and complex functions within social reproduction, an "ideological function" as Mandel stresses, it is not for all that one relation of power among others (domestic, cultural, symbolic). It remains very much the guarantor and lock of power relations, the "boa constrictor" which hugs society in its multiple rings. So it is still necessary to open the road to its withering away as a specialised apparatus separated from society. All the revolutions of the 20th century, both victories and defeats, have confirmed this major lesson of the Paris Commune.

In spite of this verified pertinence, Mandel's Introduction to Marxism is marked by certain silences. The 1970s saw a new planetary rise of the movements for women's emancipation. The Fourth International adopted an important programmatic document on the question at its 11th world congress in 1979. However, in Mandel's text gender relations occupy at best a marginal place. In the same way, whereas ecological concerns came to the forefront notably following the movements against nuclear power stations or the Three Mile Island disaster, they are practically absent from the first edition of this Introduction.

That can probably be explained — but not justified — by the humanist and Promethean optimism which then coexisted for Mandel with an undisputable lucidity on the ambivalence of technical progress and the threat of barbarism.



This incoherence – or this contradiction – is confirmed by the role that he attributes, when responding to the challenges of the transition to a socialist society, to what I call "the joker of abundance". : "An egalitarian society founded on abundance, there is the goal of socialism". This march to abundance implies a growth of productive forces and the productivity of labour allowing a massive reduction of working time. If that is true in general terms, again it is necessary, under pain of falling into blind productivism and ecological insouciance, to subject these productive forces themselves to a critical examination. Incidentally, the notion of abundance is highly problematic. The supposition of an absolute abundance and of a saturation of natural needs indeed appears as a loophole before the necessity of establishing priorities and choices in the allocation of limited resources: how to allocate to health, education, housing, transport, how to decide the localisation of these investments and so on? Is there a natural limit to needs in the area of health or education? Like abundance, the needs are historic and social, thus relative.

One can consider rightly that the logic of commodity consumption arouses and nourishes artificial needs, luxuries, unnecessary, which a socialist society could very well do without. But the step from this to preaching austerity and frugality to the poor is one that certain ideologues of zero growth do not hesitate to cross. Who can distinguish between true and false needs, the good and the bad? Certainly not a group of experts, but the democratic arbitration of associated producers and users.

Indeed the recourse to the joker of abundance allows the avoidance, or at least simplification, not only of the question of social priorities in an ecosystem subject to limits and thresholds, but also that of democratic institutions in a society in transition to socialism. It is certainly not about demanding a democratic utopia delivered with the preconceived plans of a perfect city, but rather stressing the decisive importance of democratic forms in a society where the withering away of the state is in no way synonymous with a withering way of politics in the simple "administration of things" (as has been suggested by a formula unhappily borrowed - by Engels notably – from Saint-Simon).

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One cannot reproach Mandel for this under-estimation, to the extent that he was the main writer of the resolution "Socialist Democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat", adopted in 1979 by the 11th world congress of the Fourth International. But the fact is that his insistence on the theme of abundance tends to relativise the role of politics to the profit of a technical management of distribution without limits: "employees should replace the remuneration of labour by free access to all the goods necessary to the satisfaction of the needs of the producers.

Only in a society which ensures to humanity such an abundance of goods can a new social consciousness be born". It is right that he held this question of "free access", not only to certain health or educational services, but to basic needs in foodstuff or clothing, particularly close to his heart. It follows from the decommodification of the world and a veritable revolution in consciousness, for the first time putting an end to the biblical curse obliging humanity to win its bread "by the sweat of its brow".

Thus Mandel insisted: "Such abundance of goods is in no way utopian, on condition that it is introduced gradually, and starting from a progressive rationalisation of human needs, emancipated from the constraints of competition, the hunt for private enrichment, and the manipulation by advertising intended to create a state of permanent dissatisfaction among individuals. Thus the progress in living standards has already created a situation of saturation of consumption in bread, potatoes, vegetables, some fruits, indeed milk, and fat and pork products among the poorest section of the population of the imperialist countries. A similar tendency can be seen among undergarments, shoes, basic furniture and so on. All these products could be progressively freely distributed, without the intervention of money, and without involving significant increases in collective expenditure".

This logic of free access as the condition for the partial withering away of monetary relations remains current. The accent put on the conditions of "saturation of consumption" for the least poor part of the population in the richest countries leaves however in the shadows the weight of planetary inequalities and the relation of production to demographic evolution. The notion of "progressive rationalisation of human needs", although pertinent to the critique of the mode of life induced by capitalist competition, should not be confused with that of abundance, unless it is an abundance relative to a given state of social development which does not dispense with criteria and priorities in the use and distribution of wealth. Politics, and thus "socialist democracy" and not "the administration of things", remains then

necessary to the validation of needs and to the fashion of satisfying them.

The most dated part of the 1974 Introduction, which most badly withstands the test of time and the events of the last quarter of a century is undoubtedly that concerning Stalinism and its crisis. Mandel here takes up the essentials of the analysis of the Left Opposition and Trotsky on the bureaucratic counter-revolution in the USSR and on its reasons: "The reappearance of increased social inequality in the USSR of today can be basically explained by the poverty of Russia immediately after the revolution, by the insufficiency of the level of development of productive forces, by isolation and the defeat of the revolution in Europe during the period of 1918-1923". This approach had the merit of stressing the social and historic conditions of the bureaucratic gangrene, unlike the currently fashionable reactionary historiography, typified by among others the Black Book of Communism – for which great historic dramas are only the mechanical result of what had germinated in the fertile minds of Marx or Lenin, when not simply "the fault of Rousseau". Serious contemporary research backed up by the opening of the Soviet archives (that of Moshe Lewin notably) confirms to a large extent the method of Mandel and sheds light on the different stages of the bureaucratic reaction in the Soviet Union.

Mandel takes up the classic analysis of the bureaucracy in the tradition of the Left Opposition to Stalinism: the bureaucracy is not "a new dominant class"; it "plays no indispensable role in the process of production"; it is "a privileged layer which has usurped the exercise of the functions of management in the Soviet economy and state, and on the basis of this monopoly of power granted itself lavish advantages in the area of consumption". Although debatable (the definition of classes – in the broad and historic sense, or in the sense specific to modern societies – is not clearly established by Marx himself) the distinction between fundamental classes and bureaucratic caste strives to analyse the singularity of an unprecedented phenomenon. It avoids the simplification of characterising the Soviet Union or China as "countries of socialism" requiring an unconditional fidelity, or inversely identifying them simply as an eastern version of western imperialisms.

But Mandel goes further. The bureaucracy is only a "privileged social layer of the proletariat". As such, "it remains opposed to the reestablishment of capitalism in the USSR which would destroy the very foundations of its privileges". The Soviet Union remains then "as in the days following the October revolution a society in transition between capitalism and socialism; capitalism can be restore there, but at the price of a social counter-revolution; the

power of the workers can be restored there, but at the price of a political revolution which breaks the monopoly of the exercise of power in the hands of the bureaucracy."

Yet, by the 1970s, too much water had flowed under the bridges of history, and too many crimes had been committed, to claim such a continuity between the Soviet society of Brezhnev and the "the days following the October revolution". As for the ruling bureaucracy, it would not be slow in demonstrating that it was not such a determined "adversary" to the restoration of capitalism.

Even taking into account the didactic intention, this passage from the Introduction does not stand up to the test of time. On the one hand, in reducing the bureaucracy to a functional excrescence of the proletariat, Mandel excludes the hypothesis of its transformation into a dominant class in its own right. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the velvet revolutions in eastern Europe have shown on the contrary that a substantial fraction of the bureaucracy can, on the basis of a "primitive bureaucratic accumulation" ripen into a gangster bourgeoisie. On the other hand the not very dialectical conception of the bureaucracy as "parasitic excrescence of the proletariat" underpins a debatable alternative between social counter-revolution and political revolution.

The hypothesis of a restoration of capitalism as "social counter-revolution" evokes in effect a symmetry between the events of the October revolution and this counter-revolution. Indeed, and this is the interest of the analogic notion of Thermidor, a counter-revolution is not a revolution in the opposite direction (a revolution reversed), but the contrary of a revolution, not a symmetrical event to the revolutionary event, but a process. In this sense, the bureaucratic counter-revolution in the Soviet Union certainly began in the 1920s and the collapse of the Soviet Union is only the final episode.

If it is necessary, in the light of the last twenty years, to criticize Mandel's reading of the situation, that should not prevent us from recognising that it had its uses in providing an orientation in the tumults of the century. It should also be recognised that it led to errors of appreciation, notably on the meaning of perestroika under Gorbachev or that of the fall of the Berlin wall. Having identified in "the decline of the international revolution after 1923" and in the backwardness of the Soviet economy, "the two main pillars of the power of the bureaucracy", Mandel deduced from this logically that with the rise of the Soviet economy (symbolised by Sputnik) and the renewed rise of the world revolution (in the colonial countries, but also in Europe after

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May 68), the hour of the political revolution was going to sound in the USSR and in Eastern Europe.

The overestimation of the "socialist gains" supposed to facilitate a political revolution democratising already constituted social relations thus led him in his book *Beyond Perestroika* (1989) to overestimate the dynamic of the political revolution and to underestimate the forces of capitalist restoration. In the same way his understandable enthusiasm concerning the overthrow of the Berlin Wall led him to interpret the event as a return to the tradition of Rosa Luxemburg and the workers' councils, after a long interval of reaction, and to underestimate the restorationist logic inscribed in the relationship of international forces. This was not only a manifestation of optimism of the will on his part, but very much an error of judgement stemming in part from theoretical roots.

His vision rested on the conception, shared inside the Fourth International since its congress of 1963, of a convergence between the "three sectors of the world revolution": the democratic revolution in the colonial countries, the social revolution in the imperialist metropolises, the anti-bureaucratic political revolution in the post-capitalist countries. In the 1960s, this perspective was not lacking in factual indices: the shock wave of the Chinese revolution, the victory of the Cuban revolution and the liberation struggles in Algeria, Indochina, and the Portuguese colonies; the anti-bureaucratic uprising in Budapest in 1956, the Prague spring in 1968, anti-bureaucratic struggles in Poland; resumption of social struggles and big strike movements in France, Italy, and Britain in the 1960s; the breakdown of the Franco and Salazar dictatorships.

In the midst of the 1970s, with the halting in 1975 of the Portuguese revolution, the monarchical transition in Spain, the split between Vietnam and Cambodia, the turn towards austerity of the European lefts, the normalisation in Czechoslovakia then the Polish coup, the winds had begun to change, and the "three sectors", far from converging harmoniously, had begun to diverge. Centrifugal forces triumphed. The bureaucratic struggles in the East were not led in the name of the workers' councils or self-management ("give us back our factories!") as was still the case in 1980 during the Solidarnosc congress, but were informed by mirages of western consumer society. The unequal reflux of deep-seated social revolutions announced the counter wave of "velvet revolutions", Foucault perceiving one of the first importance during the Iranian revolution of 1979.

Starting from a famous formula of Trotsky in the Transitional Programme, according to which "the crisis of humanity" is reduced to



the crisis of revolutionary leadership, Mandel often had recourse, in taking account of an unexpected turn of events, to the notion of delay. The objective conditions of the revolution will be nearly always ripe, indeed overripe. Lacking only is the "subjective factor", absent or at least considerably behind in relation to the right moment of history.

If the old ideas continue to dominate the workers movement, "it is due to the force of inertia of consciousness which still retards material reality". This idea of a delay attributable to "the force of inertia of consciousness" is strange. Certainly, the owl of Minerva is said to only take flight at dusk, but the difficulties of class consciousness stem much more from the effects of the alienation of labour and commodity fetishism than to a reassuring time lag, suggesting that consciousness will come late, but will necessarily come. At least if it does not come too late?

The notion of "delay", like that of "detour", also frequently used by Mandel, presupposes a debatable normative conception of historic development. It introduces moreover a problematic relation (not very dialectical, whatever Mandel says in the methodological part of his Introduction – chapters 16 and 17 on the materialist dialectic and historical materialism) between the "objective conditions" and the "subjective conditions" of revolutionary action. If the objective conditions are as promising as is claimed, how can we explain the fact that the subjective factor is so unreliable in most of its incarnations? Such a divorce between the two could lead to a paranoia of treason: if the subjective factor is not what it should be, it is not in relation to certain relative limits of the situation and of the effective relations of

forces, but because it is incessantly betrayed from within.

The very real capitulations, indeed betrayals of the bureaucratic leaderships of the workers' movement have certainly cost humanity dear in the past century (and will cost it still more dearly), but making this the main or exclusive explanatory factor of the disillusionments and defeats of the 20th century would end almost inevitably in a conspiracy vision of history which Trotskyist organisations have not always escaped. Mandel is happily much more nuanced. Thus he enriches his notion of objective conditions, "independent of the level of consciousness of proletarians and revolutionaries", including in this "the social and material conditions" (the strength of the proletariat) and "the political conditions", namely the incapacity of the dominant classes to govern and the refusal of the dominated classes to let them govern. Thus revised, the "objective conditions" include a strong dose of subjectivity.

There remain only among the said subjective conditions the level of class-consciousness of the proletariat and the level of strength of "its revolutionary party". They tend thus to be reduced to the existence, strength, consciousness, the maturity of its vanguard, detached from the complex mediations of the class struggle and the institutions. It opens the road to an exacerbated voluntarism, which is to the revolutionary will that which individualism is to the liberated individuality.

The risk of reducing the problem of modern revolutions to the sole will of their vanguard is compensated in Mandel by a sociological confidence in the growing extension,

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homogeneity, and maturity of the proletariat as a whole. Even if he concedes that "the working class is not entirely homogeneous from the point of view of the social conditions of its existence", the tendency to homogeneity would easily triumph in his eyes. It is supposed to overcome quasi-spontaneously the internal divisions and the effects of competition on the labour market: "Contrary to a widespread legend, this proletarian mass, although highly stratified, is seeing its degree of homogeneity broadly increase and not decrease. Between a manual worker, a bank employee, and a minor civil servant, the distance is less today than it was a half century or a century ago, as regards standard of living, and as regards the inclination to unionise and go on strike, and as regards potential access to anti-capitalist consciousness."

In raising such a passage, we should, here again, remember its social context and the political issues at stake. Faced with changes in the division and organisation of labour which accompanied the long wave of growth, the question was posed of whether this amounted to the formation of a new working class and an extension of the proletariat, or on the contrary to the massive appearance of a new petty bourgeoisie.

The class alliances and formation of a new historic bloc would raise then new strategic questions, as argued in certain texts of Poulantzas, Baudelot and Establet, where some Maoist currents tried to find a European equivalent to the "bloc of four classes" dear to Chairman Mao. Mandel argued that the situation of the employees in the so-called tertiary sector was converging with that of the working class, from the viewpoint of the form (wage earning) and the average amount of income, their subaltern place in the division of labour, and their exclusion from access to ownership. This material convergence was confirmed by a cultural convergence, and verified by the behaviour of the new wage earning layers in the struggles of May 68 in France or the hot autumn in Italy: the old blind antagonism between blue and white collar, between workshop and office, blurred before solidarity in common struggle against exploitation and alienation.

If Mandel's argument was justified sociologically and strategically (the main problem was the rallying of the workers themselves and not the search for a class alliance or a new kind of popular front in the face of "state monopoly capitalism"), it transformed into an irreversible historic tendency the specific situation created by post war industrial capitalism and its specific mode of regulation. He thus took up on his own account the sociological gamble of Marx, that the strategic difficulties of the social revolution would be resolved through the development of large scale industry and

the growing concentration of the proletariat in big units of production, itself favourable to a rise of the trade union movement, a strengthening of solidarities, and a raising of political consciousness.

If this certainly appeared to be the tendency of the 1960s and the early 1970s, the response of capital came quickly with the neoliberal offensive. Far from being irreversible, the tendency to homogenisation was undermined by the policies of dispersal of work units, intensification of competition on the world labour market, individualisation of wages and labour time, privatisation of leisure and lifestyles, the methodical demolition of social solidarity and protection.

In other words, far from being a mechanical consequence of capitalist development, the rallying of the forces of resistance and subversion of the order established by capital is an incessant task recommenced in daily struggles, and whose results are never definitive.

As he stresses in his foreword, Mandel accorded a major importance to the methodological chapters on the materialist dialectic and on the theory of historical materialism. This type of general exposé has its pedagogic virtues. The famous Elementary principles of philosophy by Georges Politzer have thus contributed to initiate dozens or hundreds of militants who were not intellectuals by training into the fundamental theoretical questions. But for Mandel as for Politzer, pedagogical vulgarisation has its price.

It gives the presentation of a theory the air of a manual, a little doctrinaire, and tends to present abstract universal laws – "the dialectic as universal logic of movement and contradiction", writes Mandel – overhanging their specific fields of validity. Thus if it is correct in the abstract that to "deny causality is in the final analysis to deny the possibility of knowledge", such a general affirmation says nothing on the numerous questions raised by the very notion of causality and on the different modes of causality, irreducible to the sole mechanical causality inspired by classical physics. Thus again, to define the dialectic as "the logic of movement" and the forms of passage from one state to another, tends to make of it a formal logic, detached from content, a system of general laws governing the singularities at work in the real world.

This is of course a discussion which would go far beyond the limits of this critical introduction to Introduction to Marxism. It is not however superfluous to indicate that its stakes are far from being negligible. Mandel's chapter on the dialectic finishes with the idea that "the victory of the world socialist revolution, the advent of a classless society, will confirm in practice

the validity of revolutionary Marxist theory". The formula is to say the least adventurous. If victory should confirm the validity of a theory, the accumulation of defeats should reciprocally invalidate it. But who wins historically? On what timescale? Who is the judge? By what criteria? the questions are connected and run into each other, which goes back in the last instance to the idea that it can be done from science and scientific truth, or the relationship between truth and efficacy [3]. Here is another – very – long story.

Mandel's book, the questions and criticisms that it can raise thirty years after its first publication, are revealing of a time and the relationship of a revolutionary with his times. Roland Barthes could write of Voltaire that he was "the last happy writer", to the extent that he could express the world vision of a rising bourgeoisie, still capable of believing in all good conscience in the future of an enlightened and liberated humanity. In the same way one could say of Ernest Mandel that he was one of the last happy revolutionaries. This formula could surprise or shock, when used of a militant who knew the tests of war and imprisonment, who was witness to the tragedies of the century of extremes, who had to fight all his life against the dominant currents.

He was nonetheless a happy revolutionary to the extent that, despite the defeats and the disillusionments, he kept intact the confidence of the pioneers of socialism in the future of humanity, and the optimism which was theirs, at the threshold of a twentieth century which announced the end of war and human exploitation. For Ernest, classical humanist and man of the Enlightenment, the disillusionments of the twentieth century were only a long detour, or an annoying delay, which did not undermine the logic of historic progress. This obstinate conviction underlay both his greatness and his weakness.

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Daniel Bensaïd is one of France's most prominent Marxist philosophers and has written extensively. He is a leading member of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International).

NOTES

[1] Published first in English as *From Class Society to Communism*.

[2] Ernest Mandel, *La Crise*, Paris, Champs Flammarion, 1978

[3] The Mandel quote relates to a certain extent to the criterion of the scientific status of a theory upheld by Popper, that of falsifiability; a theory can only be called scientific if it is capable of being refuted in practice. That is why Marx's theories, like those of Freud, which survive the denial of their prognostications or their therapeutic setbacks, cannot claim to be scientific. The argument rests on a series of debatable presuppositions, concerning both the relationship between the social sciences and the exact sciences, and the different forms of causality.

Latin America

The Epic Struggle of Indigenous Andean-Amazonian Culture

Hugo Blanco

Text of a presentation for the Latin American Studies Association Conference to be held September 5-8 in Montreal, Canada.

Over the course of more than 10,000 years, the rich biodiversity of the Andes-Amazon region has created a culture that is closely interlocked with Pachamama (Mother Nature). This culture is marked by deep knowledge of nature and is highly agricultural. Ours is one of the seven zones of the world to have originated agriculture. It has yielded the greatest variety of domesticated species.

This has given rise to a cosmic vision different from the Western outlook that views the creator as a superior immaterial spirit who created man in his image and likeness and created nature to serve him. For the indigenous cosmic vision, humanity is a daughter of and part of Mother Earth. We must live in her bosom in harmony with her. Each hill or peak, each river, each vegetable or animal species has a spirit.

Indigenous, collectivist mentality is strong enough to have endured solidly through 500 years of invasion and the dictatorship of individualism.

The Quechua and Aymara name for the campesino community is ayllu. It is bound by strong ties, many expressed in work (ayni, mink'a, faena) [1] and in all aspects of life. The community is not restricted to persons. It entails a close communal relationship with cultivated species, with medicinal species, with animals and plants that tell cultivators

about seasonal variations [2], and, more broadly, with all animal and vegetable species, with rain, and with the land.

The development of agriculture and tending of livestock, which in other latitudes led to slavery and feudalism, led in Abya Yala (the Americas) to new forms of collectivism. In the Andes zone it led to a state that extended over the territories of six present-day countries – Tawantinsuyo (called “empire” by the invaders out of the same ignorance that led them to call the llama “big sheep.”)

It's true that the new forms of collectivism gave rise to privileged castes and wars of conquest. But in no part of the continent was production based on slave labor or the feudal system.

- For more than 10,000 years our culture domesticated 182 plant species, including around 3,500 potato varieties.
- Our people know 4,500 medicinal plants.
- Tawantinsuyos planned agriculture based on a system of watersheds and micro watersheds or basins.
- They built long aqueducts, taking care to avoid land erosion.
- Terracing was practiced on the slopes and “waru-waru” [3] in the altiplano (highlands) [4].
- Special technologies were used from zone to zone.



Across the entire Tawantinsuyo territory they created storage buildings (qolqa) to supply food to the population whenever some climatic shift undermined agriculture.

Although there were privileged castes, hunger and misery did not exist. Orphans, persons with disabilities, and the elderly were cared for by the community.

The invasion

The backbone of this social organization, of the agricultural infrastructure and food reserves, was crushed by the invasion.

Europe was then passing from feudalism to capitalism. The invasion was a capitalist action. They came looking for spices, believing they had reached India. They found none, but did find gold and silver.

Mining had existed as a marginal activity, but it now became the center of the economy. To exploit the mines they used a system worse than slavery. The slave owner is concerned about the health of his slave just as he's interested in the health of his donkey. The mine owner in Peru received annually a certain quantity of indigenous people in order to “indoctrinate” them. Regardless of how many of them died, the next year he would receive the same number. Hence, youth and adults were sent into the mines and never left until they died. Because of this, young indigenous people

committed suicide and mothers killed their children to free them from torment. This practice diminished following the Tupac Amaru rebellion.

Agricultural work took place through a feudal system. The Europeans took the best lands from the community and converted them into latifundios (huge estates or latifundia). Community inhabitants became serfs on their own lands. They had to work freely for the feudal lord in exchange for permission to cultivate a small plot for their own needs.

For many reasons a huge decline in agriculture took place:

- Canals, terracing, and waru-warus were destroyed because of ignorance and lack of care.
- Until this day no planning in terms of watersheds and micro watersheds has been carried out. Chaos took hold and persists.
- With the importation of foreign domestic animals to the zone, the environment deteriorated. The auquenidos (camelid) [5] cut pasture grass with their teeth, but cows, horses, and sheep uproot it.

The invaders vented their superstitions on our crops. Our agricultural mentality didn't suit their cultured ways. So the “exterminators of idolaters” went after plants like the papa, also known as Santa Padre (Holy Father). They renamed it patata,

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the word used in Spain. This passed into English and other languages as “potato.” They also damned kiwicha or amaranto (amaranth). The coca plant, which the famous doctor Hipólito Unanue called the “supertonic of the vegetable kingdom,” is to this day the target of superstition and excessively harmful prejudice in “refined” circles.

The invaders pillaged the food stockpiles located across the territory to cope with times of hunger brought on by climatic irregularities.

Taking their behavior as a whole, we find that European imposition of hunger and misery — their cultural contribution — was even more deadly than their massacres and the smallpox they spread among us.

Rebellions and republic

From the beginning, our people rebelled against the invaders. Numerous insurrections took place, beginning with Tupac Amaru II’s rebellion. It spread all the way to Bolivia and lasted even after his cruel torture and assassination.

Later the so-called *Revolución de la Independencia* took place. It did not signify any noticeable change for the indigenous population.

The generals of “independence” were awarded “haciendas” (the new name for the feudal latifundia), “Indians” and all.

The hacienda system consisted basically of the free labor of the colono (serf) for the hacienda. There were other aspects to this serfdom.

The colono had to turn over some of his animals that grazed on natural pastures to the master.

He made long treks with pack mules burdened with hacienda produce. They lasted days and he had to sleep out in the open. The owner mistreated him physically and morally. He could jail him and rape the women. The serf’s children did not go to school either because they had to work, or there were no schools, or the master forbade it.

Our land struggle in the 1960s

The hacienda feudal system lasted until the second half of the last century.

The spread of capitalism to the countryside weakened it in many ways:

- New large-scale mining absorbed labor from the haciendas.
- New mechanized latifundia expelled the serfs and employed an agricultural proletariat.
- New high-priced crops required more labor time, pressing the hacienda owner to demand more work from his serfs and to expel them in order to take over their plots. The serfs, on the other hand, needed more time for their own labors and resisted the theft of their plots.

We organized ourselves to struggle against the new outrages. Given the intransigence of the landlords, the struggle became a fight for possession of the land.

Our defensive action not only set us against the landlords but also against the government which defended the feudal system.

In over 100 haciendas we refused to work for the landlords. But we continued to work our own plots. This was in practice an agrarian

reform. The government repressed us with arms and we defended ourselves with arms. The military government of the day crushed the armed self-defense; but it took note that it would be impossible to re-implant feudal serfdom. It opted to pass an agrarian reform law — only in this zone — legalizing campesino possession of the land. But indigenous campesinos in other zones of the country rebelled and took over haciendas. This was violently repressed, but could not be effectively contained. Hence, a subsequent reformist military government felt obliged to decree an agrarian reform at the national level.

In this way, we took advantage of capitalism’s weakening of the feudal system to take over the land. In this same epoch the Brazilian campesino movement was shattered. Capitalism triumphed there. Its victims are now struggling courageously in the “Landless Workers’ Movement.”

For this reason Peru is, with the likely exception of Cuba, the country of the continent with the greatest proportion of landowners, either of communal or private plots.

Some campesinos from the epoch of struggle for the land feel the qualitative change. “Now we are free,” they say. They consider that breaking down feudal servitude also broke them free from the yoke that had gripped them.

Following the rupture they worked for education, building schools and paying men and women teachers. Later they fought to get the state to pay them. They built health centres and fought to get the state to pay for health services.

They got the vote and elected their own mayors. They fought against mining pollution. They struggled to assume in a collective manner police and judicial functions, to replace corrupt cops and judges. They fought against corrupt authorities of any stripe — and for many other things.

They feel that breaking from feudal servitude freed them to spread wings and carry the struggle forward.

Current struggles

Most current struggles of indigenous campesinos are against the killing of Pachamama, Mother Earth; against depredations by the large companies, mainly mining, but also petroleum and gas. Previous Peruvian governments were servants of feudal lords; today they serve the great multinationals. They act against the Peruvian people and against nature.

Living conditions are another cause of struggle. There is more and more unemployment, and the standard of living is falling. In the countryside this is due to excessively low prices for farm products. This is linked to the struggle against the Free Trade Agreement with the United States that will demolish our agriculture for the benefit of large, subsidized imperial firms.

The indigenous movement, together with the rest of the Peruvian population, is fighting against corruption and to get their own representatives into local governments. People often suffer betrayals because there is no system for authentic democratic control.

Our allies

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The indigenous movement is not alone. Although it is the most vigorous and persevering, it is not unique. The rest of the people are struggling together with us.

Intellectuals called indigenistas, whether indigenous or not, merit special mention. Ever since the oppression of the original peoples of our continent began there have been individuals who have struggled against it and to defend our culture.

The work of Father Bartolomé de las Casas is known.

In Peru there were notable political figures like González Prada and Mariátegui. Writers like Clorinda Matto, Ciro Alegría, José María Arguedas. Painters like José Sabogal. Musicians like Alomía Robles, Baltasar Zegarra, Roberto Ojeda, Leandro Alviña, and so on.

The meaning of our struggle

We are defending our culture in its diverse aspects: our cosmic vision, social organization, our rituals and agricultural know-how, medicine, music, language, and many others.

We do not claim that our culture is superior to others. We are struggling to stop it from being considered inferior.

We want to be respected as equals.

We have been educated to harmonize equality and diversity. Peru is a mega-diverse country, both geographically and demographically. We have 82% of the world's 103 natural life zones. Our inhabitants speak 45 different languages. The great Inca Sun God celebration was not exclusive. It had a procession

of different peoples with diverse gods. The notion of "one God" did not exist. We are for the equality of the diverse; we are against homogenization (igualitarismo).

On the one hand we respect diverse individualities and particularities. On the other, we oppose individualism. Ours is a culture of solidarity.

We don't seek a return to the past. We know we must make the best in general of advances in human culture.

That does not contradict our resolve to go back to our own roots. Our past will be vividly present in our future.

We love and care for Pachamama. We fervently yearn to return to basing our economy on our rich biodiversity, through agriculture and natural medicine, along with any modern advances that do no harm.

We don't want our social system to be based on the deep-seated, antisocial individualism that the invaders brought here. We intend to recover and strengthen at all levels the vigorous, collectivist solidarity and fraternity of the ayllu, making use, as well, of universal knowledge that is not harmful.

We dream that the past 500 years of crushing blows are just a passing nightmare in the ten thousand years of building our culture.

About Hugo Blanco

This essay was first published in Spanish (under the title Nuestra Cultura) in the magazine Sin Permiso in its June 2007 edition. Sin Permiso (www.sinpermiso.info/) is a Spanish-language quarterly socialist magazine

and a monthly e-zine edited by a multinational team that includes the author.

Hugo Blanco was leader of the Quechua peasant uprising in the Cuzco region of Peru in the early 1960s. He was captured by the military and sentenced to 25 years in El Fronton Island prison for his activities. While in prison, he wrote Land or Death: The Peasant Struggle in Peru. It was published in English by Pathfinder Press in 1972 and is must-reading for anyone who wishes to understand the liberation struggles of peasants and indigenous people in that region.

An international defence campaign that gained the support of such figures as Ernesto Che Guevara, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Bertrand Russell succeeded in winning his freedom. After a period in exile in Mexico, Chile, and Sweden, Blanco returned to Peru where he won election to the national parliament on a united left slate. He has continued to play an active role in Peru's indigenous, campesino, and environmental movements, and writes on Peruvian, indigenous, and Latin American issues.

The article was translated Phil Cournoyer. In the 1960s Cournoyer participated in the worldwide defence campaign to win Blanco's freedom and a decade later coordinated a cross-Canada speaking tour of the Peruvian indigenous leader.

Other articles by Hugo Blanco available in English on the internet include:

Bolivia: a Different Revolutionary Process

Chile: The Lesson that Venezuela Learned?

Peru: The "Indian Problem": From Mariátegui to Today

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.

NOTES

[1] These terms from a collectivist language are not translatable to an individualist. Ayni means the mutual lending of work, as collective activity for the benefit of an individual. Faena is collective work for collective benefit. Mink'a is asking for a service with profuse and warm urgings.

[2] There are "signs" that tell indigenous campesinos how climate or weather conditions may change or how a given crop may fare. Abundant or poor blossoming of a forest plant, the coloration of snakes, the height of bird nests, the greater or lesser brilliance of a constellation, etc.

[3] Waru-warú is the practice of alternating belts of elevated fields and ditches (or swales); planting is done on the elevated belts. This has the function of avoiding floods in rainy years. In dry years water held in the ditches is used for irrigation. Heat absorbed by ditch water during the day helps to counteract cold nights at frost time.

[4] Translator's footnote - A good description of this agricultural technology can be found here. Here is an excerpt from the essay Environment and Nature in South America: the Central Andes: "The local agro-pastoralists constructed raised fields systems or waru-warú (Waru waru) and sunken smaller garden patches or qochas (Qochas) to address these problems. Construction of raised, ridged fields, with swales or canals between the ridges, resulted in ridge-top areas above the waterlogged soils in the rainy season, eliminating rot among the tubers. Both the qocha system and the intervening canals among the raised fields trapped rainwater, which was curated through the dry season to provide a continuing water supply.

"In addition to managing moisture, these systems also ameliorated temperature extremes. Thus the raised field patterns, and furrows in the qochas, were constructed either parallel to, or perpendicular to, the path of the sun, an orientation which permitted maximum solar energy capture by the water. This water kept the fields slightly warmer at night, and often radiated enough heat to prevent frost damage while the surrounding unmodified grasslands suffered heavy freezes."

[5] Auquenidos (camelid) are animals found in the Andes mountains, relatives of the camels. They are also called camelidos in Spanish. In Peru there are four different auquenidos: llamas, alpacas, vicuñas and guanacos. Llamas and guanacos are beasts of burden, while alpacas and vicuñas are used for their wool.

Venezuela

Opportunities and obstacles in Venezuela – revolutionary militants gather in Caracas

Stuart Piper

“Huge opportunities, very great dangers!” That’s how one of President Chavez’ closest advisers summed up the current situation facing Venezuela’s Bolivarian revolution.

Haiman el Troudi was addressing a seminar organised by the Fourth International in Caracas in August, to discuss the challenge of socialism in the 21st century, both in Venezuela and in the rest of the region. The meeting brought together revolutionaries from a dozen Latin American and European countries, along with a variety of currents and individuals from across the spectrum of the revolutionary left in Venezuela.

It was held in the Miranda International Centre, a government-sponsored think-tank, where Haiman, who was Chavez’ chief of staff in 2005, now directs a research programme on 21st Century Socialism.

In spite of their differing experiences, approaches, and analyses, just about all the Venezuelan participants came out with assessments of the present challenge that were similar to Haiman’s.

Trade union leader and editor of Marea Socialista, Stalin Perez, pointed to grave problems in the newly nationalised telecoms and electricity sectors, as well as the state oil company, where workers are not being given a voice, much less control, or where collective agreements have not been renewed. But he also emphasised the immense possibilities for building a new socialist vanguard in the emerging PSUV united socialist party.

Carlos Lanz of Proyecto Nuestro America, who headed up the most ambitious experiment so far in workers’ control, at the ALCASA aluminium plant, analysed the

danger of “Bolivarian entropy”, a dispersion of energy that could lead to a “restorationist counter-revolution”.

Roland Denis and Ricardo Navarro, from two other wings of the divided Proyecto Nuestro America, also argued that the contradictions within the original Bolivarian project, including within the 1999 Constitution, were now coming to a head. Simon Uzcategui, of the Ezequiel Zamora National Peasant Front, described the emergence of an unusual kind of dual power, which must now either go to the left or to the right.

Margarita Aguinaga, from Socialist Refoundation (Ecuadorean section of the Fourth International) made an eloquent case for giving any new project for socialism a militantly feminist face. And she pointed to a different kind of contradiction facing the revolutionary processes both in her own country and in Venezuela – between the pre-eminent role played by women at the grass roots of these struggles, for example within the indigenous movement in Ecuador or the neighbourhood mobilisations in Venezuela, and their far more marginalised presence within the political leaderships.

This was a theme felt keenly by the Fourth International participants present, not least because of the 14 attending from 9 Latin American countries, 9 were women, and many of these came from a younger generation drawn into political activity around feminist struggles.



Stalin Perez (Marea Socialista) and Tazia Medeiros (PSOL)

It was not difficult to find living examples of the positive possibilities in this moment of the Bolivarian revolution that many of the Venezuelan participants referred to. A visit to the western town of Carora gave a taste of how much further the so-called “explosion of popular power” through Community Councils could go.

These Councils – which Chavez calls the fifth and most important motor of the transition to socialism – are local bodies of popular power bringing together 200 or more families. They have been springing up in thousands of communities across the country since Chavez’ re-election last December.

In most cases the scope of their discussions and the extent of their powers are still limited to very immediate and very local decisions. They agree what their community’s most pressing needs are, draw up projects to address these, then oversee their execution. Such projects are usually financed by central government grants of around 10-15 thousand dollars each. As such, the community councils don’t necessarily encroach very much on the powers of the existing local state.

The constitutional reform now being discussed in Venezuela should give greater powers to these Communal Councils, including a stipulation that at least 5 per cent of the budget of all local governments should be handed over to the community councils. But the local government in Carora has already gone much

further, handing over control of 100 per cent of its investment budget to the organs of popular power through a participatory budget.

Carora is so far a bit of an exception – one of the few local administrations in Venezuela that is clearly committed to the building of a new kind of ‘communal’ state, to replace the old bourgeois one that still prevails. But it is not entirely alone.

A visit to the industrial town of La Victoria, where the mayor is a highly combative young woman, showed how all of the local government’s social service departments, and their budgets, are being transferred out of the town hall and put under the control of a regional network of Communal Councils.

But just a half an hour down the road in Maracay, it was also easy enough to see the kind of dangers Haiman El Troudi and the others were referring to. After nine months of occupation, the exemplary experience of workers control at the Sanitarios de Maracay bathroom factory had just been overturned by something looking like a coup d’etat.

Starved of raw materials, cut off from their natural customers and saddled with bank debts, some of the workers had begun to lose confidence. The Ministry of Labour offered a deal including the payment of outstanding benefits in exchange for an end to the occupation and the handing back of the factory to the absentee owners – then helped to mount a lightning assembly with

Morocco

Expect no change from the parliamentary elections

Communiqué from Al Mounadil-a (Militant)

Al Mounadil-a

the white-collar administrative staff who had never supported the occupation, to throw out the factory committee that had been leading it.

This was just the most recent and dramatic example of what has appeared to be at best indifference and at worst outright sabotage by parts of the Bolivarian government in the face of the most radical experiences of co-management or workers' control that have emerged.

A month earlier some of the workers at Sanitarios had visited Carora for a joint celebration of the anniversary of Aporeea, the alternative news web site that has become the virtual home of the left in the Bolivarian revolution. In his contribution to the Caracas seminar, Gonzalo Gomez, founder of Aporeea and also one of the editors of *Marea Clasista y Socialista*, pointed to this as precisely the kind of combination of struggles where the biggest opportunities lie for moving the process forward.

But it is clear that some within the Bolivarian leadership, including, disgracefully, the Minister of Labour, self-styled trotskyst Jose Ramon Rivera, do not want this to happen.

Several of the Venezuelan participants in our meeting pointed to the delicate balance that needs to be struck by international supporters of the Bolivarian revolution – at one and the same time defending and energetically supporting the existing achievements and the new struggles underway, with their extraordinary potential; while also speaking out even more clearly than it is sometimes possible for Venezuelan revolutionaries to do, against the abuses and dangers that threaten the revolution from within.

Stuart Piper is a correspondent for IV in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America.

We do not expect any change from the elections in Morocco on September 7, 2007. Change in Morocco will come through the popular struggles of the oppressed and exploited.

Media and meetings relay the dominant discourse that these elections will produce a new parliament and government which will resolve all Morocco's problems. They relay the programmes of the various parties which are contesting the elections, promising thousands of jobs, a high growth rate, the elimination of marginalisation and exclusion in the countryside and will emancipate women. These dishonest discourses have been heard for more than 30 years, since the elections of 1977.

Indeed since then, we have seen not only a strengthening of a policy of austerity, which has mortgaged the future of Morocco through policies of indebtedness and structural adjustment imposed by the big international financial bodies. These policies have only benefited the big capitalists, the big corrupt predators who have dilapidated and diverted the public funds to the detriment of a population increasingly impoverished every day in greater numbers

The consequences of these policies have been the dismantling of the public sector, health and education while privatisation has only produced unemployment, super-exploitation, insecurity and poverty. Meanwhile public liberties are still stifled. The multiple repressions which have crushed all popular uprisings in the various towns and villages continue today and sinister prisons like Tazmamart continue to haunt all those whose who rise up against these policies.

At every new electoral campaign, we hear miraculous slogans about the improvement of our living conditions which have incessantly got worse.

After these 30 years of parliamentary democracy, Morocco has destroyed the slightest social infrastructure, reducing its youth to seeing as their last recourse flight and clandestine immigration. All their

promises have only broken the hopes of the young generations.

This parliament and the pseudo-democratic institutions which will emerge from the ballot boxes stem from a constitution granted after a fraudulent referendum. This constitution concentrates all power in the hands of a single person. This democracy, far from giving power to the people, is only a de facto absolute power, a dictatorship in the full sense. This parliament is only a democratic masquerade serving to apply anti-popular policies decided by a minimal layer of the well to do in the service of the interests of international capital to pursue the pillage of our wealth and natural resources. In reality, the numerous parties who contest the elections will only be the voice of a single party which will apply neoliberal policies which are dictated to it. Since the formal independence of Morocco, their "democratic process" or "democratic alternation" has only served to underpin the domination of a minority.

Change will not come from parliament, it will take place through the popular struggles which have been pursued for decades by the workers, poor peasants, and all the oppressed.

What are our tasks for a real change?

- To develop, rally and unite the workers and popular struggles
- Enlarge the national and international solidarity networks
- To restore hope to the struggles and revive hope for a change
- To strengthen the tools of struggle through the trade unions, youth, women, the oppressed and the exploited.
- To rally the combative forces in the construction of a revolutionary party

The final road for all the oppressed is freedom from dependency on

imperialism, to build a real social and economic democratic power which passes through their self-organisation. This cannot be done without a total break with capitalism.

Only a revolutionary party can accomplish this task.

In the context of bourgeois democracy, elections are only a means to raise the broader consciousness of the toiling masses as to their class interests. Real changes will take place in their workplaces, in the neighbourhoods and in the street around these demands:

- Cancellation of debts, a break with the international financial institutions: WB, IMF, WTO
- Cancellation of US and European free trade agreements
- A real economic and social policy in the service of the people, for an equitable redistribution of goods and resources while preserving our ecological environment
- A broad democratisation of the whole of economic and social life in the service of the people and not in the interests of capital.

Our main demand remains a national constituent assembly for a democratic constitution allowing another Morocco to be rebuilt in the service of popular aspirations.

The emancipation of the oppressed is the work of the oppressed themselves. Our liberation will take place through the construction of organisations of mass democratic struggle and social movements and through the construction of a revolutionary party which will give a new breath to the young generations to organise society in another way on anti-bureaucratic, anti-capitalist, socialist and internationalist bases.

August 29, 2007

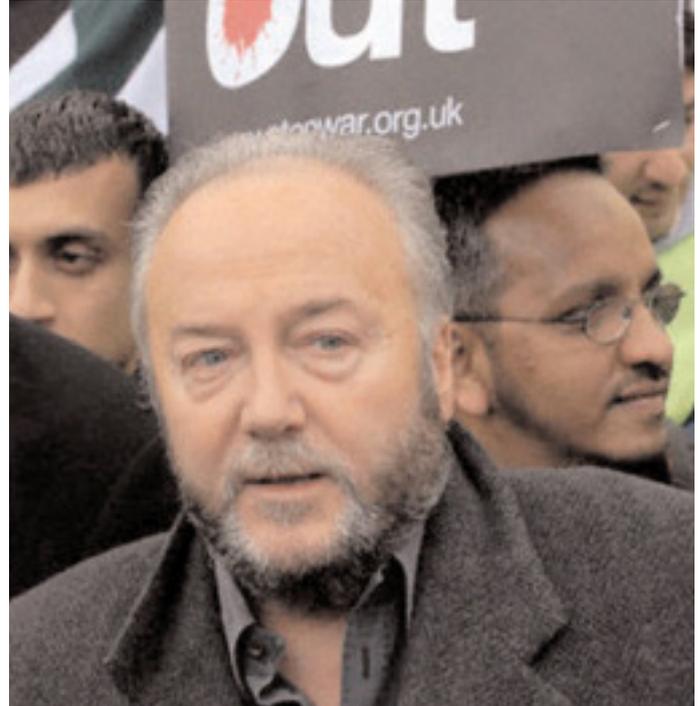
Al Mounadil-a is the Moroccan section of the Fourth International.

Britain

A wake-up call for Respect

Deepening crisis in Britain's left electoral alternative

Alan Thornett



A letter from Respect MP George Galloway to the organisation's national council has triggered a thorough-going discussion in the party. The article below, published shortly before Galloway's letter became public, outlines Socialist Resistance's proposals for solving the crisis in Respect.

The Brown bounce is now a central feature of British politics. Taken alongside new Labour's strong showing in the Ealing Southall and Sedgefield by-elections, - where the Tories came third behind Labour and the Lib Dems, - it has made a snap general election a near certainty.

Of course it means what we mean by "snap". The issue is whether it will be in the autumn of this year or the spring of next year - depending on Brown's assessment of the durability of the "bounce" and when the problems are likely to set in.

October of this year must still be a possibility since from Brown's point of view he is riding high and things can only go downwards from here. The crisis of the Tory Party is absolutely profound and they would be in complete disarray if faced with an October election.

But Labour is not ready in organisational terms, so the most likely date must be to coincide with the London Assembly elections in May 2008. One thing is as certain as it gets in politics. By this time next year there will have been a general election - and the most likely winner will be Gordon Brown.

Brown's agenda is to look different to Blair (in fact his main electoral asset is that he is not Tony Blair) but this does not mean there will be any change from a reactionary government with a hard-line neo-liberal agenda.

Brown aims for the continuation of all the main features of New Labour: - deregulation, privatisation, the war, the replacement of Trident, the new relationship with the employers, and the old relationship with the USA. On civil rights Brown is not only proposing yet another terrorism bill - but is re-raising the issue of detention without trial and its extension from the current 28 day to the originally proposed 90.

But an election in the next year, whatever month it is held, would also be a huge challenge for the left and in particular for Respect.

During the summer Respect did extremely well in winning a hotly contested council by-election in Shadwell in a very sharp political fight with Labour. This shows that Respect's validity remains intact: in fact its validity is enhanced by the arrival of Brown.

It shows that Respect's support remains strong where it has won bases and bastions out of its anti-war stance and the anti-war vote.

In the parliamentary by-election Ealing Southall, however, the story was very different. Respect secured a very poor result, winning no more than any left candidate would get who went into a campaign without adequate preparation and no local base.

The lesson from Southall is that whilst Respect has hung on to its anti-war vote in East London, and no doubt this is the case in Birmingham and several other places, it has not reached

out into new areas or generalised its electoral influence across the country.

This is a major problem with a general election and the GLA election round the corner. If Respect does not start an effective election campaign now it could face disaster in a year's time.

In fact far from preparing itself for a huge campaign Respect has declined as an organisation over the past two years despite warnings from some of us who argued as best we could at the last Respect conference that this was a problem. Then the leadership denied or tried to minimise the importance of the decline in membership and the withering of branches outside of key target areas. But the problem is it was real and it is no better now.

The lesson from Southall is that Respect cannot win in a new constituency unless it has built a base well in advance - and that means establishing a viable and active local branch before the election and afterwards.

As we remarked in our last issue (of Socialist Resistance, number 46) despite a discussion at its last National Council on the failure of the McDonnell campaign and the crisis of the Labour left, and despite a number of suggestions on ways that Respect could respond to the situation, the organisation's leadership took no initiative. Yet the failure of the McDonnell campaign was and remains a

Britain

major challenge to those who cling to a reclaim Labour perspective.

I made a proposal in June for an initiative towards the Labour left, the trade union left, and the CPB in the light of the McDonnell defeat which could continue the discussion started by the conference organised earlier by the CPB and the one organised by the RMT,- both of which took up the issue of labour representation in one way or another.

As far as I know this has not been discussed. Yet Respect cannot advance beyond its present stage without winning people from the Labour and trade union left. It cannot be successful in the medium to long term unless it wins the best sections of the trade unions into its orbit.

The much-vaunted Fighting Unions conference also lacked focus and failed to make any progress on this key issue: we need a far more targeted, engaging and inclusive approach if we are to succeed in the unions.

At the moment the RMT is considering whether to stand union candidates in the GLA elections. Respect should do everything it can to reach an accommodation with the RMT which would avoid such a clash.

We have to convince the trade union left - and that means people like RMT General Secretary Bob Crow - that there is a democratic space within Respect in which they can function and have an influence. We cannot simply say "here is Respect, it is the best thing around (which is certainly true) and you should join it or affiliate to it".

We have to accept that Respect is a start, but only a start in building a genuinely broad left wing alternative to New Labour.

If Respect is to mount a serious challenge in the general election the following is crucial:

- Respect needs to build itself as a national organisation. This means having much more of a national profile. It also means much more attention to building local branches. It needs effective fund-raising.
- It must have an elected leadership which is seen to prioritise building the organisation and which works to create an inclusive, democratic space in which people from a variety of political currents can cooperate in leading the organisation.
- It needs a much more effective means of propaganda, preferably a newspaper, as well as a much more dynamic website, broad sheets and leaflets, which can get Respect's ideas and policies across in a more systematic way and persuade other elements on the left that we are serious about building an organisation on a firm political basis.
- It needs a much more serious approach to recruitment. As some of us argued at the last conference 2,000 members is a major under-achievement for an organisation with the potential of Respect.
- It must have clear socialist politics. This does not mean that we have to mention socialism at every opportunity, but Respect has to operate within a consistent socialist framework. The current leaflet for the GLA campaign, for example, is politically bland and does not mention socialism at all! Almost

all of it (apart from anti-privatisation) would be acceptable to a Lib Dem, and all of it would be acceptable to the Greens.

- Respect needs strong material on the environment and on climate change if we are to challenge the Greens across the country. The strong positions on climate change we have adopted are marginal in most of Respect's very limited literature. Whilst being strong on the environment we have to be politically distinct from the Greens - otherwise what is the point?
- Respect also needs to address the issue of democracy, including electoral reform which Brown is saying he will raise as a part of a constitutional convention and the need for a referendum on the European constitution, which he has insisted he won't. Electoral reform is a key issue for the success of smaller parties.
- On the basis of this platform, Respect should be seeking urgent discussions with left trade union leaders such as Bob Crow, and other currents and organisations to lay the basis for a new and more inclusive alliance at the next election, laying the basis for a new left party.

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.